

Priests

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[0 : 0 0] I'm going to lead us in prayer. Lord Jesus, as we come to your word now, we pray that you would speak to us by your spirit, that you would make us attentive to you, that you would grow us in Christ, and that we would be men and women who worship you, who give you the glory in every aspect of our life.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. We sell Christianity short when we separate being rescued by Jesus from worshipping Jesus, and what I mean is that we preach, come to Jesus, receive forgiveness for your every sin and failure.

We preach the rich generosity of God, but we forget to say, or people don't hear, join us in treasuring Jesus together.

So people will take a free ticket to heaven. They want what Christ gives. They want salvation. They want salvation. They want his free gift. And they don't want him.

God's grace is given so that we can know him and participate in his glory. And God's goal in saving people is that we would worship him, that we would acknowledge him for who he is, that we would give him his worth-ship, that we would delight in him, that we would rejoice to give him glory.

[1 : 3 0] We are saved to worship. And so my message to you this morning is, come to Jesus, be rescued, start worshipping.

Now you use the word worship, and it's quite a confused word. A lot of people use the word when what they are talking about is singing.

So for some, singing in church is worship. And others talk about the service or the liturgy, and they describe that as worship.

And I think I want to say that they are both very narrow uses of the word worship. And they may or may not be worshipped depending on what is going on in a person's heart.

So you can be sitting here this morning, and you can be totally disengaged from God, and you can be totally disengaged from one another, and if that's the status of where we are, then we can hardly claim to be worshipping.

[2 : 3 5] Jesus quotes Isaiah 29 in Matthew 15 when he says, These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. So it's possible to make all the right noises, and at the same time to have a heart which is far from God.

And that is a warning to all, including me. I want us to think this morning of worship as a whole-of-life activity.

It's broad. It's about giving God his due in our life. Worship means responding to God on his terms, not ours. True worship will be expressed in loving obedience to Christ.

True worshippers will not ask, What's in it for me? They know Christ, and so they will ask, What do you want from me? Lord, I so treasure you.

I trust you with every circumstance of my life. Lord, take my life and use it to your glory. Now I'm continuing our Kingdom of God series.

[3 : 54] We're looking at the big picture movement of the Bible. We've been working to the theme which Sam's put up in front of us this morning. There is a king. There are subjects of the kingdom, and there is a place where the king reigns.

There's a place where God reigns. And what we're doing is we're considering different places in the Bible, and we were looking at the Bible in those places over time, and we're asking over time, What does it look like to be God's people in God's place under God's rule?

And today we turn our attention to Moses. So Exodus 19, it would be great to have it open. We'll be going to various places this morning. But in Exodus 19, verse 4, God says to the people of Israel, You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

It summarises a big story. 700 years before, God revealed the future to Abraham in Genesis 15. We read it last week.

God said to Abraham, He said, Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated for 400 years, but in the fourth generation, they will come back here.

[5 : 19] So in Exodus 19, where we are this morning, the future that Abraham spoke of is now past. And his descendants had grown to be a great number in Egypt.

And they cried out to the Lord because they were cruelly oppressed by a racist government. And God raises up Moses to confront the king of Egypt.

And in a series of enormous miracles, God destroyed the power of the Egyptian king and all his gods. And all through the contest with the Egyptian king, Moses was asking him to allow Israel to go and worship the Lord.

And the king continually refused. God wouldn't be worshipped in his kingdom. No way he would allow them to shoot through and go and worship God.

Not going to happen. It's a huge story. And in the end, everyone who trusts God's word and protects themselves with the blood of the lamb lives.

[6 : 23] And everyone who ignores God's provision loses their firstborn son. And so God forces the Egyptian king's hand. The Egyptians beg the Israelites to leave their land.

They send them away with riches. They plunder the Egyptians. They escape to the desert. And God saves the nation in a stupendous way.

He drives up the Red Sea. The nation passes through. And God drowns the armies of Egypt when they try to follow. And it's this massive story in the Bible of salvation and of redemption.

God pulls all the levers to deliver his people. The entire nation of Israel, all of Abraham's descendants, experience this extraordinary rescue from the most appalling circumstances.

And we see that God is keeping his promises to Abraham. And so when God says in verse 4, Exodus 19, you yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself, it has got a big story behind it.

[7 : 38] So Exodus 19 begins with the nation just over eight weeks out of Egypt. And they're in the desert in front of the mountain of God, Mount Sinai.

