

The Mission of Deliverance

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] I'd like to read two passages from the Bible this morning and then preach from one of them. If you're visiting with us, you might not appreciate what we have been doing, obviously you haven't been here.

We've been looking in our morning worship and our preaching at the mission of God. In other words, we've been looking at the Bible kind of with the one thread that runs through the whole Bible which unfolds the mission of God and we're looking at bits from the Old Testament that point forward to Jesus and we'll also look at other bits in the New Testament.

It's far from being exhaustive in any way, it's more like just dipping into Scripture to remind us that there's a very clear and very definite purpose to the Bible and to God's word as we have it.

I'm going to read the passages that are on your bulletin sheet, I'm going to read them back to front, I'm going to read the New Testament passage first and then I'm going to read the passage in Exodus because it's the passage in Exodus that we're going to look at for a little while this morning before the baptisms.

And I hope you'll find that there is a link and a relevance even though it's part of an ongoing series. So from 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 9 and 10 we have these words.

[1 : 2 6] Peter speaking to the New Testament church. You're 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 marvellous 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.

And then from Exodus chapter 19 this is just after the Israelites have been released from enslavement in Egypt and you have the miraculous accounts of the plagues and then the crossing of the Red Sea and here God meets with Moses on Mount Sinai just before the giving of the 10 commandments.

So this is from Exodus chapter 19 verses 1 to 6. On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai.

They set out from Refidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai and they encamped in the wilderness. Then Israel encamped before the mountain while Moses went up to God.

[2 : 5 1] The Lord called him out of the mountain saying, Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the people of Israel, You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles wings and brought you to myself.

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.

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.

Amen this is the word of God and we rejoice and give thanks in being able to read that word together this morning. Now as I've said that our series is on really looking at what the Bible has to say to us about God and about us and God.

And I think often we think of the Bible as a kind of random collection of stories just thrown together that somehow have come out the way they've come out.

[4 : 03] Old Testament stories and stories of blood and thunder and escape and lions, demons and all these kind of things. And in the New Testament a different kind of book that tells us about Jesus and about the church and about how we're to live.

A kind of chaotic coming together of lots of different aspects of God and history. But what we're trying to make clear and what the Bible makes clear to us is that right from the very beginning it's a selective history and it's only telling us certain things that we need to know.

It isn't a history of the universe. It isn't a history of everything there is. But it is the history of God's people and it is the history of God working in our lives explaining the kind of world we live in, explaining the mess of that world and the beauty of that world and explaining our own hearts and our own needs and our own souls and our relationship with Him as our maker.

There are so many shadows of love even in the brokenness that point us towards our Creator and our God as we saw in previous weeks. And it tells us His purpose for us, His redeeming, His saving purpose to take us from that brokenness and to make us a new people and a new community looking forward to a new future in and through Jesus Christ.

Now that is revealed progressively in the Old Testament. So every part of the Old Testament unfolds a little bit more about what God's purpose and points forward to the coming of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 52] They are like signposts. These stories that we read, the story of the Exodus which we haven't had time to read the whole of the story in the previous and the following chapters are revealing a little bit more about God's commitment, God's covenant with His people.

We saw Abraham last week and today we are looking briefly at Moses. We see God's initiative breaking into the chaos and brokenness of a world that has rejected him with hope and with salvation and with his own company that is both personal but also global.

We saw that, that it has both elements to it. And today in this little section that we read from Exodus chapter 19, we have that covenant that God made with Abraham kind of restated with Moses and broadened a little bit, telling us a little bit more about who he is and what relationship with him looks like.

And we can learn from that. We've got a lot more knowledge because we've got all of the Bible and most of all we've got Jesus and his work, his life and work and his death and resurrection on the cross.

But it does tell us a little bit more and it tells us a bit more in relation to this people, his own people, the chosen people of the Old Testament, the Israelites.

[7 : 19] Because the context is as we've seen, is their enslavement. They were people who had been called by God from Abraham begun this nation, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and this people arose and then we know that famine drove them to Egypt where they found a home.

But over 400 years or so, these people as they grew in number became a real ugly threat as the Egyptians and Pharaoh perceived them.

And so they became exploited as slaves. They lost their freedoms. They were violently mistreated.

There's great parallels with what is happening in different parts of the world today and the needs, the terrorism, the brokenness, the enslavement, the looking for freedom and the looking for hope by leaving your home country.

They were victims of genocide as their young babies were slaughtered and killed and spiritually they were oppressed.

[8 : 32] And God breaks into that situation miraculously rescues them. You know the story of the plagues and then the parting of the Red Sea which reminds us that God is revealing himself as God against Pharaoh who was also worshipped as God, if you remember.

