



## Sermon Transcript

### February 9, 2020

## God's One Story of Redemption

The People of God

Exodus 19:4-6; 20:1-3; 1 Peter 2:9-12

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on February 9, 2020 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com)

## **Sermon Text**

### **Exodus 19:4-6**

<sup>4</sup> You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup> 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; <sup>6</sup> and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.

### **Exodus 20:1-3**

<sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying, <sup>2</sup> I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. <sup>3</sup> You shall have no other gods before me.

### **1 Peter 2:9-12**

<sup>9</sup> But 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. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

<sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

## Introduction

This morning, we find ourselves parked at the foot of Mount Sinai. (Or, as the Super Bowl commercial put it last week: “We are “smaht pahked” at the foot of Mount Sinai.”) Now if you know the unfolding story of the Old Testament, you might be asking, “How did we get here so fast?” Last week we were with Abraham as he was told to take his son—the son of promise—and offer him up as a sacrifice. And now here we are, well over 400 years later, and the descendants from Abraham and Isaac now number 600,000 men, plus women and children. A lot has transpired between last week and this week.

Lets begin by getting caught up with the story. After Abraham and Isaac came Jacob. Jacob had twelve sons and they continued to dwell as nomads in the land of Canaan. One of Jacob’s twelve sons—his favorite son—was named Joseph. Jealous of their father’s affection for Joseph, Joseph’s brothers sold him to some traveling traders, who in turn, sold him as a servant in Egypt. As Providence would have it, Joseph went from the bottom of the social ladder—languishing in prison because of a false accusation—to second in power in all the land of Egypt. While Joseph was in power, a severe and sustained famine struck the land. But because of Joseph’s careful planning, everyone came to Egypt because there was an ample supply of food available. This is what led Joseph’s brothers and his father—seventy strong—to settle in the land of Egypt. It was here where they were once again reunited with Joseph.

After Joseph’s generation died off, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob grew in number. That doesn’t surprise us, considering that God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the sky and that they would become a great nation. Consequently, the Egyptians felt threatened by this growing demographic within their country, and so they consigned the descendants of Abraham to being slaves. And as the number of descendants of Abraham continued to increase, so did the level of oppression. And so we read in Exodus 2:23, *“the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God.”* Because of the covenant God had made with Abraham—the promise that he would have many descendants and through his descendants God would bless the nations of the world—God responded to their prayers and raised up a man by the name of Moses. Once again, God breaks in and through a series of miraculous events and through God’s servant, Moses, God delivers his people from slavery. They come up out of Egypt. They cross the Red Sea. Three months later, they arrive “right here” at Mount Sinai.

This is where we find ourselves parked this morning. In Exodus 19:2 we read that the

people of Israel set up camp here at Mount Sinai. I would imagine at some point, Moses told them to unpack their bags and to get comfortable because they were going to be staying here for awhile. In fact, they were parked here for about a year. The next fifty-nine chapters of the Bible unfold right here at Mount Sinai. The rest of Exodus, all of Leviticus and the first ten chapters of Numbers all take place right here at Mount Sinai. If fifty-nine chapters of the Bible originate from this spot and from this place, then I would conclude that what is happening at Mount Sinai is pretty important to the unfolding story of the Bible. Whatever is happening here, it is important enough to highlight it in our acronym for putting together the Old Testament. If you are going to put the story of the Old Testament together you need to park here at Mount Sinai. That is what the letter “S” stands for in CASKET EMPTY. Creation—Abraham—Sinai.

What is happening here at Mount Sinai? It is here where the descendants of Abraham, the people of Israel, become the people of God. In fact, God told Moses back in Exodus 6 that he was going to deliver the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt and he says to Moses in verse 7, *“I will take you to be my people and I will be your God.”* J. Gary Millar says that “the message of the Bible, in essence, is that God is at work to bring into being a people under his rule and in his place. The idea of the people of God stands at the heart of the biblical story.”<sup>1</sup> In fact, this is such a central theme to the story of the Bible, Millar suggests you can trace it all the way from Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to the end of Revelation where the main characteristic of the New Heaven and the New Earth is that there is a people of God living in intimacy with the living God forever.

It is here at Mount Sinai that we get an early picture of what it looks like to be the people of God. And since this is a theme that runs from the very beginning of Genesis all the way to the end of Revelation, there is something in here for you and for me as we seek to live as the people of God in this broken world. What does it mean for us—the church—to be the people of God?

