

# Exodus 19

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[0:00] On the first day of the third month, after the Israelites left Egypt, on that very day, they came to the desert of Sinai, and they set out from Rephidim. They entered the desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain.

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. You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 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, you will be, for me, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.

So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, We will do everything the Lord has said.

[1:06] So Moses brought their answers back to the Lord. The Lord said to Moses, I'm going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you, and will always put their trust in you.

Then Moses told the Lord what the people had said. And the Lord said to Moses, Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day, because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in sight of all the people.

Put limits for the people around the mountain. Tell them, Be careful that you do not approach the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain is to be put to death.

They are to be stoned or shot with arrows. Not a hand is to be laid on them. No person or animal shall be permitted to live. Only when the ram's horns sound a long blast may they approach the mountain.

After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he consecrated them, and they washed their clothes. Then he said to the people, Prepare yourselves for the third day. Abstain from sexual relations.

[2:13] On the morning of the third day, there was a thunder and lightning and a thick cloud over the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled.

Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire.

The smoke billowed up from it like a smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and the voice of God answered him.

The Lord descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up, and the Lord said to him, Go down and warn the people, so they do not force their way through to see the Lord, and many of them perish.

Even the priests who approach the Lord must consecrate themselves, or the Lord will break out against them. Moses said to the Lord, The people cannot come at Mount Sinai, because you yourself warned us.

[3:17] Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy. The Lord replied, Go down and bring Aaron up with you, but the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the Lord, or he will break out against them.

So Moses went down to the people and told them. There are certain events that change the whole course of history.

There are moments that define the lives of nations. For one generation, it would have been the assassination of JFK. For my generation, it was probably the fall of the Berlin Wall. For others, it might have been 9-11. Maybe it would be lockdown in COVID now. But what happened at Mount Sinai defined the life of Israel for generations to come. What happens in this chapter is absolutely vital. For two reasons. Firstly, to understand the Ten Commandments.

[4:32] Now I want to give you some earth-shattering theology here. Exodus 19 comes before chapter 20. There it is.

That is the extent of my theology. But it is enormously important because Israel would not have understood the Ten Commandments had they not met God at Mount Sinai. And neither can we as Christians understand what place the Ten Commandments should have in our lives until we first understood this chapter.

But also, this was teaching Israel how to live in relationship with God. They're about to enter into a covenant relationship with the God of glory.

They need to know how to relate to Him. And that is the great value to us of this chapter. How we can have a living relationship with God.

[5:40] Exodus 19, as it were, gives you the contours of a relationship with God today. There are four things I want to draw from the passage.

Firstly, we need a mediator. Moses is a veritable Bear Grylls here. And to think he's actually quite an old man.

How he goes up and down Mount Sinai three times in three days. Going up and down the stairs three times in three days is enough for me.

But he goes up the mountain in verse 3. Down in 7. He goes up again in verse 9. And down in 14. He goes up in verse 20.

And down in verse 25. What is he doing? He's acting as a mediator between Israel and God.

[6:38] Because Israel has a fundamental problem. They cannot come into the presence of a holy God being sinful human beings.

If they were to enter into God's presence, they would be wiped from the face of the earth. Nothing sinful can come into God's presence.

So God chooses Moses as a mediator between him and Israel. He brings God's commands to Israel.

Israel sends their replies to God via Moses. All of this was to show that Israel needed a mediator.

And we all need a mediator today to know God. God's presence. Because all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

[7:42] All of us deserve to sit under the judgment of God, not only in this life, but for all eternity. As sinful human beings, we cannot possibly know or come into the presence of such a holy God.

God's presence. We need a mediator. In Hebrews 12, it tells us that we have come to a different mountain.

Not to Mount Sinai, but to Mount Zion. And that we are surrounded by the angels and by God's people who have gone to glory.

And we have come to God himself, the judge of spirits. We have come to almighty God. We need a mediator.

A mediator to help us know God and come to him and live in his presence. And Hebrews calls him Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.