And his people worshipped him as God. And God is saying, no I am greater, I am the only God and by great works of miracles you will know that I am your God and I am the only Redeemer.

Miraculously redeems them and brings them out of slavery and renews them and as we see in these chapters he's renewing his covenant with them and pointing forward a little bit more revealing a little bit more about himself.

Now all of this for us with our knowledge, with our privilege of knowing the New Testament and Jesus all of that helps us as we parallel it helps us to understand more about Jesus and more about what Jesus has done for us as Christians.

And while you'll hear I'll read Emma's testimony and that will speak about just someone who's just very ordinary like all of us who has seen Jesus redeeming and transforming her life as we as Christians make that testimony ourselves.

[9 : 55] I'll say a little bit more generally about baptism later. But there's just two aspects that I want to look at from these verses. Forgive me because there's piles of other things and you probably say, well you probably wouldn't say it, I wish you would preach about all of them, but you probably might say I'd like to know about more of these things but we can only look at two very short aspects today and you'll need to forgive me that I'm missing out.

Vast swathes of really important sweet and beautiful truth from God's word. There's only two things really that I want to say that reveal a hint and point forward to the redemption that we have as Christians that point forward to the kind of lives that we are to live as well as believers.

And the first is what God so beautifully says in verse 4, he says, when he describes the rescue from the Red Sea and all the amazing power that was involved in setting them free and he describes it in such an unexpected way.

You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. Who would you have thought that was going to be the description?

Is that what you would have thought he would have used to describe the incredible way that he released the people and brought them to himself? I've carried you on eagle's wings. It's a beautiful picture of this great Creator God who knows his own creation and he knows the great power and strength of the eagle and the mother eagle who would watch its young as it comes out of the nest and flies but just gets to that point where it can't keep going and is going to drop to the ground and die because it's just a fledgling flight and it can't keep going and the mother just swoops under it and lifts it and carries it in this great and powerful way.

[11 : 54] And that's the picture of this great parental love that God has for his people that he comes and he lifts them, he carries them to himself.

That's the picture of the rescue of his fledgling people from the darkness and the fear and the poverty and the separation that they knew.

His great power and determination to gather them to himself and heal them. And actually there's 2 verse 24 which I think is maybe coming up on the screen.

We have that picture of the family God who heard the groanings of his people. He remembered the covenant they had made that we looked at last week with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and it goes on to say he knew them.

He knew they were going through, he understood what they were going through. And then Moses in Exodus 15 gives us a song where he is singing in praise for the redemption.

[12 : 55] He says you have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed, you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode. And there's this whole idea of rescue, of redemption that that is what God has done for his people.

Now for Israel it wasn't, now listen to this, it wasn't just spiritual redemption. It was very physical, it was social, it was economic and it was political.

And they were freed to enter the promised land. In other words their redemption was going to affect the whole of their life.

It wasn't just some kind of nefarious spiritual thing that no one could really see or understand. They were going to be rescued, they were going to be put in a new place. It was going to affect everything about them and about their relationship with one another and their relationship with the world.

Now we can take that truth of the amazing picture of God carrying his people and we can apply that to our own testimony as Christians.

[14 : 05] We can see in that truth mirrors of what is reflection and the mirror of what our own experience is as Christians.

And you know that the New Testament has so many plug-ins to this story and says, look this is Jesus, plug-in to the story of Moses and you'll learn a lot more about him.

Why do we know that? In John 1 verse 29, John says, next day he saw Jesus coming towards him, behold a Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

That's later described as the Passover Lamb, the Lamb that was slain in the Passover which was the symbolic meal that was to remind the people of this, the release from captivity in Egypt.

And we recognise that the Lord's Supper, this great covenantal sacrament that we enjoy, was instituted at the Passover meal because there was so many parallels between what happened in the Passover and what Jesus came to do in being the Lamb of God with a shedding of blood and the rescuing of the people and the trusting in God for salvation and the release from death and the newness of life, all of these things are papalel.

[15 : 23] And by grace, we see that and we'll see a little bit more just briefly. By grace, he is our Father today as Christians and we can testify that our salvation can be described as God bearing us on eagle's wings and what bringing us to himself.

That's what salvation is. It's recognising God's initiative, God's salvation, God's the one who carries us and he just doesn't randomly fly about with us.

The purpose is clear, is to bring us to himself, is to bring his Old Testament people then into relationship with him and so for us. We're not coming, Christianity isn't coming to a philosophical ideology, it's not coming to a ritualistic way of life, it's coming to a person, it's coming to a creator and a Redeemer or Savior who gave himself, who shed his own blood, not the blood of some other animal which was only pointing forward to his shed blood, but who gave his life in order that we might live.

