

Exodus 19  
God Established a Covenant

October 20, 2019  
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One of the most exciting days of my life was the day that Keren and I got engaged. It was the Sunday after Easter, April 12, 2015. There was a lot going on that day. I preached at church twice on Sunday morning at the church I served before coming here; then Keren and I watched the Masters together. For you golfing fans, that was the year that Jordan Spieth had his coming out party and just demolished the field. Then I went back to church to preach the afternoon service. I told Keren that after church I had a special date planned for her. So I took her to the top of the **tallest building in the entire city**. My friends owned the top floor, and they helped me transform that balcony into the most romantic environment I've ever seen, with flowers and greenery everywhere. We ate a delicious meal as the sun set over the city. As we looked down, we could see all the different locations that were a part of our relationship. We played tennis at that park, went for a bike ride on that street, had a birthday meal at that restaurant. And when the sky was full of a hundred different shades of orange, blue, purple and pink, I got on my knee, told her I loved her for the very first time, and asked her to marry me. It was one of the best days of my life. **Here's a picture of the two of us**. And then Keren and I went into wedding planning mode. We only gave ourselves three months, and we planned to invite about 500 people. The details weren't coming together that easily, the costs were going through the roof, so we came up with what we thought was a clever plan. Our friends were hosting a shower for us a few weeks before the wedding. Our family and closest friends were all going to be there. So at the wedding shower we got everyone together on the front porch to take a picture, and then we told them that this wasn't our wedding shower, it was actually our wedding. You can see what the **first picture** looked like before they knew, and then you can see the **expressions on people's faces** the moment we told them.

Now the reason I take a moment to tell you about our engagement and wedding is because that is what is happening with God and his people in our passage today in the book of Exodus. The last nine weeks we have talked about how God delivered his people out of captivity in Egypt. Now that they are set free, God wants to dwell with them. And the language that is used is the same language as marriage covenant. After rescuing his people it's almost as though God takes a knee and says: "Would you like to enter into an eternal covenant with me, where I will be your God and you will be my people?" Look at 19:3-8 **3 Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'** These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

Now there are several things that I want to take note about the verses we just read. First, God says 19:4 **"I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself."** This is an analogy from the animal kingdom. The picture is of a baby eaglet in trouble, whose life is threatened, and mama eagle or daddy eagle swoops in from on high, grasps the baby eagle, and rescues it from danger. That is what God is saying he has done for his people in Egypt. They were in danger. They were enslaved and oppressed. God came down, rescued and delivered them as on eagle wings. And they didn't have to do anything to earn that salvation. Their salvation from Egypt was not based upon good works. It was not based upon keeping the law. It was not based upon them praying and tithing and keeping a long list of regulations. God did all of the saving work! God swooped down and took care of everything!

And the Lord says: 19:5 **"If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession."** This is God's way of saying, "It was my decision to rescue you, but now you get to decide if you want to be in a relationship with me, if you want to enter into a **covenant**. You don't have to; this can't be forced upon you. Love, by definition, is a free choice. This is God

making a proposal. This is the marriage language. And just like when I stood next to my bride and took her hand in mine, I didn't just say, "For better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health," I also said, "forsaking all others I will be faithful to you alone for as long as we both shall live. And that is what God is asking for in this marriage. He says: **"If you obey me fully."** Israel, you don't have to enter into this covenant, but if you do, like a groom to his bride, I want you to be faithful to me, and to me alone. And if you say yes, **"you will be my treasured possession."** In Hebrew the word is (*seg-ul-la*). This is the word that was used to describe the most valuable possessions owned by a king or queen. For a modern day example, do you know who owns more land than anyone else in the world? **The Queen of England.** I want you to take a guess at how many acres of land she owns.... The answer: 6.6 billion. (That is 22% of all the land in the world!) So suffice it to say she owns a lot. But not all of her possessions are equally valuable to her. Of all that she owns, she has treasured possessions which are more important to her than the rest. She has Buckingham Palace. She has her royal jewels. She has her golden throne. She owns so much, but she has *Segulla*, treasured possessions, things that matter more to her than anything else. And what is God saying here? I created the entire universe. I own it all. But if you say yes to me, you will be my treasured possession. You will be, to me, the most valuable thing in all the galaxies.