It is interesting to take note of the titles God uses to refer to the people of Israel who are now parked at the foot of Mount Sinai. In Exodus 19:5-6, we have God’s first encounter with his redeemed people, delivered from slavery. And with great affection he refers to Israel as *“my treasured possession . . . you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”* What is surprising is that this is the only place in the Old Testament where these words are used together to define Israel as the people of God. But these words do show up again in the Bible. They show up in the New Testament where Peter says of us, the church, *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession . . . Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people.”*

There is something very important about the people of God to the story of God. What we are going to discover about the “people of God” parked here at Mount Sinai is something that applies to the “people of God” parked here in these seats right in front of me. It is simply this. God forms a people in order to reach people. And if we are going to be a people who reach people for God then there are three things we need to know about God. He is the LORD! He is the Liberator! He is the Law Giver.

### **The People of God Know that God is the LORD**

In Exodus 20, Moses comes down from Mount Sinai with a message for the people parked here at Mount Sinai. He is going to help them understand what it means for them to be “the people of God.” The first thing God says to them through Moses in Exodus 20:2 is *“I am the LORD your God.”*

Do you realize that Mount Sinai is the very same mountain where God first appeared to Moses in the burning bush? It was here where God called Moses to go down to Egypt to deliver the people of Israel from the heavy hand of their oppressors. Of course, Moses came up with every excuse in the book as to why he didn’t think he was qualified for such a task: “They won’t listen to me . . . I am not a good speaker . . . Who am I?” In the midst of his protest, he says to God, *“If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your Fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?”* And it is here where God discloses to Moses his special covenant name, *Yahweh*. God says to Moses, *“I AM WHO I AM . . . Say this to the people, ‘I AM has sent me to you . . . the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you. This is my name forever.’”*

In our passage this morning, we find that Moses has come full-circle. He returned to the place where God called him to go. In fact, from the burning bush, God promised to be with Moses and he said, *“But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you, when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”* So like Abraham, Moses trusts the promise of God and he goes. And now, he stands before this vast people parked at the foot of Mount Sinai and the first words out of his mouth from God are *“I am the LORD, your God.”* It is a loaded statement. Moses is proclaiming to the people of God the name of God: *Yahweh*.

On one hand, this sacred name for God highlights the transcendence of God. Literally God’s name means, “I am who I am” or “I will be who I will be.” It speaks to God’s self-existence and self-sufficiency and supreme authority. It is what we saw when we were at

letter “C” - Creation. It is here where we first acknowledged that God is God and we are not and that the key to living life is to maintain the distinction between the Creator and the creature. Life is to be lived under the good rule of God. Nothing caused God to be. God has no beginning and no end. God is completely independent and there is no one higher than God. That is why we will see shortly in the first of the ten commandments the command “*You shall have no other gods before me.*” Why? God is the great *I AM* and there is no other.

But there is something more being communicated about God through his name *Yahweh*. This is his special covenant name. And so, inherent in his name is the revelation that God is a God who saves. When Moses first arrives in Egypt, initially things don’t go very well. Pharaoh’s initial reaction to the request of Moses to “Let my people go!” was met with a harsh response. The daily quota for bricks would not change, but now they were given the added task to go get the supplies themselves. The people of Israel were none too happy with Moses. And so Moses cries out to God and God comes to Moses in Exodus 6 and four times reminds Moses of his sacred name “*I am the LORD.*” In rehearsing his name to Moses God says, “I made promise to Abraham . . . I will bring you out of Egypt . . . I will make you my people . . . I will bring you to the land I promised.” In other words, “*I am the LORD.*” I am the God who saves.

And so looking out at the vast group of people parked at the foot of Mount Sinai, Moses conveys to the people of Israel in Exodus 19:5 that they are God’s *treasured possession*. It is a phrase that means “royal property.” This word is used in 1 Chronicles 29 where King David had given a gift from the royal revenue to support the building of the temple. But more money was needed to fund this project and so David went and dipped into his personal treasure—his *treasured possession*—and gave it for the building of the temple. And so God says of Israel in Exodus 19:5, “Look, *all the earth is mine*. The whole of creation belongs to God. But you . . . you are my *treasured possession*. Why Israel? Did they pass a beauty contest or were they more righteous than the other nations that they earned this favored status with God? No. It was the sovereign grace of God. In Deuteronomy 7 Moses said to the people of Israel, “*The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.*” Why? Why Israel? Moses went on to say, “*it was not because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all people.*” In other words, there was nothing special about you that caused God to take notice. Instead, God simply says, “*But it was because the LORD loved you.*”

The first thing we discover about being the people of God is that we are the object of

God's saving love. Did you ever ask the question, "Why me?" Why have my eyes been opened to the saving goodness of God in Christ? Why do I believe? I'm no better than anyone else. I am not more deserving than anyone else. I may not be able to fully explain it or understand it. But I can't deny it. God has set his affection on you and me and he has made us his *treasured possession*. Do you know what that means? It means that God loves us more deeply than we would ever dare to hope or imagine. And that is what God is declaring to this people when he says from Mount Sinai, "*I am the LORD your God.*" He is the self-existing exalted sovereign God of the universe who has set his affection on you. He is the God who saves! We are his people—a *treasured possession*—deeply loved. God's people know that He is the LORD!

