

# That the Nations Will Know

Exodus: Revelation and Redemption

Pastor Dominick Wong

December 29, 2019

Morning First Free! This week we will be entering not just a new year, but a new decade. And I still can't really wrap my head around that. Like most of us here, I was born in a previous century, a previous millennium. So in my mind, when I hear "the twenties" my first thought goes to the 1920s. Not the 2020s. Something in the past, not the immediate future. And when someone mentions the year 1980 I think, oh that was twenty years ago, because I'm pretty sure the year 2000 just happened, right? Time flies, I guess.

Every year, this week leading up to January feels significant. New Year's Eve is kind of like walking through a doorway into a dark room. You don't know what's on the other side, but you don't have a choice. You have to go through, and you'll just have to wait until the lights come on to find out what's there.

I don't know how you'll be welcoming in the new decade, but if you're like me, it'll involve a lot of thinking and reflection. What did I do this past decade? Who have I become these last ten years? Who will I be in the next ten? This is a time for New Year's resolutions, for big life decisions and major turning points. How should we think through these things?

The nation of Israel faced much the same questions in the book of Exodus. Now that we are no longer slaves, who will we be? What kind of a people will we become? How will we be set apart from all the other nations?

Now, we've been in Exodus for the past five months, and last week Josh preached on the final chapter of the book. So you might be thinking, Exodus? I thought we were done with that? But it's my conviction that as we enter a new decade, the book of Exodus has very much to say about what our lives should look like. So before we leave Exodus and move next week into our evangelism series, I want to zoom out and explore one of the dominant themes of the book as a whole—God's mission. What has God been doing in Exodus? What was the whole point? And what does it mean for me today?

We'll begin today by reading just the first two verses of Exodus chapter 5. Two short verses that demonstrate the *problem* that God's mission is going to address.

## **Exodus 5:1-2<sup>1</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'" <sup>2</sup>But Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go."*

This is the Word of the Lord.

## ***The Mission***

"Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?" (Ps. 2:1). The psalmist wrote these words many generations after the events of the Exodus, but the nations have always been raging. Ever

---

<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

since our first father and mother left the garden, things have gone from bad to worse. We choose to live our lives apart from God, lives without hope. Because without God, what hope is there? Without God, you're alone aren't you? No one's got your back except you.

And so, of course, you have to take what's yours; look out for number one. After all, if you don't who will? Your only choice is to conquer, to oppress, to exploit those weaker than you or else you yourself will be conquered, oppressed, and exploited.

Why do the nations rage? Because they do not know God. As these first two verses in chapter 5 show us, Egypt, the most powerful nation of its time, did not know its Creator. And so Egypt raged. So it's little wonder that the book of Exodus begins with a genocide. A massacre of infants. The Egyptians sought only their own interests. And that self-interest made something as good as life—as fruitfulness and multiplication—made something as wonderful as a baby boy into a threat.

But when Pharaoh ordered that all the newborn sons of Israel be murdered, there was more at stake than the survival of just one people group. No, although for over four hundred years Israel had been nothing more than slaves, these people carried with them something very important. A promise from God. A promise for the nations. To Abraham, their ancestor, the Lord promised this: “I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you [get this] *all the families of the earth shall be blessed*” (Gen. 12:3).

All the families? All the nations? The wicked, oppressive, idolatrous nations that rage against their Creator? Even evil, slaveholding, murderous Egypt? All of them? Yes, all the nations. Even Egypt. This is the remarkable, astounding truth underlying everything in our series on the book of Exodus.

We haven't spent five months in this series just to learn about the origins of Israel. Exodus is not just some history lesson. The book of Exodus is about God's mission to make himself known through one nation to *all* nations.

Now, if you've been with us through this series, this should be at least a little familiar. We've mentioned this before. But today, I want to make sure that we don't miss this crucial point. To do this, we're going to go through the whole story, stopping at points along the way to see just how significant this mission is.

