The Mission of Priesthood

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[0:00] So we continue our series on the mission of God this morning, our fourth installment. I want to get right into it. So I first want to ask, why are we reading the Exodus?

Because this morning our focus is on the mission of priesthood. So why are we reading the Exodus? That's the first question. Then we're going to look at two lessons from this chapter.
The first is that there's a difference in objective and subjective redemption. The second is that you need a priest.
So first, why the Exodus? Why the Exodus? We said before that the mission of God that we're looking at throughout the Old Testament this semester is the mission of God to save the world, to save the world from sin.
In the first week we saw that God is the only true God from Genesis 1. And the second week we saw that God comes to relate to people, to covenant with people, to save people.
[1:00] And then in the third week we said that God comes to save everything, not just people, but through them the world, the cosmos, to resurrect a new heavens and a new earth.

And this week we look at the fact that God comes to save people with a priest. Now a priest, what's a priest? And you might be tempted, and you would be right to say that a priest, if you know your Old Testament, is a Levite.
In Exodus 28 God commissioned the Levitical priesthood. It's a bloodline priesthood, and they do things like make sacrifices and carry the Ark of the Covenant and carry the temple and the tabernacle around the lands.
But you know what? Priest existed long before the Levitical priesthood. The first great priest, many commentators would say was Adam.
But the first great priest that's very explicit in Scripture is Melchizedek. Melchizedek pops up in Genesis 14 as this mysterious priestly figure to Abram.
[2:04] And then the second great high priest of Scripture before the Levitical priesthood ever came along was Moses. Was Moses. Now you say, how? How? In Hebrews chapter 3 verse 1 the writer says that Jesus is our great high priest who is more faithful than even Moses over the house of Israel.

And you see what he's saying? He's saying Jesus is a high priest. He's the high priest of our confession, but he's even a better high priest than Moses ever was. You see what he's saying? He's saying that Jesus is the greater high priest than Moses. But Moses too was the great high priest of Israel. A priest is simply this.
It's a mediator. It's a go between. It's a person designated to represent people to God, to speak to God on behalf of people, and to speak to the people on behalf of God.
That's all. A priest is a go between. So why are we looking at the Exodus? It's one of the most beautiful, clear places in Scripture where we see Moses' high priesthood on display.
[3:16] Now the Exodus. What's the Exodus? The Exodus is the movement of Israel from slavery to Sinai. So they were in slavery for 400 years in Egypt, and they were redeemed out of Egypt, taken across the Red Sea.

That's specifically what we're focused on today, and taking to Mount Sinai. And the Exodus is so important for the Bible. It's central to the story of the Bible, but it's also been important in Western culture.
Hopefully, most of you, if you were born at least before the 90s, have seen Charlton Heston's famous scene in 1956.
Behold! Observe the power of the Lord and the waters split. It was one of the great cinematic marvels. It really was a landmark in Sinai, actually, and how they did the splitting of the water.

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And there have been 15 movies just about the crossing of the Red Sea since then. So it's been a staple for Western culture to reflect on this famous story, but even more important, obviously, the history of the Exodus.
[4:23] Crossing the Red Sea has been a controlling concept throughout the whole Bible for explaining salvation. So John 10, John 10 verse 9, Jesus says, I am the door, and whoever enters in by me will go out to pasture.

Now, what he's talking about there is sheep coming through the door and getting to go to rest through him. But the little verb there, they will go out to rest. You know what the verb is in Greek? It's literally the word exodus. It's a Greek word. It's the word exodus, or even more significant, in Luke 9. Luke 9 is the transfiguration where Moses and Elijah, the great high priest and the great prophet of the Old Testament, come to the mountain with Jesus.
And it says that they spoke about Jesus' departure to Jerusalem. And in the ESV, you'll see there's a little footnote, and it points you to the bottom, and it says, what's the word for departure?
And it says literally exodus. You see, Jesus tripped to Jerusalem. He tripped to death, the gospel is consistently called the exodus.
[5:33] Think about it this way. A few commentators have said this before. If you were to see an Israelite a year after they crossed over the Red Sea and went to Sinai, and you said, what happened to you?

