

“MOSES: THE PROMISE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Exodus 19:3-9; 34:27-28

Introduction.

Advent is the time of year when we revisit and retell the greatest story every told, how God invaded human history and came down as a baby to save us from our sin. Advent is about how God's ways are not our ways and God ways are higher than our ways, and way better.

This advent season we are exploring how advent was not the beginning of God's plan, exploring how the incarnation was not the beginning of the Gospel of our redemption. What we tend to think of as the Gospel, the four Gospels or the NT, is not the beginning of the Gospel.

As the Heidelberg Catechism says: “God himself began to reveal the gospel already in Paradise; later, he proclaimed it by the holy patriarchs and prophets, and portrayed it by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; finally, he fulfilled it through his own dear Son.”

Ever since the fall God has had one thought on His mind, and everything He has done since then has been with that thought, that one goal in mind. Everything is preparation for Christ's advent.

This path of salvation history from the beginning has been guided by covenants God makes with mankind. God announces His plans and purposes ahead of time and accomplishes all that He sets out to do.

Two weeks ago we said the first time the Gospel was ever preached was in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:15 when God made the covenant of redemption with Adam.

Genesis 3:15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

The entire Bible is the outworking of Genesis 3:15. Keep your eye on God's big picture. Don't lose the story line in the details.

The covenants are the spring from which flow all God's actions with mankind. Each covenant of grace advances God's unfolding plan of salvation. As we watch the story unfold, you do you can't help but be struck by the purposeful slowness of God.

Two thousand years later God preached the next Gospel sermon and miraculously and graciously converted a 75 year old pagan idolater named Abraham. We said it was one of the most world-changing events in human history because it touches every family, every nation.

Then 500 years later we come this morning to another world-changing event when the people of God gathered at God's holy mountain, Mt. Sinai, and another covenant was made. That covenant continues to touch the entire history of the world.

Exodus 19:3-9, God's covenant promises.

First, He chooses them by grace, not merit.

Exodus 19:4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

They witnessed God's power and covenant kindness and goodness. They witnessed the Father God who shows compassion and cares for His children.

God acted first in love toward Israel, He acted first in saving Israel and delivering them out of bondage and slavery in Egypt. God walked with them through the wilderness the entire way and cared for them, gave them food from heaven and water out of a rock.

The Exodus reveals God's saving grace. There was nothing in them that caused God to chose them and there was nothing God foresaw in them to cause Him to choose them. In fact, just the opposite. Before God gave them His Law, before they could ever obey anything, God chose them to be the people He would love with a great love. And He did so knowing all the ways they would sin against Him in the future.

We tend to think of Exodus as being about the Ten Commandments and the Law of God. But please don't do that. The Law is extremely important, but the covenant supersedes the Law. God's relationship with Moses is a covenantal relationship, not a legal relationship. Covenant and grace always comes before law, in the OT and in the NT.

He didn't choose them because they were lovable. He loved them because He chose them.

This is still true for how God's graciously chooses us. While we were yet sinners, living in sin, God loved us, while we were ungodly Christ died for us, while we were weak He sent His Holy Spirit to us, long before there is any response of faith or obedience in us.

Second, Israel will be God's special treasured possession.

The Mosaic covenant begins the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation.

For the first time, they are a people, a people belonging to God, the children of Israel, a nation. They are made to be a people by the covenant of God. And not just a people but a treasured people, a prized national treasure.

Notice God says the whole earth is His, God can do whatever He pleases with it, and this is what He has done. It pleased Him purely by virtue of His own will and desire to make one people His special possession.

They are not just treasured to be His private, personal possession. They are God's instrument of blessing to all the families of the earth.

Third, Israel will be a kingdom of priests.

Israel will be a kingdom of priests to God, having intimate, personal access to God Himself. There is no greater privilege than intimate access to the God of the universe.

Their lives don't just have secular importance, there is something sacred, divine about their lives. They have special privileges in relating to their God and they have equal status before God.

Fourth, Israel will be a holy nation.

Israel will be a holy nation, which has both a negative and a positive connotation. They are set apart **from** or separated from all other nations. And they are set apart **for**, or dedicated to God.

As they obey they will bear the image or likeness of the holy character of God, becoming more like Him.

Being a kingdom of priests and holy nation clearly says they are to be different. They are to reflect God to the rest of the world. Holiness is not to win God's favor, but to show God's favor.

Holiness is not withdrawal from the world, but being a visible difference within it, so that the world might see the glory of God.

This is a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that He will make him a great nation. This is what that looks like or means. Not great in numbers, power, wealth, but great in holiness, in reflecting the character of their great God. In becoming a nation God also fulfills the promise to give them a place, a land of their own.

