

Text: Exod. 19:1-8

Title: "Life under the Lord's covenantal love"

Time: 2/21/2021 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: We have come to a major mile-marker in our journey with Israel through the book of Exodus. The first two verses of our chapter tell us where we are in that journey (vv. 1-2). We are not quite halfway through the book, but we have covered two of the three major sections I have outlined in Exodus.

Remember that *Exodus* means *the way out*. When reflecting on the content of Exodus, the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church: "There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). That phrase *way of escape* is a close synonym for the word *exodus*. The book of Exodus is all about the way God delivers His people – He has provided a way of escape out of the slavery of Egypt for them.

So, the first four chapters of Exodus were all about Israel's need for deliverance and God's choice of a deliverer to meet that need. Then, chapters 5-18 told the history of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. That deliverance was resisted by a hardened Pharaoh (5:1-7:13), but it was shown to be irresistible in spite of Pharaoh's hardness (7:14-12:36). Then beginning with chapter 13, God's deliverance of His people was executed, made irreversible, first celebrated and then lamented, and finally blessed by the visit of Jethro in chapter 18.

With God's deliverance of His people completed, the Lord begins a work in the history of this newborn nation that is going to show them what the life of the delivered must be. People whom God has redeemed live differently than they did

while slaves in Egypt and differently than the way the world still in bondage to sin lives. Next in the book of Exodus are three blessings in the life of the redeemed – (1) their life becomes a covenantal life (19:1-25); (2) it becomes a lawful life (20:1-24:18); and (3) it becomes a worshipful life (25:1-40:38).

So, we begin to understand the life of the redeemed people of God by reading about the Lord's covenant with Israel. A *covenant*, of course, is a legally binding promise. I have three covenantal relationships in my life, each of which is legally binding and documented on a piece of paper. The covenant of marriage between my wife and I is one of those. The second is the covenant of church membership defined by our church's constitution in accord with the teaching of the New Testament. And the third is the covenant of citizenship in the United States, which is defined by our nation's constitution.

In every case, the covenantal relationships of my life are each both a covenant of love and a covenant of holiness. In my marriage, I am to love my wife and stay separate from all other women. In my church membership, I am to love my fellow church members while jealously protective of a strictly regenerate (truly saved) church membership. In my citizenship, I am to fulfill the duties defined by a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, understanding all along that by *people* we do not mean people of other nations.

And so it is with the Lord's covenantal relationship with His people. That relationship includes our need to recognize the enormity of His love for us, but also our need to respond to the purity of His holiness as well. Both are themes in this chapter. This morning we are going to look at that first aspect of God's covenant with His people – His love for them.

I. In love, the Lord initiates His covenant with His people (vv. 3-4).

Illustration: In every courtship that results in marriage, someone had to take the first step. Maureen worked at the university bookstore where I purchased a book that she rang up and bagged for me. I had just been through an epiphany of sorts in prayer and while doing my laundry and knew that the Lord wanted me to take the first dating step with someone. Too shy to just ask Maureen in person, I searched the year-book for her picture, found her name, and wrote her a note asking her to a Vespers service. Back then, young ladies were encouraged to say “yes” at least once so that they could be well-informed when they ditched a guy later. We had a good time together, and here we are over three decades later.

Application: In love, the Lord takes the initiative in His covenantal relationship to His people. The end of verse 5 says simply, “I brought you to myself.” Getting to God had nothing to do with what comes after verse 5 and everything to do with what went before. What went before was that the Lord crushed Egypt’s bondage, freed Israel from slavery, and delivered them. The beautiful picture of this saving work is described as the Lord’s lifting them on wings of eagles.

Illustration: Imagine if a prisoner in a prison camp was suddenly given wings like an eagle. That prisoner would be able to fly out over the fence and escape miraculously, instantaneously, and irreversibly. That is the picture of this metaphor.

In love God gives wings to sinners trapped in sin. For them, the wings God gives do all the necessary work of salvation. Salvation is a work of God, not man. The work of God that saves is the one symbolized by the Passover Lamb on the night of Israel’s deliverance. Jesus shed His blood on the cross of Calvary to give sinners in slavery eagle wings to escape. And even as believers who have been delivered from this slavery, it is still that blood that cleanses us from our sin and gives us wings to grow in grace (1 John 1:7). Isa. 40:31, “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they

shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

Pilots must earn their wings to fly. None of us can say we have earned our wings of deliverance from sin, because our wings were not earned, they were given to us as unearned and undeserved. Salvation is a work of free grace. Each of us can claim that, because of God’s love, His initiative, His Passover Lamb, I can have wings that can make me soar out of bondage, cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, no longer the slave of sin.

Have you received the gift of the wings of forgiveness of sin this morning? Do you believe Jesus died for you? Have you become free from slavery to your sin and unbelief? If not, the gospel is that the wings of forgiveness are offered freely to you too. God has taken the initiative at Calvary; Jesus died on the cross for your sins; you can follow Him out of Egypt miraculously, instantaneously, and irreversibly this morning.