Tell me your story. Have you heard this story before? We were slaves in a foreign land under the yoke of bondage.
Then God sent a Redeemer. And the Redeemer performed miraculous signs and wonders. And the Redeemer led us out of slavery.
And we crossed over from death to life. And we met with God finally in His presence, and He told us what it looks like to obey Him. And now we are wandering in a wilderness awaiting our rest in the promised land.
Have you heard that story before? Have you heard that story? You see, the exodus, it's a picture. The salvation of Israel is the great picture of salvation in Jesus Christ.
[6:38] And at the center of it all, there's a priest. There's a priest. So that's the first thing. Why the exodus? The first thing is the first lesson we take from the passage. That there's a difference in objective and subjective redemption.

There's a difference in objective and subjective redemption. All right. There's two things you need to see to see this. The first is in verse two. So if you look at that, tell the people of Israel to turn back. So the people of Israel had left Egypt, and God tells them, turn back. Have you noticed that before? Turn back. In other words, change routes.
And Numbers 33 gives a little bit more detail about their route. They left Goshen and Ramses. They went to Sukkoth, then to Ephem.
Then they were told to turn back to P. Ha-Hiroth, to camp between Mughdal and the Red Sea, next to Baal Zaffan. Got that? Everybody got that? What is, don't worry about the names.
[7:39] What is this about? How did he tell them to turn back? Here's what we know. We don't know exactly where all those places were, but here's what we know, approximations, that this was a bad route.

God told them to turn out of a route that they were taking that was definitively safe. The Egyptians would not have caught them if these places are where most biblical scholars think they are.
And he told them to turn back. And it says that he told them to camp between a place called Mughdal, you'll see that in verse 2, next to P. Ha-Hiroth, and between Mughdal and the sea.
Now Mughdal is not a part of Mordor. It's a, here's what it means, the word literally translates to military fortress.
You see? It was an Egyptian military outpost. So he told them to turn south when they did not have to cross over the sea, and to camp between the Red Sea and an Egyptian military outpost, and to stay there.
[8:45] You see why the Israelites are starting to get upset? We were going to be safe, and now we're camping between an Egyptian military outpost and the Red Sea. And the Red Sea, the Red Sea, of course, we can only look at the Red Sea today and guess what it must have been like then.

But the Red Sea, I'll just tell you what it's like today, we think that they probably crossed where the present-day Gulf of Aquabias between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and it's 15 miles wide the Red Sea

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at that point.
It's 15 miles, this is no, you can't swim across this, and at its deepest point it's 1800 meters deep, so this is no joke. God told them to go there and to camp there.
Why? Because he wanted their salvation to be impossible. You see, he wanted their salvation to be utterly impossible. And you get two responses that flow out of that.
The first is Pharaoh's response, and God tells Moses how Pharaoh responded in verse 3, Pharaoh will save the people of Israel, they are wandering in the land and the wilderness has shut them in.
[9:49] You see the wilderness, the desert mountainous wilderness was to the south, so they couldn't go south, they couldn't go east, and they couldn't go west, and north is where they came from. They were completely shut in, that's Pharaoh, when it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, what he's saying is that God gave Pharaoh over to his desires.