[8:56] At Christmas, we remember that Christ came as a babe to die. That he humbled himself to become man. That he humbled himself to death, even death on a cross.

That he might be the mediator between man and God. There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

You can only come to God through Jesus. We all need a mediator. And he is Jesus.

Have you come to him? Have you put your faith in him alone? Secondly, grace is all we need.

God reminds the Israelites in verse 4 that he saved them for no other reason than his grace, his unmerited love.

[10:01] There's this idea that some people have that in the Old Testament, you could get to heaven by obeying the law. And in the New Testament, you are somehow saved by grace.

And nothing could be further from the truth. People have been saved by grace alone. Old and New Testaments.

Notice that God does everything here. You yourselves have seen what I did. I bore you on eagle's wings. I brought you to myself.

God does it all. And he does three things. He judges, he delivers, and he draws. He judges Egypt. You yourselves have seen what I have done to the Egyptians. Now, why would God mention that to the Israelites? To remind them that they have seen the fate that they themselves deserve.

[11 : 09] They were no better, no different than the Egyptians. The fate that the Egyptians suffered, the Israelites should have suffered.

But God in his grace had not judged them, but saved them. So he has judged, he has delivered. There's a lovely picture here of an eagle pushing her chicks out of the nest and then catching them and carrying them to safety.

God has delivered Israel from all danger, all slavery, all idolatry. He has saved them. They have done nothing themselves.

So he's judged, he's delivered, and he's drawn. I brought you to myself. He is not simply saving Israel.

He's bringing Israel into a personal relationship with him. God does not just save us from our sins as an end in and of itself.

[12 : 22] It's a means to an end. When God saves us, he saves us to have relationship with him. And God's grace tells us two things here.

Firstly, that you can never come to God any other way than by grace. Some people would say that to come to God, you would need to be a good person, do good works, earn your way into God's favor.

But this passage tells us that no amount of obedience to God will ever bring us to him. Salvation from sin and death and hell is a gift, and a gift that we do not deserve.

It is a gift that you can never earn and that must be received by empty hands, that trust in him alone.

And we must obey God because of grace. We come to God by grace, but we are to live with God by grace.

[13 : 36] It's grace first, then law. God saves Israel, then he calls Israel to obey him.

They cannot be any more saved by obeying him. We must obey God because of his grace.

Know this this morning, that you can never be more loved by God, accepted by God, or saved by God, than you are now, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ.

There is nothing you can do to add to your status or to make God love you more. You know, for many of us growing up, obedience to our parents was about gaining their favor.

If I got good grades at school, if I went to the right university, if I did the right thing, then my parents would approve of me.

[14 : 47] We have been accepted in the beloved, Paul says in the book of Ephesians. We're accepted because of Jesus' perfect life, death, and resurrection.

His righteousness makes you and I accepted in the sight of God this morning. He could not love you more even if you tried.

Because his love is not conditional on your obedience to him, but the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. And that which matters is that when we talk about the Ten Commandments or obeying God, we don't see obedience as winning favor with God or keeping ourselves saved or keeping ourselves from the wrath of God.

there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We obey God because we love him.

We obey God because he has first loved us and because he has sent his son as a perfect sacrifice for us.

[16 : 12] grace. The babe that was born in Bethlehem was nailed to the cross for our sins and that is why we obey him.

You see, grace is not about just being saved. The whole Christian life from beginning to end is about grace.

Grace saves us and then grace is what motivates us to obey God. All you need is grace.

And grace makes obeying God a delight not a burden. So we see that we need a mediator and all we need is grace.

And thirdly, we see that we need to live according to our identity. Now verse 5 has caused some confusion. Now if you will obey my voice fully and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession.

[17 : 22] It sounds on first reading as if if Israel obeys God, then they will be a treasured possession, a royal priest, a holy people, and so on.

It sounds as if their salvation depends on obeying him. But God doesn't contradict himself. Two verses above, he's just said, I've saved you.

