

Exodus 19-20

1. Sentence

God's people have a glorious, priestly purpose, but it requires obedience.

I remember discussing this with a friend of mine some years ago. She had teenage children at that time. She had been a young woman in the 1960s – and she had been involved in the protests and the activism of that decade. Thirty years later she found herself animatedly discussing politics with her own children, when her son turned round to her and said

Chill mum. You didn't achieve anything and neither can we.

Some commentators suggest that the present generation of young adults is perhaps the first generation for more than a hundred years to be less idealistic than their parents. I don't think that is totally true. I have been personally encouraged to see the tent occupation at St Paul's. Not because they are offering a coherent solution, or even because it is necessarily the best form of protest, but simply that people are prepared to engage, to question, to debate and to imagine that there could be a better way to live. By and large it seems to me, people are increasingly adopting the pessimism of my friend's teenage son.

The political philosopher Francis Fukuyama, a number of years ago wrote a book entitled "The End of History and the Last Man."¹

In it he suggested that the world is now reaching a final form. Liberal democracy and capitalism are triumphing, and as they do they are bringing in a final era of peace and prosperity. It won't be perfect but everyone will agree that there is nothing better to strive for. The book mainly suggests this as a positive vision but Fukuyama himself is ambivalent. He ends in this way:

'The end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one's life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination and idealism, all this will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technological problems, environmental concerns and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history.'

If Fukuyama is right – and many people suggest that his analysis, at least of the current condition of the western world is brilliant and insightful – if he is even partially right, it seems to me that true Christians will stand out from the crowd more and more.

Because we don't believe that this is the final form of humanity. We believe that human beings are glorious creatures, but fallen enmired in sin both personally and institutionally. We believe that human beings are heading for a last great day of judgment, and recreation in which all sin and all evil will be eradicated. But in the meantime we are called – not to accept the status quo – but to do everything in our power to prepare for that final day here and now. To call people to be reconciled with God here and now – because one day it will be too late. To labour to make this world – in every dimension from vast human institutions to tiny insignificant flora and fauna – to make it more like the place that God intends it to be. We are to be concerned for everything that offends God from global poverty to the misery of the person next door.

¹ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Hamish Hamilton, 1992).
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We won't solve this world's problems, but we have the inestimable dignity of being a part of a great process – which will not end until Jesus returns – which has been going on since the dawn of history.

It is that dignified role that Exodus 19-20 introduces us to.

As we have studied the story of the Exodus we have seen that Israel's story anticipates our story. In Exodus 1-15 we saw God revealing his saving power to Moses and Israel as he delivered them from Egypt, parted the Red Sea and set them free. In chapters 16-18 we saw God providing for his people by giving them manna in the desert, and giving them victory over their enemies – as Moses prayed, and encouraging human wisdom as Jethro advises Moses how to lead the people. God looks after us as we walk towards his new creation.

But now in Exodus 19-20 God addresses a new question. Israel knows what she is saved *from* – slavery in Egypt. But what is she saved *for*?

2. A covenant purpose- Exodus 19:1-6



Exo 19:1-2

Safely out of Egypt

We don't know for certain where Mount Sinai is – but Sinai Peninsula, east of Gulf of Suez.

Here God state his purpose for them



Exo 19:3-6

Status: To be treasured – v5

Cf Eph 1:18 – “the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people”

- Local churches are jewels in his crown
- You – may feel pretty ordinary, useless, dirty? Worthless?
 - You are of infinite worth to God
 - God was prepared to give his son for you.

Role: A kingdom of priests – v6a

Kingdom

Could mean “people under a king” BUT MORE

Seems to mean – people who have royal status – “kingly priests”

Dan 7:27

²⁷ Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven **will be handed over to the holy people** of the Most High.

1 Peter 2:9 – “royal priesthood”

- Human beings destiny
 - Made to rule over creation
 - Now – we fulfil that mandate – but in weakness – like king Jesus on earth.
 - Eternally – will fulfil that mandate fully

- The royal mandate to care for the earth
 - From building houses to sweeping streets
 - From designing new drugs to washing up
- The royal mandate to care for people
 - From campaigning for political systems, to babysitting

Priests

In Israel there was a priesthood

Here the whole nation are priests to the world

- Priestly role
 - Know God in a special way
 - Mediate God to the world
- Proclaiming the gospel is central to our life
- Our whole lives as individuals are to commend the gospel

Character: holy nation

Holy - “Set apart”

But more – God’s holiness is his “godness”

“Holy nation” - “a nation set apart to be like God”

- That is your mandate from God – to be like God in the world – to be like Jesus in the world
- That is our mandate as a church
 - To “display the glory of Jesus in East Oxford and the world”
 - Building – a tool to enable us to serve as “royal priests”
 - Planting – to be out amongst all kinds of people

3. An awesome covenant

The people’s preparation

Wash clothes – v10

Not go near – vv11-13

The appearance of God

Thunder, lightning, cloud trumpet – v16

Could not see God

New Testament



Hebrews 12:18-24

Not Sinai but Zion

Sinai – giving of the law

Zion – Jerusalem – final destination

- You are as good as home!
 - There is something awesome about the New Covenant – BUT DIFFERENT TOO

Not fear but joy

“thousands of angels in joyful assembly”

Not uncertain but certain

“names written in heaven”

Not full of sin but “the spirits of the righteous made perfect”

BECAUSE not Moses but Jesus

“Jesus the mediator of a new covenant... of sprinkled blood that speaks a better word”

- Our covenant purpose is overwhelmingly awesome but also overwhelmingly joyful.
 - Weep – people settle into mind numbing mediocrity – of money, job security, looking for the ideal mate, etc etc
 - Those things are a part of much bigger story.
 - God has saved you, God will keep you FOR A PURPOSE!
- Will you accept that mandate?
 - Mission impossible?
 - But it is God’s commitment to you – to be his precious possession, to be a royal priesthood, to be a holy people.

END HERE?

4. Covenant stipulations

Everything stems from God’s prior act of salvation

Exo 19:4

Exo 20:2

- We are not obedient to make ourselves savable, we are obedient because God first saved us.

Relationships with God and human beings

God

No idols

No misuse of name

People

Dignity of life – murder, slaves rest on the sabbath

Dignity of possessions – steal

Dignity of relationships – adultery, father and mother

Active and passive

About our actions and our hearts

“no god before me”

“do not covet”