And God reminds them that he is the one who saved them. And he addresses his rescued people and he says to them, this is verse 5, And what God does is he offers these people, his people, a privileged role in his purposes for the world.

And God says, I will treasure you, you will be set apart for my purposes, you will be my representatives to the world. And God names the terms.

He says, Obey me fully and keep my covenant. And if you do, you will be the nation out of all the nations of the earth who represent me to the world.

Now I haven't got time this morning, but if we read the next 12 chapters, you would read the 10 commandments being given and the laws of God and the provisions for priesthood and you would see how God wants to be worshipped and you would see that at the conclusion of God giving all his instructions, the people with one voice say, everything that the Lord has said, we will do.

[9 : 13] That's Exodus 24. Everything that the Lord has said, we will do. It's a great moment of commitment. And God invites this nation of Israel into this privileged relationship with him. They say, we will do it and they blow it first base. Because you get to Exodus chapter 32 and 33 and you come across a national disaster.

Moses is up on the mountain meeting with God. The people convince Aaron to make them a golden calf which they begin to party around and worship. The holy people of God, his treasured possession, stepped away from privilege.

They went back to being just like everyone else and in a short period of time they just went back into the world. And Moses and Joshua come back down the mountain to an orgy of worship as the nation dances and prances around this stupid thing that they have made.

Sometimes we behave as though there's some kind of safety in sin. You know, we get security if everybody else is doing the same thing it'll be alright. We drive like the road rules are for everybody else.

[10 : 38] We watch television shows that a few years ago wouldn't have even got an R classification at the movies. We go back into the world we gossip we call it informed conversation.

Moses says to Aaron what on earth is going on? What have you done? And he gives this idiotic explanation.

Oh don't be angry we threw all the jewellery into the fire and look what popped out. It's a miracle. Heard the story recently a 50 something year old man somebody my age left his wife went overseas sleeping with a 25 year old woman to do mission in an orphanage.

And he justified himself by calling it ministry. We are blind fools when it comes to sin. Moses saw the people running wild.

He's horrified that the nation has turned away from God in worship and he takes the most drastic action. He gets the Levites to strap the sword in and on and go in amongst the people and bring it to a halt and they slaughtered 3,000 of their own people that day and then God topped it off with a plague that killed a whole lot more.

[12 : 08] And Moses goes to the Lord and he appeals for mercy and forgiveness for the people and he places himself between them and God he acts as a priestly mediator and he says if you won't forgive their sin then blot me out of your book.

And God replies very firmly whoever sinned against me I will blot out of my book. And again it's a long story but this is opportunity lost because Israel has blown it on the starting blocks.

Right at the beginning they lose the opportunity to be the privileged nation. They will never now be the kingdom of priests and the holy nation the treasured possession.

And in judgment God says go to the land but I will not go with you because you are a stiff necked people and I might destroy you on the way.

I was blown away by this God does not change his mind. they lose an immense opportunity but God still shows grace to the nation in allowing Moses to mediate on their behalf.

- [13 : 41] And so Moses rather than the nation becomes the priest or the mediator who stands between God and people. He is the man who turns God's anger away from the nation.
- He is the man to whom God says I am pleased with you and I know you by name. Exodus 33. He is the man who knows and sees the glory of God. No one else in the nation is privileged to know God in the way that Moses does.
- God is still king and God's people are still invited to God's place. That's for next week for Sam's sake. God is king but now God rules them through a particular mediator.
- A priest who stands between God and people and they are no longer a nation of priests mediating God to the world. And what is lost is not recaptured in great glory until you get to the pages of the New Testament.
- covenant. So in Hebrews chapter 9 verse 15 it says for Christ is the mediator of a new covenant that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.
- [15 : 06] Or in Hebrews chapter 14 verse 4 we have a priest who has gone through the heavens. And so the glory of God is seen in the Lord Jesus in a fuller way than was ever revealed through Moses.
- Christ is the mediator the priest who dies for the sin of God's people. He is a propitiation for our sin. He turns God's anger away from us.
- He is in heaven he knows God's glory and when Jesus was here God his father declared this is my son whom I love listen to him.
- And it gets even better because Jesus restores what was lost when God's people faltered at first base and worshipped the golden calf. Peter has a clear understanding of what Jesus has restored when he writes 1 Peter.
- He effectively writes to us sitting here this morning and he says to us but you are a chosen people a royal priesthood a holy nation a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.
- [16 : 34] Once you were not a people but now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy. mercy. And so Peter takes up the language of Exodus to explain the mission of Christian believers to the world and it is absolutely glorious.
- The privilege and the opportunity offered in Exodus and lost has been recaptured. Believers are addressed as a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who belong to God.
- And we are called those things because of the work of Christ. So in 1 Peter chapter 1 Peter says, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. So salvation has led to the opportunity for privileged service of the king.
- and we are able to enter into a life of worship. And we are now able to do God's works which he prepared in advance for us to do.
- [17 : 51] And 1 Peter says that we have been called to a very specific role. To declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.
- 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 9. God has saved us for a purpose. To declare the praises, to declare his praises.
- God has. And Peter says that to a bunch of believers who don't seem very significant in terms of power and worldly influence.

