

Exodus 19-24

Review last 3 weeks. So Israel has been rescued by God, they've crossed the Red Sea; we saw last week that they've been trained by God to be his obedient people, the experiences in the desert helped them to learn more about what it means to trust God, but also that God is faithful to provide all that they need, things like food and water and continued help against enemies.

So we come to this huge section, it's an incredibly nation forming moment; a moment that the nation would never forget. I'm going to focus on the beginning and end of our passage today.

Setting the scene – on the mountain. Chapter 19: 16-19 Amazing scene. It would stay with the Jews forever. Why all this fire and cloud and earthquake. THIS IS THE ONE TRUE GOD. And this is a tremendously significant moment in the life of the Jewish people. Just as we look back to Jesus walking here on earth amongst us – God amongst us. Here is God amongst his people. He has come down to the mountain to speak to Moses. Moses will be the mediator. And the people would remember the mountain. So what does Jesus do, what does God do? Later, Jesus is transfigured on the mountain where his glory is revealed; a few weeks later he dies on a mountain, on the hill outside of Jerusalem, God's city built on a mountain. And then there are the words in Hebrews 12. The writer is talking to Christians who are thinking of going back to Judaism. He recalls this incident on Mt Sinai, 1400 years before and says in v. 18, "You haven't come to a mountain that is burning with fire, where there is darkness, gloom and storm; or the trumpet blasts, or the voice booming out of the mountain and the severe punishments if you crossed the line to come up the mountain. You haven't come to a place where you will be terrified. You've come to Mount Zion, God's mountain, where all of God's people are gathered; the place where Jesus has freed people; he is the mediator that died on the cross and his sprinkled blood atoned for every sin once and for all in a way that the blood of animals could not.

The Law – the bulk of this passage is a whole bunch of laws that God gives to Moses to give to the people. This is to guide how they live as God's people. Chapter 20 has the 10

commandments; then there are a whole bunch of laws that flow out of the 10 Commandments – laws about how to treat servants; what to do with murder and manslaughter; protection for slaves; compensation for animals being killed or grazing on another’s land. There is an emphasis on generosity in our actions. For example if you lend money to someone who doesn’t have much don’t charge them interest. There is encouragement to settle disputes out of court. Don’t go to court; try and settle it outside. If you do go to court and you’re found guilty the judge will make you pay back double the value of the property that was in dispute. Lots of laws about having the highest moral standard – “do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd”; don’t show favouritism; do not deny justice to poor people. And laws about the Sabbath and the festivals. Now I’m leaving these for the moment because we will look at them in more detail when we read Deuteronomy, which is coming after Exodus.

We’re going to focus now on 19:1-9/24: 8-18:

When Moses first talks to Pharaoh he says, “Let my people go, so that they may have a festival for me in the desert.” God wants them to be free so that they can worship him, meet God in the desert. Here they are at Mt Sinai – where they find out what they are to live for; they’ve been liberated from slavery in order to worship.

Chapter 19 is before the 10 commandments. The words in this chapter are really Israel’s mission statement. 19:4-6 are the answer to the question, What is Israel for? What is its purpose? Freedom is always 2 things – freedom FROM and freedom FOR. We’re freed from something and we’re freed for something.

Let’s read v.4-6

There are 2 things in view. The whole world – God says it’s all mine, that resonates with Genesis. Even though the whole world is mine, you, my redeemed slave people, will be my treasured possession. One of the troubles we have reading the Bible is how do those things go

together. How do you simultaneously have a god who is the god of heaven and earth and who picks a people, who has a treasured possession. But note the language – “although the whole earth is mine” put in “because” for “although” you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. So the whole world is in view, but God chooses Israel, so Israel can be for him a kingdom of priests. So the question here is , What do priests do? What is the essential role of a priest? Priests stand between humanity and God. The job of a priest is to mediate – to bring our worship to God, to bring God’s forgiveness to us, to offer sacrifice, to bring the word of God, to bring the rituals. The point of a priest is to be a go-between, to lead our worship, to bring us into the presence of God, to mediate. Notice what’s here: *the whole earth is mine, you’ll be a treasured possession*. You’ll be holy, so you’ll be different from all the other nations. They won’t look at you and think you’re indistinguishable. You’re very distinguishable; you’re very different from all the other nations. Why? Because you’re my kingdom of priests. Now what happens if a whole nation is a kingdom of priests? It’s kinda a weird business model. If everyone’s a hairdresser, or a builder, there’s no market for what you’re offering. The whole point is that the whole nation is a priestly kingdom so that they can mediate for the nations. Here’s the logic. God pulls Israel out of slavery, comes into covenant with her, makes her special and holy. Priests dress differently, do different things, the whole of Israel is supposed to look like a priest, to be priestly, so that the nations can be led back to the worship of God. These laws will shape how she looks – different from other nations. That’s Israel’s job, that’s her purpose. This whole section is the answer to the question, Who is Israel?