Who died the death we deserve as Chory said in his prayer and we receive the life that we don't deserve because it's his righteousness that we receive.

He's our Father and he brings us to himself and unless you've come in Salvation and crying out as the people of the Old Testament cried out for relief, unless we are crying out and daily I think that is ongoing for us as Christians, we keep crying out, we're wanting to be in relationship with him, drawn to himself.

[17 : 10] Church isn't about coming here primarily, although it's important, it's about coming to God and coming into relationship with God and until we recognise he is the Redeemer and we need him to cleanse us from our sins, to free us from our enslavement to that and the death that comes from it and the separation then we will never know the fullness of life and the hope of redemption and salvation.

And that is very much what's recognised in baptism, that we come to him for cleansing, for washing, we can't earn our own way, we can't make our way to heaven, that he comes to us and he has done it on our behalf.

He asks us simply to be carried and to be brought to himself and to enter relationship with him. So that's the first thing. The second thing very briefly is not only were they carried by God in this picture but they were also commissioned by God.

In verse 6 we're told, now therefore if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant you shall be my treasured possession among all the peoples for all the earth is mine 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. So he rescued them and he brought them out of slavery enslavement and he didn't just say right that's it, on you go, just live any old way now that you're carried on eagles, wings and you're brought to yourself.

[18 : 40] No, he commissioned them and he gave them a mission. He gave them something to be, to be a people, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation to himself and that was, it wasn't a condition of their salvation, they had already been redeemed and saved by then but it was a condition of their calling and I think mainly the story of the Old Testament is the story of their failure to fulfil that.

That they didn't generally throughout their history show themselves to be a holy nation, a priesthood of believers to the nations around them.

Which brings us to Christ of course. So the priest you see in the Bible had a dual role. He was to bring God's word, God's law to the people.

The next chapter speaks about the Ten Commandments. Do you know what the Ten Commandments are? Ten Commandments are his laws of love, loving God, loving one another. That's all they are, his laws of love and they were to bring God and his law to the people and they were to offer sacrifice on behalf of the people to God.

So there was a dual role, bring God down to the people in terms of his word and also represent the people before God as their representative in sacrifice.

[20 : 04] And the priest in that role was to live the law himself. He was to obey the law as a priest and tell people about God and lead people in sacrifice to forgiveness from God.

And God here says, I want you all to be like that. I want you to be a kingdom of priests, every one of you to be. In other words, I want you to be a new community who all love God and love your neighbour and who all recognise the importance of drawing the nations around you, because that's where God placed them in the nations, draw all the nations around you to recognise this only God.

What happened? They usually did the complete opposite. They didn't live like they loved God and loved one another. And instead of highlighting God to the nations, they embraced the idols of the nations around them and fell into idolatry.

That was the worst thing. That's what God hated most, because he redeemed them. He was living. He was in relationship with them. And they just ended up bowing down to the idols of wood and stone.

And that really was dreadful. So they didn't often fulfil that particular mission. Now that mission is unfolded for us in the New Testament also, in different ways.

[21 : 35] Really, because this priesthood that was in the Old Testament pointed forward to Jesus. So Jesus Hebrews 4 verse 14 speaks of Jesus as our great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.

And he's the one who represents us before God and who himself is both the sacrifice and the priest.

He's the Lamb and the priest. He's the one who himself goes into God's presence as the offering and says, I will bear the sins of my people. My blood will be shed in order that they can be forgiven.

And he is the great High Priest. Not only as our sacrifice, but showing us who God is. Showing us what God is like. Not by expounding the law in word, but by being God in the flesh and in fleshing what it means to live out loving God and loving your neighbour.

So Christ becomes the Lamb and the priest. But then we as Christians are asked to be priests as well. Really? Yeah.

[22 : 49] In 1 Peter 2 and verse 9. We have this great, great verse, but you had a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for their own possessions.

Very similar language to the language used in Exodus that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. So we are priests. And this Old Testament story is to help us understand what it means for us to be Christians.

It means in other words that we are to live out the law, bring that law, law of love, loving God and loving our neighbour, into our lives.

And that is holiness. That is holy living. And by so doing, we are then to be a witness, be a proclaiming his excellencies to the world in which we live.

So there's this dual aspect that we are to live out what it is to be a Christian. We are to proclaim Jesus by how we live. We are to tell people about his Word and inflesh it in our lives.

[24 : 03] And we are to live in such a way that we draw people to ask questions. Well, who is this God you serve? We're a new community.

And as I close then, I'm just going to apply that in three ways to our situation. The priesthood of all believers reminds us of all of the privilege every Christian has.