He calls them strangers in the world, he says they're scattered, and yet he says to them even though everybody might despise you for what you think and for what you believe, you go and live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds on the day of Christ Jesus.

Who we are in the world is not what makes us significant in God's economy. On the day of Christ Jesus, your ATAR, your position in the business world, the properties and wealth that you possess, representing Australia at sport or whatever it is, will not matter.

[19 : 11] God has saved us to give him the glory and not to take his glory to ourselves. We are saved to worship. And if you are a Christian believer, you have a story to tell about God who brought you from darkness to light.

And the journey for all of us might be a little bit different. Some of us have been nurtured in the faith in Christian families and maybe, maybe not, there have been places along the way where our family's faith has become our own.

And others of us know very clear moments of conversion, a moment in time when you understood Christ and trusted him for the first time. You've got a story to tell.

And even if you aren't sure what your story is, we have his story. We have the gospel. And God has provided a perfect mediator, a perfect priest.

He has stood in our place. He has died for our sins. And we have God's great news about the Lord Jesus Christ. We have a message that God wants us to declare to his world.

[20 : 15] And it's a message which people need even if they don't think they do. What you see here is that God speaks to the world through chosen mediators, his people.

people. He does it through the church. And I don't mean the church as an institution.

I mean the people of God scattered throughout the world who meet in many different places and circumstances around the word of God. The community groups that I'm in at the moment are reading a book called A Meal with Jesus.

I've mentioned it a few times over the last few weeks. It's a delightful little book that looks at the significance of food and meals in Luke's gospel. And it describes Jesus in a very ordinary way as the son of man who came eating and drinking.

And the religious people called him a drunkard and a glutton. But it's in Luke's gospel, it's during meals that Jesus does some of his most significant teaching, sometimes offending, sometimes comforting.

[21 : 35] But he does it in the ordinary. And I think much of ministry happens in the ordinary moments of life. Opportunities to declare God's praise come in very ordinary settings around a meal.

At the school gate, while we're watching our kids play sport, over lunch in the workplace, one of you told me a lovely story the other day of wanting to be a friend and to hold out a helping hand.

And it led to a conversation where the person expressed interest in coming to church. Brian Tung did some great things at the end of last year with the NTE mission.

The whole team surveyed people down at the Mandarin Centre down in Chatswood and their purpose wasn't to do a dump and declare every purpose of God in every conversation.

I think Brian described it as a date, a point of contact and hoping maybe to create an opportunity for a second date and a second opportunity.

[22 : 46] I have a friend who describes these sort of conversations like fishing. He said you need a well presented bait and you need patience while you wait for the fish themselves to show interest in what you've got to offer.

I like to talk about having winsome conversations with people, not being too pushy, listening well, sharing yourself, being real, not looking to dump your truck on top of people.

Romans 12 1 says therefore in view of God's mercy present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God which is your spiritual act of worship.

Salvation leads to worship and worship is whole of life service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Exodus God moved his mighty arm to save his people in a marvellous way. They were called to worship him. They blew it at first base.

[23 : 58] They lost the privilege opportunity to be God's priests, God's mediators to the world. And in Jesus Christ we have been offered privilege again.

1 Peter chapter 2 says you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

So go into the ordinary and be the extraordinary people that we have become in Christ. Christ. So my message to you this morning, come to Jesus, be rescued, start worshipping, open our mouths, use our resources, open our homes, open our hearts to people living in darkness that we might declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Amen.