You see Pharaoh woke up, he realized they've made a dumb decision, they're thwarted, they're trapped, God gives Pharaoh over to his desires and says, he had lost his whole slave labor force. His whole slave labor force in one day he lost it, he wants it back, so he goes after it. This is the response you get, and this is where the major point is, the second response you get is from the people of Israel.
And if you look at it, it's in verse 10. When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes and they saw the Egyptians marching after them, and they feared greatly, and they cried out to the Lord, and they said, is it because there's no graves in Egypt that you've taken us to die in the wilderness?
They said that to Moses. And they said, did we not tell you when we were in Egypt, we never wanted to come. They never even wanted to come and do this. Now first off, they never said that.
[11:01] If you know Exodus, they wanted to leave. They were happy to leave. And as soon as the first circumstance that looks impossible, this is after they've seen the 10 plagues, the first circumstance that becomes impossible, they say to Moses, did we not say we would have rather stayed at least in Egypt, we had three hot mills.

Human is better than freedom. That's what they're saying. And commentators call this Israel's recovered or selective memory. We sang about it in that Psalm. It's consistent throughout the whole of Testament.
They have a very selective memory, and it doesn't stop here. As soon as they cross the Red Sea, they're grumbling again, they're angry again. They say we would rather, at least they say right after they cross the Red Sea, they get hungry.
At least in Egypt, we had pots of meat and bread to eat, they say. They have a selective memory.
Here's the point. Objectively, the people had been saved.
You see that, objectively, they were no longer slaves. They had been liberated. They had been freed. They had been redeemed.
[12:12] But subjectively, in their hearts, they wanted slavery back. You see, there's a difference in object of redemption and subject of redemption.

Now Martin Lloyd-Jones preached a very famous sermon on this passage where he preached the whole sermon about the difference in object and subject of redemption. So I'm drawing from him, and then Tim Keller preached a very famous sermon on this passage where he drew from Lloyd-Jones to make this point.
And now I use both of them to say this. Object of redemption. It's completely free grace, you see. God comes and he pulls them out of slavery despite themselves through the power of a Redeemer, Moses, a priest, the representative of God.
And then as soon as they're freed, they don't know how to be free yet. You see? And here's what Keller says. You can take the people out of slavery, but you can't take the slavery out of the people. It takes longer. It takes a little longer. Lloyd-Jones uses an illustration. He thinks about what it must have been like after the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 in America, especially in the American South.
[13:25] Abraham Lincoln and the Congress declare black African-American slaves free. But you can imagine if you're a black man in the American South that one day you're a slave and the next day you're proclaimed, you're pronounced free.

But you go into that same white-dominated town that you've always lived in and you get there in a white man that's yelled at you a million times, yells at you again in the same exact way.

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And what do you do? You shudder. You turn in. You're afraid of what might happen. You do what he says. You see? Objectively emancipated, free, proclaimed, pronounced free, but subjectively in your heart still something of a slave, subject of redemption.
You see? It takes time. It takes movement. This is the picture of what we call in Christian theology the difference in justification and sanctification.
Have you heard that? Justification is God's pronouncement in Jesus Christ that everything that's true of Jesus is true of you, even if it's not.
[14:41] In justification God pronounces you objectively righteous, free, forgiven, liberated from the slavery of sin. You've left Egypt. And then in sanctification we recognize that you actually have to become what you are.

You see? You're declared righteous, but now you have to become righteous. There's a difference in objective and subjective. One is instantaneous.
Objective redemption is you weren't and now you are. It changes in an instant. Subjective redemption is a process, a process of change, of heart change.
It's slow. It includes lots of failure. As soon as bad circumstances come along, it pulls your heart right back into the slavery used to be a part of sometimes, you see?
Do I have time for this? I think so. Jean Valjean, one of the great literary characters from Les Miserables. Jean Valjean was a thief in Victor Hugo's famous novel and he was a petty criminal.
[15:48] He had been in jail for, I can't remember, 14, 16 years, something like that. Some literary buff in here will correct me afterwards. And he is finally freed and he's homeless and he's camping outside of a priest house, you remember?