So why does he use conditional language? If, then. Because he's saying, if you want to function as my treasured possession, function as a royal priesthood, function as a holy nation, then you need to obey me.

You already are these things. Now, you need to live as these things. Obedience here was not about becoming so favored before God.

they already were. Obedience was helping them become what they already were, if that makes sense.

[18 : 39] And these words, of course, are used in 1 Peter 2, verse 9. You're a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.

As believers in Jesus Christ, these are the very words that God uses both of Israel and of us today. We are his treasured possession.

How I love that phrase. It was used of a king who had something or someone that was the most treasured thing in his life.

You and I in Christ Jesus are God's treasured possession, which is both wonderful but also has implications.

It's wonderful because we are so treasured by the holy, glorious God of Sinai. But it's also a responsibility.

[19 : 47] We are his treasured possession. We belong to him. Romans 14, 9. For to this end, Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord of both the dead and of the living.

We are his possession. We have been bought by the blood of Christ. We belong to him, lock, stock, and barrel, which means practically that our lives are to be lived for him.

My question this morning is, are you living for yourself, for your desires, for your will, or are you living for Christ, for his desires, and his will?

But we're also a kingdom of priests. What does that mean? Well, the Israelites were to pray for the nations, teach the nations the law of God, and guide the nations to God.

Their identity was their mission. Who they were determined what they were to do. and our identity is our mission.

[21 : 15] As a kingdom of priests, we exist for this, to pray for the nations, to go to the nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ, to make disciples in all the nations, teaching them to obey all that Christ has commanded.

we exist for this. Not just as a church, but as individuals, we exist for this.

We have been saved for this. Do you understand that the purpose of your life, the reason for which you have been saved, is to be part of the royal priesthood of God, making known Christ to the nations.

And this work is not the work of missionaries, of pastors, of ministers alone. That's what we have the minister for.

That's what we pay him for, isn't it? No. We have been saved by the blood of Christ to be part of that self-same mission.

[22 : 42] To take the gospel to the ends of the earth. That men, women, and children might look upon Christ and be saved.

That is the purpose of your life. It's not marriage, children, build a good life. However blessed a thing that may well be, the very purpose for which you have been saved is to make disciples.

So you pleading with God in prayer for the lost. And you sharing Christ with others. And are you making disciples?

The church is only as good as its component parts. It's not about who stands at the front on a Sunday.

It's about who shares the gospel through the week. And who takes people through the Bible to live as disciples of Christ through the week.

[24:03] That is our job, all of us as God's people. It's not for the professionals. We're also a holy nation.

Holy meaning to be set apart for God. So for example, the utensils in the temple were holy. They were set apart for one purpose, to serve God in his worship.

The robes of the high priest were holy. The high priest himself was holy to the Lord. Why? He'd been set apart for God.

You and I as believers have been set apart for God. which means that when people look at us, they should see God in us.

They should see the character of God when they look at us. Can people see Christ in your words, your actions, your choices, your priorities?

[25:12] Are you distinct from the world around us? or are you indistinguishable from it? To be a holy nation means to be set apart from the world for God that all might see who God is in us, through us.

Our identity determines how we're to live. And fourthly, we need to know God as he really is. This is the biggest, most majestic, most glorious revelation of God in history.

Why would God reveal himself in this way before giving his law? So that the people knew what kind of God they were dealing with.

To have a relationship with God, we need to know God for who he truly is. So how does God reveal himself at Sinai?

He reveals himself as the faithful one. What is the promise that God gave to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3, verse 12?

[26:34] When you've brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain. And God keeps his word because God is always faithful to his word.

He always keeps his promises. He's the holy one. They must fence off the mountain, not touch it, or they will die, verse 12.

They must purify themselves for three days before meeting with God. They must restrain themselves from sexual relations, not because they are sinful, but because it will take their focus off this holy, glorious God that was to appear before them.