So how does this relate to us. Well, Peter takes up this truth that the Jews are God’s priests, mediators to the nations and he says in 1 Peter 2:9 - ⁹ *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* ¹⁰ *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.* When I become a Christian, when I trust in what Jesus did on the cross for my sin and repent and come under his lordship, I am then a priest, part of God’s holy or set apart nation, the church, God’s special or treasured possession, to be a mediator to the world, to be a light

to the world. Yes we are saved; yes, we are forgiven. But now God gives us the privilege of being his priests, his light, his word to the world.

And as we think about this there's another important thing to remember. In this section God is giving his law so that the people will know how to truly live as his people. We have been given God's spirit to live in us; to shape us, to train us.

Laws are very important because they tell us what to do. But one writer I was reading this week made the point that stories are far more important, far more determinative, far more shaping of who we are and what we do than any law could ever be. We get told this; the reason Israel is being told all this is not so there is something to be talking about in Sunday School. All the way through they're told these stories and they're told don't forget to tell your kids these stories and explain who we are – we're the people who God brought out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Because you only know what to do when you know who you are; and you only know who you are when you know what story you're in. The whole purpose is knowing that we're Israel who were rescued through the Red Sea and brought into covenant with God to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. That's just not background to the law; they are the shaping stories that tell Israel who they are how they are to act.

For us as Christians today in 2022 living in Mt Druitt that is still true. What is the story that shapes your life? The truth is that stories shape us far more than laws. We know that in our country; like if your new in the country, you can read the Constitution, the road rules, the tax laws; and that's going to help you to operate; but it's really the stories like ANZAC. The story of Fred coming to NZ and helping the rest of his family, that story will stay with his family. You couldn't understand American history without understanding fight for freedom from British; first nation stories;

At a local level, I reckon you're far more shaped by the story you think you're in than you realise. And the way to be a Christian and the way to grow as a Christian is to tell ourselves the story that God has put us in. We can tell ourselves stories that are fundamentally not true;

we'll tell ourselves stories that I am fundamentally unforgiveable, there's things I've done or thought or said that means that I have ruled myself out of any full and final acceptance with God. There's something about me that's just dirty or gross; and God is basically disappointed with me, basically took me on and didn't realise what he got himself in for and we exist in this story of mutual disappointment. That's not true. There's stories we believe about God as our Father. We may not have had a loving Father, so we tell ourself the story that God couldn't be a loving, protective Father who regards us as his treasured possession. The true story we've been called into is that we've been rescued out of sin and darkness and made God's treasured possession. We're being called into the church of his first born, that we've been washed and made holy. And just like they came through the waters of the Red Sea we've been washed by the blood of Jesus. And so the truth is we stand before him holy and blameless and righteous on the basis of what Jesus did on the cross. My job and your job is to tell each other the true story. See the other false story that we tell ourselves is that I caught in sins and addictions that I can never escape; that I'm enslaved from forces within, from without and I just have to make peace with them because there's nothing I can do about it That's not true. It feels true. It's just like, imagine the Israelites – they've come across the Red Sea, they're in the desert; a few months later there's an Egyptian who wasn't in the army and he comes and meets them, and he says "You're our slaves right" And you can imagine the Israelite who's spent their whole life in slavery in Egypt, and everyday they wake up and they think, Oh you're in charge of me, saying you're the one's with the monopoly on violence, you can beat us and punish us, we are your slave. My whole life that's the story that I've lived in, but now I'm on the other side of the Red Sea and I meet this Egyptian, I hear the accent , I hear the voice saying "Aren't you a slave?" And for that brief moment you say I think I am, but that's not true. And you can say to the Egyptian, "We were but now we're not." I was once your slave but by a mighty hand God rescued us and now you are not over me. And brothers and sisters we get to say that to the world the flesh and the devil, to the temptations of Satan, and to the powers that overwhelm us, they are no longer in charge of us, they no longer have mastery over us because we're no longer under the law but under grace. So our job is to sing, pray , speak, read and talk to each other about the story that God has brought us into.

This passage ends with another incredible event – as if there weren't enough in this book of Exodus so far. This is , a story that we need to remember as part of our story. Look with me to Chapter 24:9. Read v.9-11. God brings the leaders into his presence and then there's this amazing phrase – “they saw God and they ate and drank.” I presume with God. It's another one of these meals that are right throughout the Bible. They are eating with God; a feast? Maybe. An extraordinary event? Certainly.

In Psalm 23 – I set a table for you in front or among your enemies - and I reckon it's God there eating with his people in front of the enemies.

On the night before he died Jesus ate and drank at the Passover, the celebratory meal that we're talking about at the moment – God is eating and drinking with his people; And God says to us: “Come and share my table he invites us, come and eat with me, my treasured possession. Live as my people and display by your lives what an awesome God I am.”