And the priest invites him in and the priest gives him a beautiful meal and he gives him clean clothes and a place to sleep in a shower. And in the middle of the night, Jean Valjean, what does he do?
He has to be who he is. His identity, his subjective identity, he's a thief. So he gets up in the middle of the night, he takes the silver and he leaves.
And the next day he's caught, right? And the guards, the French troops bring him back to the priest and he's waiting to go back to prison because this is all he knows. He has to choose this.
He doesn't know how to live any other way than as a thief or a prisoner, a slave. And what does the priest do? Do you remember? One of the most beautiful scenes of redemption in all of literature.
[16:51] They say, is this the man that took your silver? And the priest says, yeah, yeah it is. He says, well, do you want to press charges? And the priest says, no, no, I gave it to him.

I gave it to him. Oh, and you know what I'm actually angry about? You forgot to take the candlesticks. And they're the most valuable piece of all my silver. So he goes and he gets the candlesticks and he stuffs them in John Valjean's bag.
And John Valjean says this, are you really doing this? Are you really letting me go? He'd never seen anything like it. And the priest says, don't ever forget this moment.
You are now a new man. And he says, but why? Why? You no longer belong to evil. With this silver I have bought your soul.
I have ransomed you from fear and hatred and I give you to God. John Valjean had never seen grace at the cost of another.
[17:50] Free grace. And you know what, Victor Hugo then after that jumps years ahead in the book. Why? Because objectively John Valjean, he had been free, he had been redeemed.

That's the picture. But subjectively Victor Hugo had to jump years before he actually looked like it. Years down the road he was that beautiful mayor, he gave to the poor, he was such a kind man, he redeemed somebody else in the end.
But subjectively he left and saying, what is this? This is not me. This is not me. You see there's a difference. There's a difference in being declared forgiven and redeemed and becoming that person.
Now the Gospel is encapsulated in this whole passage, this whole point in verse 14, if you look at it with me. Verse 14, the Lord will fight for you.
You have only to be silent. The Lord will fight for you. They've been complaining and Moses' response says, here's your job. Here's your job.
[19:00] Stand over there and be quiet. You see, you're under the pains of death. You're about to all be murdered and here's your job. Stop talking.

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Be quiet. You see, that's an ambiguous word there. It actually could be translated, be deaf. So it's saying, hold your mouth and cover your ears.
You don't need to listen. You don't need to speak. You see what it's saying? The Gospel is surgery. The doctor comes and he puts you under.
You go to sleep. He's saying, go to sleep. Wake up and you will be ready. It's instantaneous. You don't do anything. Be silent. The Gospel is not about you.
Every other religion, every other religion besides Christianity, when they come to the Red Sea and they're facing sure death, you know what they try to do?
[19:58] What humans try to do? They want to build a bridge. You come to the Red Sea and you're facing sure condemnation and to get across to new life, what do you want to do? You want to build a bridge.

You want to lay down the pylons and put stone on stone and stone and work your way, years of years of work, as hard as you possibly can to finally achieve redemption.
And Moses says, here's the object of salvation. Be quiet. Don't build a bridge. The Lord will fight for you.
The Lord will work for you. He's going to do it all. He's going to do it all. And, and, and, if you've been a Christian for 50 years, 10, 20, 30, 40, and, the Gospel is not that God came to Israel, delivered to them the law while they were slaves and said, okay, as soon as you start to obey this, as soon as you get it right.
Then I will liberate you and you will be my people. No. The Gospel is that he comes to a people that didn't even want him, redeems them and then sends them to Sinai to learn how to be holy.
[21:14] You see the order? Objective salvation. You do nothing. It's not by works of the law, Romans 4 and 5, and you're saved to do works of the law, to be holy.

You're saved from slavery to Sinai to become something. See? That's the relationship between objective and subjective redemption.
You don't, you're not saved by works, but you're also not left the way you were. You're also not left the way you were. Okay, so that's the first thing. The second thing, we'll be brief here.
Secondly a second lesson of this passage and finally, in Christ, in Christianity, there is no salvation without a priest and you need a priest if you want to be saved.
You need a priest. Now Moses is a priest of Israel and you see this in verse 15. Verse 15. The Lord said to Moses, why do you cry to me?
[22:20] Did you catch it? Who was doing the crying? Who was, who were the people that were complaining? Not Moses. Moses knew the plan.