### **The People of God Know that God is the Liberator**

The next thing we learn about the "people of God" from our passage is that we are a redeemed people. Notice what God says next to the people of Israel in Exodus 20:2, "*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*" Not only is God their Lord, but he is also their Liberator. He *brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*

It is a rather dramatic story that unfolds in the early part of the book of Exodus. We already noted that the people of Israel have been consigned to slavery for many years and they cried out to God in their distress. God heard their cry and raised up Moses to deliver them. Through a series of miraculous plagues, God slowly pried the Israelites from the grip of Pharaoh. Of course, that final plague is still remembered every year by Jewish families when they celebrate Passover. It looks back to when Moses instructs God's people to prepare a Passover lamb and put the blood on their doorposts. Hebrews 11 tells us that the people of God did this "*by faith.*" At midnight, the LORD will come and bring death to every firstborn of Egypt, but he will pass over every house that has blood from an unblemished lamb on the doorposts. Not even Pharaoh's house was spared. That very night, Moses and Aaron were summoned to Pharaoh's palace and he said to them, "Go!"

This was such an important event in the history of Israel that God said to them in Exodus 12:14, "*This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever.*" It is hard for our minds not to get too far ahead in the story, but we can't help it. Paul makes the connection for us in 1 Corinthians 5:7. He says, "*For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*" Jesus comes and leads a "second Exodus" when by his blood shed on

the cross we are set free from our bondage of sin as we too respond with faith. This is what connects us as the “people of God.” The “people of God” are a redeemed people. Peter says it this way in 1 Peter 1:18-19, “*knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*” Are you part of the “people of God?” Are you part of the vast company “parked at the foot of Mount Sinai?” By faith, the people of Israel put the blood on the doorposts. By faith we turn to Christ, crucified and risen for the forgiveness of our sins.

But here is the question I want to ask “the people of God” parked here right in front of me this morning. To what end? To what end are we made the “people of God?” Is the end to which we are made the people of God simply defined by getting a ticket to heaven? Notice what God calls this redeemed and liberated people of Israel in Exodus 19:6. He says of them, “*you shall be to me a kingdom of priests.*” This helps us understand to what end God makes us his people.

First of all, we become a people who are set apart to worship God. The priests and the Levites were set apart to lead the people in worship. They took care of the tabernacle. They prepared the sacrifices. And so by calling the entire nation a *kingdom of priests* he was indicating that the whole nation was set apart to worship and glorify God. He is about to give them the Ten Commandments and the worship of God is at the heart of the first four commandments. They are not to worship any other gods. They are not to worship the true God through an image that cheapens his glory. They are not to be flippant in the way they use the name of God. And they are to keep the Sabbath day—one day a week—as a day set aside to worship God. Where does this heart of worship come from? Look what God has done! The self-existing Sovereign LORD—the covenant keeping *I AM*—has kept his promise and he-HIMSELF—has redeemed our lives. As Paul reflects on this in Ephesians 1, three times he breaks out in words of praise, “*to the praise of his glorious grace.*”

But then the title *kingdom of priests* has a mission focus. This is the role the people of Israel was to play to the nations. A priest brings people to God and this is the role that Israel was to play in the world. Remember, God says in Exodus 19:5 that *all the earth is mine*. It is what he said to Abraham when he called him. He said “*all peoples on the earth will be blessed through you.*” I saw something in the story of the Exodus this week that I never noticed before. When the people of Israel were packing up their things to leave Egypt it says in Exodus 12:38, “*A mixed multitude also went up*



*with them.*” In other words, there were Egyptians who chose by faith to join themselves with the people of God. That is the end to which we are made to be the people of God. God forms a people to reach people. We have been redeemed in order to *go into all the world and make disciples*. That is why we want to be a church that plants churches. That is why we support missions. That is why we proclaim the name of Jesus to others. Worship and mission is the end to which we have become the people of God. God is our Liberator.

### **The People of God Know that God is the Law Giver**

The next thing we see in Exodus 20 is the giving of the Ten Commandments. God says through Moses, *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.”* The main thing I want you to see here is “who” God gives the Ten Commandments to. These commandments are given to a redeemed people—the people of God. They are given to a people who have already tasted of the grace of God. These commandments are for God’s people and they describe how we are to live as God’s people. Or as he puts it in Exodus 19:6, how we are to live as a *holy nation*.