For those of you taking notes, I'll be looking specifically at four truths that Exodus reveals about God's mission, Israel's role in that mission, and what it all means for us today.

Even if you haven't been with us through this series, you probably know the gist of Exodus. God picks one man, Moses, to lead his people out of slavery by sending ten plagues on Egypt that eventually end in Israel's freedom.

For many of us this is a familiar story. What we might not realize, though, is that this wasn't the only way things could've gone. God didn't have to free Israel through Moses or the plagues. God could've just put all the Egyptians to sleep for a few nights and told Israel to get out of Dodge. Surely that would have been enough to show Israel how amazing God is.

But God was not only concerned that *Israel* would know Him. No, the Lord's mission is to make himself known to *all* the nations. Even Egypt. *Especially* Egypt.

## **GOD'S MISSION IS FOR EVERYONE.**

---

God makes this explicitly clear throughout the story. Over and over again he says that all the plagues, all of this, is happening not just for Israel, but so that Egypt “may know that there is none like [him.]”

In chapter 9, with the plague of hail, we see God’s purpose explored in depth: “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh and say to him, “Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, ‘Let my people go, that they may serve me. For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, [and why?] *so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth.* For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth”’”(vv. 13-15).

Like we’ve said, God could have done something entirely different. Why bother with the plagues? God could have wiped out the oppressive Egyptians in a second and would have had every right to do so. But he didn’t. And why? Verse 16: “But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.”

In other words, all of this—Moses, the plagues, and even Pharaoh’s power (the power used to enslave Israel)—all of it was for the sake of God’s mission to proclaim his name in all the earth, to all the nations.

And so we see that in simply being delivered, in sitting on the sidelines and watching the Lord fight for them, Israel has already served a key role in God’s mission. So now has Israel played their part? Are they done? Far from it. God desires not only that Israel would passively know him, but that they would actively make him known.

Up until this point, Israel’s main job has been to stand by and watch as the Lord fulfills his mission. But in chapter 19, where God makes his covenant with Israel, we see a dramatic shift.

Imagine that you’re stuck in a burning building, when suddenly a hand grabs yours and pulls you through the blazing flames out of the fire. And then, once you’ve had a chance to catch your breath, your rescuer turns to you says, “There’s more people in there. We need to get them out. Can you help me?”

Here in chapter 19 Israel has just been rescued from the fire, and now God is asking Israel if they’ll help him save the others. Here, God declares that Israel has been saved not just out of slavery, but into his mission.

## **GOD SAVES ISRAEL TO TAKE PART IN HIS MISSION.**

---

Exodus 19:4 says, “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.” God begins with what he’s done. He brought Israel out from the Egyptians and to himself. And he did this for a reason: “Now *therefore*, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (v. 6).

Here God gives Israel three new identities, new titles, new roles. Let’s unpack these three. The first new identity: “You shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine.” The Lord says all the earth is mine, all the nations, even though they rage against him. But Israel was

uniquely chosen as his treasured possession from among the nations. And why? To bear the promise, to play a special role in the mission.

That role is explained in verse 6 in the second new identity: “And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests.” I think a better translation would be a “priestly kingdom.” In other words, the whole nation of Israel is given the task of serving as priest to all the other nations.

This is why Exodus spends so much time talking about the priests, what they wear and how they’re ordained and what they must do. In the instructions to the priests we’re given a clue to understanding what it means for Israel to be a priestly kingdom. Priests serve as mediators between God and man. That is, they make it possible for Israel to have a relationship with God. They alone can enter into God’s presence, into the holy places where they pray on behalf of the nation, bearing up the names of the people of Israel, and making sacrifices to atone for their sins.

In much the same way, the whole nation of Israel has the unique task of establishing a relationship between all the wicked nations of the earth and God. And like the priests, the only reason Israel is able to do any of this is that God sets them apart as holy.