It was the Israelites, but in verse 15, God does not come to Israel. He does not speak to them directly. Never. Not yet.
He comes to Moses. In the you there, why are you crying to me? Commentators are puzzled by this because it's singular. It's not plural. So he's not saying this to everyone.
He's saying it just to Moses. Why? Because Moses is the go-between. Moses is the priest. You see what's being said here?
That what happens with a priest, whenever the people sin, whenever the people cry out in anger, shaking their fists at God, who is it that's being charged with the guilt?
[23:13] Not the people, but Moses. Moses is the one that's being charged guilty. Why are you, Moses?

Grumbling. Why are you complaining? Why are you crying out to me? You see? He's their priest. He's their mediator. He stands in between them.
The priest stands between the judge and the judged. Now, this is the picture of the Red Sea crossing. That's a movement from sure death and possible salvation to new life on the other side.
And what does this mean? This means that on one side of the sea, the Israelites are judged. They're guilty. They are condemned.
They are under God's wrath. You see, it's a presupposition of the possibility of being saved. You can't cross from death to life unless they are condemned on the side of death.
[24:14] You can never have mercy or salvation or redemption without also having judgment. You see?

Everybody knows this. It's really popular today to pit the God of the Old Testament against the God of the New Testament. You've seen this. The God of judgment and anger and wrath in the Old

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Testament against the God of love and mercy in the New Testament.
But even the people that want to do that, even if you're tempted to do that, you know that that's not true. You know that that's not possible. So for example, I'm doing a study this semester on the side on the relationship between theology and film or television in the 20th century.
And this week, I was researching on the relationship of violence on film and the age-old question, what is violence in television and film due to people? Their psychology.
Does it make them more violent? What does it do? And our assignment in exploring that question was to watch some of the famous films about the Rwandan genocide from 1994.
[25:21] The Rwandan genocide, the film Hotel Rwanda, sometimes in April is not as well known, but very, very good film, Shooting Dogs, you know, 1994, the military government after the assassination of the Hutu president ordered a massacre of all Tutsi peoples in Rwanda, killing, it was to kill everyone to eliminate the people group, the Tutsis.

In Rwanda, it's estimated that 800,000 to a million were killed in 100 days in Rwanda during the genocide. It's one of the great tragedies of the 20th century.
And Bill Clinton actually, after he left office in the U.S., said that it was the great regret of his work in the office that he stood by while during these 100 days.
Heather and I were watching these and at one point and sometimes in April, there's a Hutu husband married to a Tutsi wife and therefore they have Tutsi children.
And there's this gripping scene where, and you knew it was coming the whole time, where they're at a checkpoint and the guards are trying to decide whether or not they're going to rip the Tutsi family away from the Hutu husband and murder them.
[26:36] And of course, what do you say when you watch it? Mercy, mercy, mercy, show mercy. Don't rip the family apart because of ethnic origin.

What is this, son? What is this, right? That's what you're saying. You're screaming at the television in tears and they do it. They kill the children and the wife.
And then what are you saying? Judgment, judgment, judgment, justice. You see, the presupposition of the possibility of mercy is that something's gone wrong and needs to be judged.
That justice needs to be given and needs to be had. Judgment must be made. There are guilty parties. That's the presupposition of mercy. Israel is under the wrath of God.
And the only way for them to cross over the sea is to have a judge who would be judged in their place. That's the only way.
[27:41] You know, Israel wasn't innocent. They were just as guilty as the Egyptians of sin. They didn't deserve it.