And now look at 19:6 **"You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."** This is actually an unbelievably significant statement! Most religions work like this: there is a group of people, and then a few of those people are chosen to develop a really deep relationship with God and serve the needs of the rest of the community. Those people are called priests. God says that's not what he wants. What he wants is for the entire community to develop a deep relationship with him, to really know him, and then the entire community to serve the needs of the world. A kingdom of priests. An entirely new approach to religion.

There are four points I want to make from this passage. I'll spend just a short bit of time on the first two (because they are more frequently discussed truths) and a bit more time on the latter two (because we don't hear about them nearly as often). Here's the first: **God saves us by his grace.** Just like the Israelites were saved by God's grace when he rescued them out of Egypt on eagles' wings and they did nothing to merit or earn their salvation, the same is true for us. The Bible says that every single one of us has sinned. We are slaves to sin and there is nothing that we can do about it. We cannot save ourselves. But it says in Titus 3:5 **God saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.** And in Ephesians 2:8 it says: **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.** Grace is hard for us to understand because it runs so contrary to everything else we experience in the world. The world tells us that you get what you deserve. Grace tells us we get what we don't deserve. Because of our sins, we deserve punishment and eternal separation from God. We deserve to have God look at our lives, see our sins, and then give us the punishment for our sins. Grace tells us that because of what Jesus did on the cross, when God looks at our lives he doesn't see our sin, he sees the perfect, spotless righteousness of his Son. We are saved by grace.

Next **God makes us his treasured possession.** Just like God could say that all the nations are his, but he wanted Israel to be his special people, just like the Queen of England owns 6.6 billion acres of land but has a few possessions that mean more to her than anything else, God has access to and rightful rulership over the entire universe, but he wants you as his treasured possession. Think about what means in regard to the value God ascribes to you! Almost everything that exists in the world that has a value assigned to it based upon how much we think it's worth. Think about the **values of precious metals.** Each of these have different values. **Copper** is worth \$2.63 per pound. **Tin** is worth \$7.53, per pound. **Silver** is worth \$214.01 per pound. **Gold** is worth 23,862.08 per pound. Tin is worth three times as much as copper. Silver is worth 100 times as much as copper. Gold is worth 10,000 times as much as copper. They are all metals. But based upon what we've decided, they have extraordinarily different values. When God looks at you and says, "of all the things in the universe that have value and worth, I want you more than

anything else. I want you to be my treasured possession...” what does that do to your soul? To have value and worth imparted to you like that? It makes the soul sing! Most of us know the pain of being evaluated and not chosen. Not being picked for the team, not being picked for the college, not being picked for the job, not being picked by your dad, not being picked for marriage. Most all of us know what it feels like to be evaluated and then passed over. Or worse yet, to be evaluated, chosen, and then rejected. God looks at us and says: “Of all the things in all the universe, I want you to be my treasured possession, and I want them for all eternity!”