Which is why Israel’s third new identity is that they will be a holy nation. To be holy, is to be set apart for God’s use. Israel, among all the nations of the world, will be used by God in a unique way.

This special function is best illustrated in one of the other things that God calls holy—the tabernacle. This last month, we have focused specifically on the significance of the tabernacle and how it helps us understand the Christmas season. If you’ve been with us, you know that the tabernacle is more than just a place of worship. The tabernacle is a holy place. In the tabernacle, God’s presence dwells. This is incredibly important. Because just as the tabernacle bears God’s presence among the people of Israel, Israel is going to bear God’s presence among the other nations.

When other nations interact with Israel, they’re going to encounter the very presence of God. This is Israel’s special job. Israel alone will bear this presence. God will set them apart from all the other nations, but only if Israel agrees to be set apart. That’s why before giving Israel three new identities, the first thing we read in verse 5 is: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant.” Israel’s promises are grounded in obedience to God’s word, to keeping his covenant, his Law.

God appoints Israel to be his representatives, his ambassadors to the nations. And the law of Moses was meant, in part, to remind Israel to keep God at the center of their lives, and to live in his ways, so that when all the other nations look at Israel, they’ll know who Israel’s God is. And this is why it’s such a big deal that Israel makes a golden calf.

### ***Mission Compromised***

Not long after Israel receives the Law, they break it. The Ten Commandments were clear. The Lord is the God who brought Israel of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. And so, because of that, Israel is supposed to have no other gods. They are not to make or worship a carved image.

Yet, that’s exactly what they do. They ask Aaron to melt down their jewelry and make the golden calf. And once it’s made, what do they say?: “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” Israel isn’t just breaking a rule, they haven’t just disobeyed the Law. In

worshipping the golden calf, Israel's forgetting who God is. God brought them out of Egypt, not this idol.

How can Israel fulfill their mission to the nations now? How can they make God known if they do not know God? If they reject God like all the other nations? Here, Israel has become an enemy of the mission. And so by all rights they should have been destroyed, but they weren't. Why? Why doesn't God destroy Israel? Why doesn't he wipe them out? Because in spite of it all, in spite of Israel's stiff-necked, hard-hearted opposition to God, in spite of the fact that Israel has become God's enemy, God still chooses to use Israel. In fact, when God first made his promise, when he first chose Israel out of all the nations to serve his mission, he knew that this would happen, that they would compromise the mission, and yet, he chose them anyway.

And so one of the great wonders of Exodus is that instead of a tragic end for Israel, the book wraps up just as we read it last week in chapter 40, with the tabernacle being constructed, with Aaron—yes, that idol-forging, excuse-making Aaron—ordained to the high priesthood, and with God's presence coming down to dwell with an idolatrous people.

Everything goes according to plan. Nothing has changed. And that's the miraculous thing about it all. At the end of Exodus, despite everything, Israel is still the nation that God will use to accomplish his mission. Because although Israel is woefully unqualified for this job, it doesn't matter. Hear this: Israel was never going to be the one to get the job done. In fact Israel was never even capable of doing it. That's why most of Israel can't enter the tabernacle. It's why, at the end of the book, even Moses can't go into the Holy Place. Israel will be a kingdom of priests, yes, but even its priests must sacrifice before they can enter God's presence

God didn't choose Israel because they were uniquely capable of fulfilling his mission. No, he chose Israel in order that through them God would fulfill his mission.

### **GOD HIMSELF FULFILLS HIS MISSION.**

---

Ultimately, God fulfills his mission in Jesus Christ. All of Exodus, every word of this book, points forward to Jesus. Jesus, the very presence of God himself, Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus, a better Israel, who though tempted did not fall. Jesus, our great high priest, who speaks for us at the right hand of the Father.

In Revelation 5:9 it is of this Jesus that the angels sing, saying: "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God."