You better believe that as they ran across the Red Sea when it parted, that they were shaking their fist at God. They shook their fist at God before the Red Sea.
They shook their fist at God during the plagues when they would see miracles. And don't believe that the Red Sea, a miraculous sign, made it stop. It didn't.
As soon as they got across the Red Sea, they were back again shaking their fist at God. The golden calf, you know that story, they didn't deserve to move from death to life.
What's the difference between the Egyptians and the Israelites in that moment? Why is it that one guy saved, one gets mercy and the other doesn't? What's the difference?
[28:36] It's that when the Israelites were crossing under the water, they were told to look up, to look up at the man, to look up at the man holding the staff.

You see the only difference is that Israel had a priest to look at, a go between, a mediator, a judge judged in their place.
Moses was a faithful priest, a mediator of God's salvation to Israel, but there's a better one. There's a better mediator.
There's a better high priest. One of the major characters, and we'll close with this, one of the major characters in our series on the mission of God that you may have not noticed, we haven't spoken explicitly about it yet, has been water.
Water, water is a major character in the Old Testament, and it's been in all of our passages somewhere. In Genesis chapter one, the waters are the elements of chaos that God separates and parts in order to bring order to the world.
[29:43] And then he brings creation through separating the waters, and then in Genesis six to nine, he reverses that creation by letting the waters flood the earth.

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You see, and after this in the book of Joshua, crossing over the water will be the crossing into rest. You see, water in the Bible is the great picture of judgment.
Theologians call it the great water or deal. And in our passage here, water is clearly a symbol of judgment. So Israel has to pass under the waters of judgment in order to reach new life.
And Moses was a great mediator, but the difference in Moses and Jesus is this, is that because there had already been a lamb whose blood was spilled on the Passover, that Moses was able to stand there and part the seas.
You see, Moses was a murderer. You remember? Moses would never enter the promised land because of his sin. And the only reason he was able to be called a mediator was precisely because the blood of the lamb had already been spilled on the Passover for him and for all of Israel.
[31:00] Oh boy. You see how the Israelites were saved by the very same gospel that we're saved by? It wasn't Moses' gospel.

Jesus Christ was drowned in the waters of the Red Sea so that we might walk out of the Red Sea in new life. You see, Jesus is the only priest in history that has been both priest and the lamb himself. He went under the waters of judgment so that you might be baptized in the waters of new life. This is why Romans 6 calls Jesus crucifixion a baptism.
It's going under the waters of judgment and death. Justification. The gospel is somebody else's work. Jesus Christ for you.
Take outside of you completely objective so that you might cross from death to life. Sanctification, now you're a call to become holy. You're called out of Egypt to Zion and glorification.
[32:09] The end of the story. Did you know how long it took for them, for Israel to get from the Red Sea when they stepped their feet on dry land to Zion?

You know how long it took? Romans 33 tells us, three days. Three days. You see what's happening here?
You see what's happening here? Three days. In the crucifixion you pass under the waters with Jesus Christ to objective new life and in the resurrection death cannot hold you down to be in the presence of God at Sinai, to become holy.
This is for everybody here today. You've been a Christian for 50 years and you say, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know this. I know this story. Have you seen it like this? Have you seen it? Are you awake to the gospel preached throughout all the ages?
Are you awake to the instantaneous adoption you've received to the calling? Worketh not. Worketh not, Romans 4-5.
[33:22] To the one who worketh not but believes in the great high priest Jesus Christ, their faith will be credited as righteousness. Let's pray. Father, we asked this morning that you would help us to see, no matter where we are in life, doubter, believer, skeptic, that the gospel has been in this world from ages and ages past, that you have been proclaiming it in your great acts.

We asked that you would help us to want it, want it, want it afresh. We asked for those of us that believe on Jesus that you would make us holy, that we would desire what you command as a gust and prey.
We asked for those who are doubting and skeptical and struggling that they would see the beauty of a Bible put together 3,000 years apart in such a way as to the gospel to be preached throughout all the ages.
We pray that your spirit would touch us in that way. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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