Those are the first two truths that jump out from this passage: We are saved by God’s grace and we become his treasured possession. The next two truths get a little less airtime, they’re not quite as much publicity, but they are just as important for us to focus on. In fact, they are the logical conclusion of the first two. Here’s the third truth. **God requires our complete obedience.** Again, people don’t tend to talk about this quite as much. We love to focus on God’s saving grace, and that’s wonderful, but it doesn’t require anything from us. We love to focus on being God’s treasured possession-it’s a wonderful message-but again, that doesn’t require anything from us. Complete obedience required a lot from us. God says: “**If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession.**” Again, let’s understand this in light of a marriage relationship. I love my wife with all that I have. I would do anything for her. I adore her. And because I love her, and because we made a lifelong covenant with one another, I can’t even imagine what would happen in my heart if she came to me and said that though she wanted to be with me, she wanted an open marriage where she could be with me and with other people. My heart would be ripped out of my chest. It can’t be me and you *and* them. This is a marriage. It has to be just you and me. A marriage covenant requires exclusive and complete commitment. And that is what God is looking for from us: exclusive and complete commitment. Do we ever find ourselves approaching God with the thought, “Maybe this could be an open relationship? Where I serve, honor and obey you when it’s convenient, when it fits my agenda and preference, but then of course I can also pursue other allegiances, other priorities, other values in my life when I want?” That thought rips God’s heart to shreds. It can’t be me and these other priorities. It has to be me and me alone. God is a gentleman; he doesn’t force that on us. But if we say that we want to enter into a covenant relationship with him, that’s the expectation.

And look how the Israelites responded. Look with me at 19:8 “**The people all responded together, “We will do everything the Lord has said.”** Just like Matt Proctor mentioned a few weeks ago. When we look to God and say, “As you wish,” it’s really another way of saying, “I love you.” When God’s people decide to trust and obey him, it’s another way of saying they love him. Listen to what he said in John 15:10-11, 14 “**If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete...14 You are my friends if you do what I command.**” Years ago I had the privilege of preaching on that passage at a church. I preached a really simple message: We express our love for Jesus and remain in the love of Jesus by obeying his commands. A pastor came up to me afterwards and said, “Dan, you really missed the mark.” OK. Help me understand how. He said, “You focused way too much on obedience. That’s not really what God cares about.” I was just puzzled. I asked, “Did you read what Jesus’ said? I didn’t make that up. Those are his words, not mine.” So often when we counsel and instruct others we say things like: “What do you think is right?” Or, “What do you really want to do?” Or, “Listen to your heart. What is your heart telling you?” As if the goal was to follow the ever-changing desires of our heart rather than the never changing heart of God. The right question to ask is not: “What do I want,”-it’s, “What does God want?” What would honor him? What would full and complete obedience look like? Our culture has made obedience a stigmatized word filled with pejorative, negative sentiments. Obedience is not a bad thing. Obedience to God is our part of the covenant. Obedience to God is how we show our love to him. Obedience to God is the pathway to untold blessing.

God wants our complete obedience. Listen to what Paul says in Romans 1:5 **“Through Christ we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.”** True faith always leads to a life of obedience. Jesus didn’t tell us that God is up in heaven, looking down on us saying: “Dan, your kingdom come, your will be done.” No! Jesus taught us to look up to heaven and say, “God, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” And there’s a lot of places where we can’t control if God’s will is done...over in Syria, across the world in Russia and China, up in NYC and Washington DC. But do you know the one place you can control if the will of God is done? In your own life, as you walk in obedience to him.

So we see that God saves us by his grace, makes us his treasured possession, requires our complete obedience, and here’s the last truth: **God commissions all of us to serve.** Not a few of us, not just the pastors, not the missionaries, not those who graduated from seminary. Every one of us. Do you remember what he said to the Israelites in 19:6: **“You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”** God doesn’t want just a few, set apart, specialized people serving full time in the church, he wants the entire church serving full time in the world! That’s what God wants! Not every Christian resigning their jobs and going to seminary, but every Christian serving him right where they are. Everywhere you go. Everyone you know. God wants you to serve and love people in Jesus’ name...to be a priest, representing God to people, and representing people to God.