We have direct access into the presence of God because of what Jesus has done and as we trust in him, the way is open. We can, as God says here, we are brought to himself.

You have absolutely free access. You don't need the minister to pray for you. You don't need anyone else to pray for you. You don't need some kind of intermediary to pray for you. You can have direct access to God and relationship with him through Jesus Christ, through trusting and trusting your life to him because he has opened the way to us.

Our sins have been forgiven. The barriers that have kept us from God, the ugliness, the darkness, the bleakness, the sin, the rebellion, the pride, the lust, all of these things have been paid for by Jesus or Satan.

[25 : 09] And we are covered in his righteousness. So we have free access as Christians into the presence of God. And therefore, we are priests.

We are a holy person, not because of our holiness, but because of his. Now that has implications in three different ways and maybe a hundred other different ways, but we'll only look very briefly at three.

One is in the family. Okay? In the family. Now this is a baptismal service today and we know and recognize that as believers, parents who are believers, have this great responsibility to be priests, as it were, in their own home, to share God and God's word with their children, to example God to their children, and to encourage to make God known by so doing.

Both in their teaching, but I would say even more importantly in their life and how they example Jesus in their lives. And we know that this great covenant that soaks through the Old Testament into the new was a covenant where God showed that he worked not only in individuals, but also in families and in the children of believers.

And the covenant symbols of the Lord's Supper and of baptism and baptism speaks specifically of that promise of the element to the covenant of God that he works through his people and he works through family and he draws people to himself when they recognize their great privilege of being priests and of being friends with God and the promises to those who trust and to their children, which is why we baptize children.

[26 : 54] Not because it makes them Christians, but there's this great promissory element that speaks of the privileges they have of being brought up in this covenant relationship, which we pray and know and believe will be God's means of bringing them to himself.

Now that has a responsibility then for you, if you're a grown up here today and you were baptized as a child and you have yet to make your peace with God through Jesus Christ, you have that great and solemn responsibility because the privilege is outstanding and he loves you and he wants to carry you on eagles' wings.

So there's this great important Christ-like ethic within the home. I say this to lots of parents and I say it to lots of couples that are getting married if they have kids.

Your Christianity will be tested most when you have kids because they will see exactly what's important to you. They will see exactly how real your relationship with Christ is.

They will know exactly how hard you're working to control your temper and to deal with things that are difficult in the home. That's where we are ourselves, isn't it?

[28 : 11] That's where we are completely open and children see that and will know that. And so therefore remember of all of these things, love covers a multitude of sins. You love your children, you love God and you love your children, that will make up for a whole lot of parenting deficiencies.

And I'm very grateful for that in my home. Family and it has implications for the church because as a people, you know, it's not just you're a holy priest, it's that we're a holy nation.

We're a people together and God has saved us into community, into family, spiritual family I mean at this point, and that we work out this priesthood together.

What do I mean by that? It means that we love God and we love our neighbour and that starts in the family and then in the church, in concentric circles as it were.

We treat one another in the church as Christians and I get this, the way Christ has treated us. Now that really changes our outlook, doesn't it?

[29 : 18] Because it's so easy for us to church our wasted time and churches full of hypocrites and the church is letting me down every which way and then we look in the mirror and say wait a minute, that's exactly what I've done for Christ.

I've let him down, I've been a hypocrite, I've been a clown and he asked us to be forgiving and he asked us to bear with one another's burdens and he asked us to be a new community, not like Egypt with all its violence and oppression and self-righteousness and pride and everything.

He wants us to be a new community that loves God and loves our neighbour and that doesn't mean we go into some pious corner and be holy on our own and say oh the world's a terrible place, a horrible place and so is the church.

It's not like that. It's that we recognise and see that we are to be a new community and as a church to go to the last point, we are therefore as a community, a new community to be an influence in the nations to the world around us, to the world in which we live.

So we're not just to be a kind of gathering of Christians that are in some kind of insular separate existence which we're just hanging on in there until heaven and the world and all its darkness and blackness out say.

[30 : 34] We're to recognise that the world's in our hearts primarily and that Christ has come to redeem us from that and therefore to go with that newness into the world in which we live and influence it and bless it for good.

Among all the people treasured possession because all the earth is God's and He goes on and He spoke in Abraham and He speaks later about being a blessing by living this holy and separate and different life.

That's what He asks us to do, a new ethic, a powerful morality, a concern for injustice, a longing to see poverty alleviated, a desire for those who have no spokesperson in this life that we care about these things because they reflect the kind of God who cares about these things and who wants us to be His instruments for good in this world.

Not just to be a holy huddle but to live as families, to live as a church in the world different from the world and I've gone on too long but that's the only hope that there is for us and we praise and thank God for that reality.

Amen.