Everything at Sinai is telling Israel just how holy God is. He's the sovereign king. So the trumpet that blasts was a sign of a coming king.

And this is the king of all kings. The mountain shakes. His voice is so loud that the people tremble.

[27:59] He gives instructions to his people, and they obey. and he is the judge. The mountain is covered in smoke as God comes down in fire.

Now think for a moment, when was the last time in the Bible that God appeared in fire? At Sodom and Gomorrah.

he is appearing as judge here, and he is not safe. Four times in verses 21 to 24, God says the people and the priests must not go up to him unbidden.

Why? Lest the Lord break out against them. reminds me of what Mrs. Beaver said to Lucy.

Lucy says of Aslan, is he safe? Safe? Who said anything about safe? Of course he's not safe, but he's good.

[29:12] He's the king, I tell you. Our God is not safe. Praise God that we have safety in Christ Jesus. But our God is utterly other from all of creation.

He is so much greater, so much purer, so much more powerful, so perfect in every way. Which means what? That we serve him in reverence and awe.

Hebrews 12 in verse 28 it says, therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken and let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe for our God is a consuming fire.

Here is the irony about this consuming fire. This fire draws himself, draws us to himself. ourselves. We don't flee from this fire.

This is the irony of the fear of God. It's not a fear of destruction or judgment or being cast into eternal hell. This is the fear of being in the presence of one so great, so mighty, so awesome that we tremble before him.

[30:42] And the writer to the Hebrews, thinking of Mount Sinai, says to us today that when you see God as he is, in all of his majesty, then all we can do is serve him with reverence and awe.

the more you know God, the more reverence and awe you will have of him, and the more you will live the way he delights in.

To have a relationship with God, you must come through the mediator, Jesus. You must come to him and continue with him by grace.

You must live according to your new identity and you must know God as he truly is and serve him with reverence and awe.

But does living with God and having a relationship with God seem so far removed, so impossible? Think about when this happens.

[31:54] It is the day of Pentecost because the feast of Pentecost is founded on the day to celebrate the day that the law of God was given at Sinai.

And as the Jews celebrated Pentecost through the ages, they looked ahead to the time when God would pour his Holy Spirit on his people that they might live with him and obey him and know him and delight in him.

And as the Holy Spirit came upon the church at Pentecost, then God's people were transformed, given new access, new understanding, new power, new ability to love, to serve, to obey God.

So your relationship with God is not built on our strength. it's built on the strength and the power that the Spirit gives.

He is that which enables us and empowers us not just to know God, but to obey him, to have a right relationship with him, to glorify him in everything we do, and to make him known.

[33:21] God. And so we look at Sinai, our eyes are to be cast to Pentecost, and to the gift of the Holy Spirit, who gives us the power to live for and to know the only true God.

Thank God for the gift of his Spirit, who enables us to know him, to love him, to serve him, to worship him, now and forever.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we bless and thank you for your word. We thank you so much that you have revealed yourself to us in your word.

And as we think on how you revealed yourself at Sinai, our minds hearts cannot contain that which you are. We cannot comprehend such a glorious, such a great God, but we bow and we worship you for all that you are, and we worship you for the grace that you have shown.

God, and as we celebrate the birth of Christ this Christmas, Lord, we pray that you would fill our hearts with joy, that the babe became a man who hung on a cross to save us from our sins.

[35:00] And may our minds go from Sinai to Pentecost to rejoice in the gift of his spirit poured out on his church.

Thank you that we can know you through Christ, and that we can love you and worship and serve you with reverence and awe because of Christ and his gift of his spirit.

Father, we pray that if there are any here who do not know you yet, that you would draw them to yourselves through Christ.

And we who know you, Father, may we know you more and more, and may our relationship with you, Lord, deepen each day, and may you help us to live as your treasured possession, your royal priesthood, your holy nation.

Oh, God, help us to live by the power of your spirit for you, that the nations might turn to Christ and be gathered in for an eternity with you in heaven.

[36:14] In Jesus' name, Amen.