This is something the Israelites of Exodus could never have imagined. That God himself would come down to Israel as a baby boy, offer himself in Israel's place as an eternal sacrifice, tear the veil, remove the separation between God and Israel, and by his blood ransom many of the nation of Israel to be a people for God, and not just Israel.

Christ ransomed people for God (look at this) "from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth" (vv. 9b-10).

God's people would no longer come just from chosen Israel, but would consist of people from all the nations. Think of how incredible that is. God chooses from the wicked, oppressive, idolatrous

nations that rage against him. He chooses us to be his kingdom and his priests to reign on the earth! Don't take this for granted.

Israel deserved destruction for turning from God in the wilderness, yet God gave them undeserved mercy. How much more do we from the nations deserve destruction for our constant rebellion? And yet, God has shown us an incredible, undeserved, unexpected mercy.

It's with this amazing truth in mind that 1 Peter says, "But you [brothers and sisters, *you*] are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (2:9).

Do those words sound familiar? God's possession, a royal priesthood, a holy nation? These names once belonged only to Israel, the people of God. Now we, who were once among the raging nations, we in this very room, bear the same titles. And with them, the same mission: to proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light. In other words, just like with Israel, God saves us so we can take part in his mission.

### **GOD SAVES US TO TAKE PART IN HIS MISSION.**

---

I worry that Christians today have lost sight of just how much God's mission should affect our lives. I worry that we have too small, too narrow, of a vision. That our imagination only goes a little bit outside of ourselves before it comes back. Many of us today live like "Christ died so that I could go to heaven," and that's it. And so the Christian life becomes just about me. How can *I* be more holy? How can *I* get closer to God? And those aren't bad things, but the full picture is much, much bigger.

When God saved Israel, it was not just salvation from slavery to Egypt. It was also salvation into God's mission. In the same way, brothers and sisters, if our faith is in the blood of Christ, we have not only been saved from slavery to sin. We who were once his enemies, we who compromise his mission every day by our sin, we have now been grafted into a mission that is much bigger than us.

The mission has not changed. The mission is to make God known to all the nations. And this mission belongs to all of us. Not just missionaries and pastors. All of us. God calls all of us to make him known.

And so we must all proclaim his excellencies. Our verbal witness is critical to the mission. But like Israel, we must take care to not compromise the mission by turning to things other than God, by returning to the sin that enslaved us. But rather to live with God at the center of our lives. Not only for the duration of a two-week missions trip. Not just when we decide how much of our paycheck to give to missions partners. Not even just in how we interact with non-believers. God's mission needs to shape *everything* in the Christian life.

This week we will be entering a new year; a new decade. And the question will inevitably come to mind, What will I do this year, this decade? Who will I be in the 2020s? These are great questions, and they certainly deserve careful thought. But First Free I want you to start this decade by thinking about a different question: What is *God* doing this year? How do I see him moving in the world; through the people around me? Where is he taking his Church this decade? How can I be a part of it?

We *have* to start with what God's doing before we can understand our part in his mission. Ask yourself: What is God doing in the life of your co-worker and why did God put you two on so many

projects together? Why did God open up your Friday afternoons this year? What might he be doing in Wichita during those hours? How is God growing and shaping your sons or daughters as they get closer to graduating? How can you align your hopes for them with God's plan?

Here at First Free we ask these questions constantly. Our mission is to "make disciples of Jesus Christ who glorify God as the grace of the gospel grows deep in God's people and goes wide to all peoples."

So as we plan where our church is headed this next decade, we start by looking at what God is doing. How is God making the gospel grow deep in our kindergarteners? What kinds of people is God drawing to us as the gospel goes wide to all peoples?

Yes, this is our mission. But we didn't come up with it, and we know that we're only a small part of it. Because ultimately this mission comes from Christ himself and it belongs to all of his believers. Matthew 28:18-20 says, "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

If we are God's treasured possession, his royal priesthood, his holy nation, then this mission is ours. Brothers and sisters, in this new decade, how will we be a part of it?