Now this passage from Exodus is quoted in the New Testament book of 1 Peter 2. And right after this quote, right after calling us a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, listen to what the Bible says. 1 Peter 2:12 **Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.** **Pagan** is simply another term for a non-believer, someone who has not yet placed their faith in Jesus. And Peter doesn’t say we have to go on a door-to-door knocking campaign and hand out tracts. He doesn’t say we need to stand on a street corner and yell at people who are walking past us. He doesn’t say we need to fly across the world and learn another language. What does he say?: **Live such good lives among the pagans.** Translation: Live as God’s holy people. Obey him completely in everything you do. Let them see the change God has made in your heart, your relationships, your family, your priorities. And once they have seen the change, then tell them about the one who has made all the difference. This is what God has done for me, he can do the same thing for you. D.T. Niles has said evangelism is simply one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. And what is the end result? **They may see your good deeds and glorify God.** Our hope isn’t that they have a lofty view of us and hold us in high esteem, but that they have a lofty view of God and hold him in high esteem. Something in our lives actually triggers a change in their life, and they go from being pagans to people who know and glorify God.

God is calling all of us to join in that work. I want to use an analogy from the sports world. At any given game you go to, you are going to find **bleachers**, a **bench**, and a **ballfield**. You have **hundreds** or **thousands** who are watching from a distance as observers **dozens** who are a part of the team, but who are sitting down and are passive observers, and a **few** who are actually in the game, giving it all they have, their blood, sweat, and tears. Some people think church is like going to a game. Show up, watch other people do all the work, just sit back, relax and enjoy the entertainment. What would our impact as a church be like if at this church, we didn’t have anyone on the bleachers or on the bench but 100% of our people engaged, in the trenches, serving and loving and representing Jesus in all that we do? Can you even imagine the impact? Hear me on this, please. I’m not speaking to you right now as a pastor who leads a church with positions that need to be filled. I’m speaking to you as a brother in Christ who wants to see the kingdom of God come to Indianapolis. We gotta get out of the bleachers, get off the bench, and get in the game!

Can I tell you a few people at our church who are knocking it out of the park in this regard? It’s our young people. Most of the schools in the area have been on fall break the last two weeks. And instead of

taking that time off to play video games or binge Netflix, we had dozens and dozens of students sign up to serve our city. **(Start video)** Not only did they get together to paint a playground at a local elementary school in Franklin Township, as you can see here, they packed 170 care packages for cancer patients receiving their first round of chemotherapy. They packed and distributed 500 protein snack packs for homeless in the downtown Indy area, served at local food banks, cleaned police cars for IMPD officers, delivered refreshments at six different fire stations and prayed for first responders. Our students taking their vacation and living on mission, setting the bar throughout our church! **(Look at this picture)** That's not a bunch of teenagers right there; that's a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

In Exodus, we see God has saved us by his grace, makes us his treasured possession, requires complete obedience, and commissions all of us to serve. And this is all a part of entering into a new, covenant relationship with God. Now, every covenant that is entered into in the Bible is established and sealed by the shedding of blood. That's part of what makes it official. So a few chapters later, in Exodus 24:8 we read **Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."** So Moses takes a branch, dips into the blood, and sprinkles it on all the people, blood going everywhere, signifying they were entering into a new covenant.

Now that's Exodus, 1250 years before the time of Jesus. But if you go to the gospels, on the last night of Jesus' life, when he was eating the Passover meal, he said, God is making a new covenant. This covenant is not just for the Jews. It's for all humanity. It's not to set you free from Egypt, it's to set you free from sin and darkness and death. This covenant will not be established by the blood of an animal but by the blood of God's own Son. There on the cross, Jesus' blood was everywhere. He gave his life for ours to establish a new covenant. The cross of Christ is the heart of God on full display. And don't mistake what's going on. The cross of Christ is many things, and among them is a marriage proposal. God doesn't take a knee and pull out a ring. He takes on our flesh, goes to the cross, sheds his blood, gives his life and he says: This is my love for you! This is my commitment to you! Do you want to be mine? Will you be my bride? For better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, faithful to me alone for as long as we both shall live? The relationship can't be forced. It has to be freely chosen. And that's what God is inviting us to do today: to choose to live in a covenant relationship with him and represent him everywhere we go.

Prayer. Invitation. Communion.