Fifth, God will personally fight and defend Israel and overcome all her enemies.

This reminds us of God's continuing faithfulness to His covenant promise to Adam that the head of the serpent will continue to be crushed. All through salvation history there is a great spiritual conflict and God fights and wins. The gates of hell cannot thwart His redemptive purpose.

How does the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai fit with God's covenant with Moses?

Because they are so favored and blessed, it is only right that God should expect a response that His people live in obedience to Him.

"The law was given to a redeemed people, not that they might be redeemed by it, but that they might know how the redeemed ought to live." (Francis Turretin)

The OT Law is how the Israelites were to show their love and loyalty to God. This is their part of keeping covenant with God.

With the giving of the Law God reveals His high standard for righteousness and holiness. The people were to show their covenant faithfulness through their obedience.

But the Israelites completely missed the whole point. They became so focusing on all the rules they forgot the covenant was about a relationship with God, and the Law was meant to help them reflect the holiness and righteousness of the God they loved. They lost the joy of obedience.

God is not naïve, God is under no illusions about the children of Israel. He knew they would disobey, so He gave them the sacrifices to cover their sin and maintain their covenant relationship. The substitutionary sacrificial system clearly shows God knew they would sin, and provides for it. More grace.

The Law showed the path to righteousness with God, and exposed man's inability to achieve righteousness on their own. And this points to the need for Christ.

Fulfillment.

Christ is God's treasured possession, the Son in whom He is well pleased. He is the great high priest and royal Son of King David, and He is holy, through whom God calls all nations to be holy. He is the light of revelation to the Gentiles (Luke 2:32).

God's covenant promises to Abraham and Moses are fulfilled. Christ is the offspring of Abraham through whom all the families and nations of the earth are blessed. Christ kept the whole law perfectly fulfilling all the righteous demands of the Law, and at the same time bore in His body all the curses of the law, all our sin. The Passover Lamb who takes away the sins of the world has been sacrificed for us.

Implications and application.

Why did God bring His people to His holy mountain, to say these things and enter this kind of relationship with them? Because God is on the move in

history and at that moment on the world stage God was embarking on something entirely new.

God created a special people to have a special relationship with Him. God calling them to a special place among all the nations of the world, a nation set apart as holy, dedicated, consecrated to God, in a unique and privileged relationship with Him as a kingdom of priests.

From then on there was one group of people on earth who were defined by their special relationship to their God. The apostle Peter uses the language of the Mosaic covenant to show that what God started at His holy mountain, continues today in His church, in His kingdom on earth. We are the new Israel, the new people of God. Listen carefully to how Peter explains it.

I Peter 2:4-5 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious [treasured, favored], 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. [Romans 12:1, present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God.]

I Peter 2:9-12 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. 10 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.

11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. [pride, lust, greed, envy, selfishness, anger] 12 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.

God delivered us from our Egypt of sin and bondage, He crushed Satan's grip on our lives. We are Abraham's seed, God's continuing covenant community. Through us God is blessing all the families of the earth. Through His church God is revealing His truth, goodness and beauty.

As a royal priesthood, we like the priests make intercession for others, and that intercession results in blessings to others. We are making intercession for the people in Everson, Nooksack and Sumas. When we make intercession

for the H---a people we are spreading blessing to the nations, to the families of the earth. This is no small thing, God hears and is answering.

Peter is motivating us to live godly lives in order to be salt and light to the nations.

We are not called to be different from the world just for the sake of being different. We are called to be different that the world would take notice and be drawn to the truth, goodness and beauty of God.

Don't be driven or obsessed by what the world is driven by or obsessed with, success, money, power, recognition. Don't drink from the fire hydrant of the world's polluted waters, greed, lust, porn, envy, laziness, selfishness, bitterness, immorality.

By His own Holy Spirit at work sanctifying us, God is transforming ordinary human beings to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Having been saved from sin and now dead to sin, we seek to live separate from sin, so we can be effective witnesses to those still dead in sin.

Do you see how great is God's love and grace toward you, how He has done for you what He did for the children of Israel?

Remember God's mighty acts of salvation and grace He has shown you. Remember you are His treasured possession in Christ Jesus our Lord. Advent is about the faithfulness of God keeping His promises over thousands of years. In Christ's coming God is proclaiming again, "I will be their God and they will be my people."

Take that as His invitation to respond by living a life that reflects Him. Live a clearly distinct life as a reflection of your gratitude for what God has done for you and as a witness to those around you. Let your life proclaim just how excellent God is and how much better light is than darkness.