Dare I say this? These commandments were not given to be hung up in the public school. I am not saying that they wouldn’t have value in the public square. But the goal of the commandments are not to make nice people or good society. I am more concerned whether or not these commandments are hanging up in the hearts of God’s people. In fact, to impose these commandments on people who have not tasted the grace of Christ is tantamount to false religion. Peter Enns says, “God’s laws are for God’s people. Those who do not know him are walking tombs. They do not need whitewashing but complete renovation, from the inside out. They do not need their moral gyroscopes pushed in the right direction, but the Spirit of the risen Christ breathed into them.”<sup>2</sup> For one, these commandments expose the sin of our hearts and cause us to turn to Christ with the cry, *“God have mercy.”* But for the redeemed people of God, these commandments become the means by which we demonstrate to the world what God is like. If we are to be a people who reaches people we need to be a people who reflect the character of God.

For example, one of the commandments is *“You shall not steal.”* When you study the commandments, you discover how far reaching they are. The Heidelberg Catechism says that the scope of this commandment includes “that I do whatever I can for my neighbor’s good, that I treat others as I would like them to treat me, and that I work

faithfully so that I may share with those in need.” It is stating the commandment in the positive. I’m not just to take what doesn’t belong to me. Rather, I am to take what belongs to me and share it. In doing so, I am reflecting to the world the self-giving love of God. Through these commandments, we are showing people what God is like. It is what enables us to be a people that reaches people. Love for God and love for others shines through us. And so God is the Law Giver and we are a holy nation. We are set apart to reflect the beauty of God to others.

## The Unfolding Story

In our passage this morning, God presents to us the ideal—the means by which he will bring his blessing to this fallen world. He is forming a people to reach people. But as the story of the Old Testament unfolds, we are going to see how Israel fails to be that *kingdom of priests and a holy nation* that others may come to know the living God. But where Israel fails, God keeps his promise. What Israel cannot do, Jesus does. Jesus is God’s *treasured possession. . . kingdom of priests . . . holy nation*. In the truest sense of the word, Jesus is the “seed of Abraham” the true Israel of God through whom the blessing of God comes to the nations.

But then God takes you and me, who through faith in Jesus, are made into “the people of God.” Look at how Peter takes these Old Testament titles for Israel—the people of God and applies them to us. “*But 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. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*” Peter Enns says that it is pretty obvious what Peter is saying here. “The blessed status assigned to Israel in the Old Testament is now the property of the church, the true and final Israel.”<sup>3</sup> The promise made to Abraham—that the nations would be blessed through him and his offspring—is now being fulfilled in the church. We are the “people of God.”

But to what end? We are a people to reach people. And so just like through Moses in giving the Ten Commandments, Peter calls us to reflect that character of God to those around us. He writes, “*Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*” Very simply put, do people see Jesus in you? That is our calling as the people of God.

*“You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world . . . Let your light shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”* These words of Jesus are the words of Peter and they are the words of Moses.

If God is your LORD through faith in Jesus—the Mighty One who saves—then you are his treasured possession. If God is your Liberator who redeems you from the slaver of sin, then you are a kingdom of priests. You are called to worship God and live on mission to make him known to others. If God is your Law Giver then you are called to reflect his character to this world through your good works. This is what it means to be the people of God. And so I say to the people of God parked in the seats in front of me let us embrace our calling. We are a people to reach people. May God use us to that end.

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<sup>1</sup>J. Gary Millar “People of God” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* eds, T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove: IVP 2000)684

<sup>2</sup>Peter Enns *Exodus: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) 433

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 398

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## COMMUNITY GROUPS

### Getting To Know Me Questions

1. What is your ancestry background? Share one story or one interesting fact about your ancestry. What do you notice about the national background of your group?

### Diving Into The Word

2. Read Exodus 3:14-15; 6:1-8. God reveals Himself to Moses in the burning bush. How does God identify himself? How do the promises God made to Abraham help us understand the Exodus? How important is the presence of God in these chapters? Explain
3. Read Exodus 19:4-6. Looking back on your spiritual journey, how have you seen God “carry you on eagles’ wings and brought you to God?” Review the three titles for the people of God in these verses. Which one stands out to you and why?
4. Read Exodus 20:1-17. What do the commandments reveal about the character of God? How do these commands summarize God’s commitment to us and our commitment to him?
5. Read 1 Peter 2:9-12. What encouragement do you find from this passage? What do you learn from this passage about what it means to be the people of God in this world? How can we grow in being a people who reach people?

### Taking It Home

6. What is one thing you are taking from your study?
7. Who can you tell? Give this a try. Learn to share with others what God is teaching you. It is a great way to “be a people who reach people.”