Illustration: When I courted my wife, she never said “no” to my request for a date, and finally came that wonderful “yes” when I proposed marriage to her and asked her to be my wife in the covenant of marriage.

How often has the Lord graciously taken the initiative of the covenant of salvation with you, only to hear you stubbornly say “no” to His invitation to be forgiven and forever free from slavery to sin? To utter this refusal in final unbelief is the unforgivable sin. To utter this refusal is to remain Egypt’s slave, and ultimately to be forever destroyed under God’s judgment in Egypt. If that happens to you, it will not be because the Lord did not love you. It will not be because He did not take the initiative and offer you eagles wings. It will be because you said, “No” (Ezek. 33:11; Matt. 23:37).

II. In love, the Lord explains His covenant with His people (vv. 5-6).

Illustration: The talk radio host Rush Limbaugh died this past week at the age of 70. He is beloved by some and hated by others, but no one lacks an opinion about Rush because his influence on our nation was truly an amazing accomplishment. In 1971 the 20-year-old Rush dropped out of college and became a DJ at a radio station in McKeesport, PA. Fifty years later, Rush is remembered as the creator of alternative news media and the savior of AM radio. I first heard Rush when he came on the air in 1988 on WABC in New York.

Application: In 1988 our country had just experienced two terms of the Regan presidency and would in that year elect Regan's vice president, George H. W. Bush, as its next president. The national debt was \$2.6T. Marriage was between a man and a woman. So here we are, some 30 years later, remembering the influence of a man with the political power of a Rush Limbaugh, and we can ask ourselves, "Is our nation better off today than in 1988 or not?" I think that unquestionably, from a spiritual perspective, most of us believers would say that the United States of America is just as bad off if not worse morally and spiritually than it was in 1988.

Which brings me to the Lord's explanation of His covenant with His people. One question that comes to my mind is that if the influence of a Rush Limbaugh cannot make our nation better, what can? The Lord explains in His covenant with His people that He has a plan for making the world a better place, and that plan is centered on the people of His covenant.

The covenant of the Lord with His people makes some promises in this regard. It says His people would belong to Him as a peculiar treasure above all other people, who also belong to Him. In other words, God would place a special value on His possession of Israel, His people, when it comes to His plan for the world. What is especially valuable about their role in this plan is that the Lord promises to make Israel a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. A holy nation is one that is set apart

for a special purpose, and a kingdom of priests is one that is comprised of priests who are also kings. As priests Israel would teach other nations God's commands and intercede for those nations before the Lord, and as kings Israel would administer those nations creating world peace and tranquility.

This, of course, is the plan first communicated to Israel in the Abrahamic covenant: "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3); "And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee" (Gen. 17:6); "And God said unto him [Jacob, whose name He was changing to *Israel*], I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins" (Gen. 35:11); "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10).

God's plan for His covenanted people is one that the plans of Balak for Balaam's curse could not upend. Instead, the misled prophet was forced to prophesy: "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city" (Num. 24:17-19).

Before His death, Moses spoke of the success of this covenant's plan: "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places" (Deut. 33:29); and even after the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the nation of Israel, Daniel could still see

this promise's fulfillment: "And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (Dan. 7:27).

And the good news for us as Gentile members of a local church today is that the Lord has included us in our age in this wonderful covenantal plan: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

That's the plan. And all Israel needed to do is respond to the love of the Lord's covenant in obedience (v. 5).

III. In love, the Lord accounts for His people's response to His covenant (vv. 7-8).

Application: Israel says, "All that Yahweh spoke, we will do." That is their response to God's plan for their nation and its ministry to the world. How did that go? Deut. 9:6-8 sums up the answer succinctly. The rest of the Old Testament tells the whole answer. Israel did very little of what Yahweh spoke, and when they did, it was for very short periods of blessing.

But the Lord accounts for this in His covenantal plans for His people. After their destruction, He gives Jeremiah news of the new covenant for Israel and Judah into which the Gentile nations shall be invited as well, just as the Abrahamic covenant said it would be (Jer. 31:31-34). Unlike the Sinaitic covenant, the new covenant would change their hearts, glorify their resurrected bodies, and guarantee their obedience for the fulfillment of God's covenant in righteousness and peace.

And so the Apostle John looks to our future as a local church with the plan of the Lord's covenant of salvation still in force:

“John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, *and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father*; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (Rev. 1:4-6; emphasis mine).

Conclusion: The Lord’s plan for His kings and priests is right on schedule. He has accounted for our inability to obey Him in the obedience of Christ and the shedding of His blood to cleans us from our sins. His death ratified the new covenant.

Are you one of those king-priests this morning? Has God made His covenant with you? Are your sins washed in the blood of the Passover Lamb? If not, today can be the day. Repent of your sin and seek forgiveness in Christ. If so, be of good courage. Jesus has overcome the world. To Him shall be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching