

God Gives Identity, Commands, And Purpose

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Exodus

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If you'll take your Bible, let's do this first, let's take our Bible and let's turn to Exodus 19, alright? Let's do that first. Exodus 19. We've been working through the Sermon on the Mount and I don't think I'm exaggerating by saying this, we have come to the part that is probably the most chilling part in all of the Bible in Matthews' gospel, chapter 7, where you have Jesus said, "many," he used the word "many." Many are gonna come on that day, on the day of judgment and they're gonna say, "Didn't we do this? Didn't we do this? Didn't we do this?" All ministry, and he's gonna say, "Depart from me, I never knew you." It's one of the most chilling words of all of the Bible and we're going to be looking at them this Wednesday night and I'd love it if you can be here, love for you to be here as we go over this because, again, it's a really, really interesting passage and sobering passages. If you can make it, be sure to catch it on Facebook live but we'd like for you to be here.

Exodus 19. I'm gonna read verses 1 through 8 as we continue through the book of Exodus.

1 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. 2 They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, 3 while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: 4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 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; 6 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." 7 So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. 8 All the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.

This is God's word.

You'll see a picture of one of our local congregations here in town, King's Baptist, and I'd like for us to pray for them as we pray for ourselves today.

Our Father, your church in every generation has faced challenges from the culture around us. Oftentimes we have experienced the fact that the church is not viewed as something beautiful and lovely and helpful, even today we're seeing the same thing, we're seeing many churches that are slipping into a ditch theologically and doctrinally and so, Lord, we want to pray for King's Baptist, we want to pray that today they may sing different songs and preach from a different text but they are opening the same Scriptures and you are speaking today through your word, by your Spirit. So Lord, may the people at King's be helped and encouraged, strengthened in their faith, and may the same be for us. May we remain as a light in this community. May you use each congregation in this town to be making you known, not sowing confusion but bringing you, making you known. And so we pray this for the sake of Christ who redeemed us. Amen.

This May, this May of this year Kathryn and I will celebrate 42 years of marriage. Back a few years ago when we celebrated 35 years, our daughter encouraged us to have a vow renewal service. Now many, many in this congregation have done that same thing, had a vow renewal, and so our daughter, Candy, officiated. Ted was there. Our three grandchildren were there and a photographer. That was all. Just the way we wanted it. Just family and a photographer to kind of capture the moment, and yeah, don't know how to explain this other than it was just a special time. I have a picture in my office at home of Kathryn and I looking at each other and that moment somebody captured the shot, you know, and I look at that often and remember that day. It was a day that we reflected back on the past, we reflected on the present, and we looked forward by God's grace to the future.

I mention that to you today because many Bible commentators have suggested that Exodus 19, the verses that we just read, are very similar to a vow renewal service. Very similar to what we, you know, it has a similarity to it today with a married couple renewing their vows. We have here in chapter 19, very similar, a vow renewal.

Now you'll see if you look for it, you'll see God speaking about the past and the present and the future for his people, and in verse 4, you'll notice the past. Okay, let's just look at that for just a moment before we get started here. "You yourselves have seen what I," this is God speaking, "what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself." All past tense language. Past. Now what we've been looking at in the book of Exodus, a number of things but one of the things that's been standing out is the way Exodus describes God's salvation. In Exodus you don't see people walking an aisle or, you know, coming forward in the service, that sort of thing. You don't see that. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that, but you don't see that in the book of Exodus. What you see is God liberating his people from the things that enslave them that they might come and serve him, and now that I've been, you know, looking at Exodus really closely with you for the last few weeks, I would have to say that is a great

definition of God's salvation. It's God himself, mighty to save, liberating us from the things that enslave us. We are slave-able people, we really are. There are things that entrap us, enslave us we can't get away from. We need help outside of ourselves. That's what God does in the book of Exodus, his salvation. And we see it in verse 4 as he speaks about the past. He said, "I bore you. I carried you."

Now that verses is so beautiful that I struggled this week to figure how can I explain verse 4 in a way that we can enjoy it, you know? Maybe something to think about? Well, I ran across this story of Hannah and Stewart. Hannah and Stewart met each other in Sunday school. Hannah was 15 years old, Stewart was 17 and they started liking each other. She found him attractive, he found her attractive and the more they got to know each other, it finally got to where they went out on a date and that date led to another date, and then they fell in love and then they got engaged. And about a month before their marriage, Hannah was in a horrible traffic accident. It didn't take her life but it broke her in many ways. It was so bad that it appeared that the wedding was gonna have to be put off, but they said, "No, we're not gonna put this off. We're gonna go through it."

So I ran across some pictures of this I want you to see. The first one is Hannah in a wheelchair, her dad is rolling her through a grove of trees. The next picture you'll see Stewart, he sees her and he's coming, he's coming toward her, okay? Next picture, he comes and he picks her up. And the final picture, he carries her. Hannah was carried. She was being borne. Now just let me ask you a question. Think about it, what exactly did Hannah contribute to this? Well, she trusted Stewart. She trusted. She entrusted herself to Stewart. He'd come to carry her. She didn't contribute anything to this except to just trust and rest in Stewart's arms.

What God is saying in verse 4, the God who is mighty to save, he says, "I carried you. I carried you. I carried you out and I carried you to myself." That is a beautiful picture of biblical salvation. Let me ask you: what did the Israelites contribute to their salvation? They trusted God. He carried them. He heard their cry and he came and he liberated them. He rescued them. He said, "I carried you. I bore you on eagles' wings." They were carried out and carried to and, friend, that is still God's salvation today.

So that's why we see what is spoken in verse 5. Look at verse 5 with me. It says, "Now therefore," now just stop there for a moment and notice, what have we moved from? We've moved from the past to the present. Now. He spends some time reminding them about the past, of how he bore them on eagles' wings and brought them to himself, now, now, the present, "Now therefore." Now you remember what the word "therefore" means, it means it's God saying, "Since I have done this for you," verse 4, "Since I have done this for you, now," now what's that mean? God is saying in verse 5, "Therefore now that I have done this for you, you have identity, a command and a purpose." That's what we're gonna look at this morning. "Now that I have done this for you, now that I have graced you. You didn't contribute anything to this except to trust me and now that I have done this for you, therefore you have an identity, you have a command, and you have a purpose."

Let's look at it. First, you have an identity. Look at verse 5, "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice," we'll get to that part in a moment, "and keep my covenant," notice this, "you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine." According to the New York Times, the biggest paper in the world, according to the New York Times the year of 2015 was "the year we obsessed over identity." Maybe you've notice this, maybe over the last few years a lot of talk about identity. I mean, when I grew up, you know, let's say the '60s, when I grew up in the '60s I never heard the word "identity." I mean, it was just nobody was talking about their identity or their identity being fragile or trying to find an identity or build an identity. I wasn't hearing any of that but in 2015 that became, according to the New York Times, the year that we obsessed over it and I believe that's accurate.

Now identity is not an easy thing to define. We're gonna try in a minute but it's not easy to define so I thought maybe this would help us to understand a bit about identity. Last year there was a spike in high profile suicides in our country. A number of names, I won't go into the names, but a number of people, high profile on television, in fashion, in music, who took their lives. Now when that happens, I'm just gonna, you think about this, I know what I do, when I hear about it, I usually think, "Didn't they know how good they were? I mean, didn't they know how great an actor they were? Didn't they know how great they sang? Didn't they know how good they played an instrument? Didn't they know that they were at the top of the heap? Didn't they know how talented they were?" Because I'm thinking if they knew, they would have never taken their lives. Didn't they know? And I thought, you know, perhaps they do know but that wasn't enough. I mean, perhaps they realized they were at the top of their game, perhaps they realized that they were really really good, maybe even the best, perhaps they knew that but perhaps it wasn't enough and perhaps it wasn't enough because of depression. You see, depression often plays a huge role when it comes to someone taking their life.

Dr. Elaine Ehrenberg wrote the book "The Weariness of the Self," and she explored why depression has become the most diagnosed mental disorder in all of the world, and here's what she after years of study, after years of studying the history of depression and its correlation with suicide she said this, it comes down because of feelings of inadequacy. Feelings of inadequacy. In other words, the person who is at the top of the heap, the person who is successful, they've been driven and they've reached it, perhaps the story which they told themselves was not enough. They kept telling themselves, "I'm really good. I'm the best. I'm achieving." But perhaps the story that they were telling themselves was not enough, or perhaps the story society told them about themselves was not enough.

So I ran across, I hope, what will be a helpful definition of identity. I want you to see it. Identity is the sum of everything that pertains to us and shapes us. Identity is that sense of being and self-understanding that frames our actions, communicates to others who we are, and sets the agenda for our actions. Identity drives life. It provides the energy and motivation for all else. If you know who you are, you know what you must do, and if your identity is healthy, it provides a confidence that enables action. There's a lot there, okay, but you do at least see this: our identity is really important; that we understand who we are. I mean, there's many people in this world struggling, many college students are

struggling desperately trying to figure out, "Who am I? Who am I? What am I? What am I here for?" And here's the question that you cannot dismiss, none of us in this room can dismiss this question: will you construct your own identity or will your Creator? That's really what it comes down to. Will you create or construct your own identity or will your Creator give you an identity?

Why do I say it that way? The Bible seeks to tell us who God says we are and who we should be, and how we fit in God's purposes and how we should live because of our God-given identity. I mean, really that's one of the lenses you can look at the Bible and say, "What is the Bible about?" It's about God telling you who you are and what you should be, and how you should live because of your God-given identity. That's one way of understanding the Bible.

Maybe this will help. This is not an expensive Vos Bullitt County vase, okay? It's not expensive. It's not expensive but it is nice. It has some etched glass. It's nice. You put some flowers in this and it'd be attractive. I use this to show that we, we as human beings like to see ourselves and present ourselves as a beautiful vase. We're up on the mantle and we want the world to say, "Isn't she beautiful? Isn't he so successful? Isn't she so talented? Isn't he great?" That's what we desire, we want to be the vase on the mantle that draws all the attention and the attraction and people think we're beautiful, but is that true? Is that true? It's not what the Bible says. The Bible says is we are earthen vessels, not beautiful vases but earthen vessels.

Now what that really is not a Styrofoam cup but I just use this for an example. The earthen vessel would be like a clay pot that has some cracks and you can even see through it. You know, if you were to put a light inside of it you'd see the light coming out, you see? The truth is God says you are an earthen vessel, in fact, the Psalmist says he has compassion on us because he knows we are but dust. He doesn't see us as a vase, we're earthen vessels. But you say, "That's not very encouraging. I mean, that's not an identity-builder." Oh, but wait. You say, "The world wants this. The world wants to see me successful, no cracks, no blemishes, no weaknesses. They want to see me as a vase. Brother Van, surely people are gonna want this." Yeah, okay, until, until let's say I take \$50,000 worth of bills and I stuff them inside this cup and there's cracks in it and you can see through, and you can see, "Oh, my goodness, there's a treasure inside that." Which one you gonna pick then? You see, what the Scriptures tell us is this: we are not a beautiful vase, we are earthen vessels and what makes all the difference is what dwells inside of us. The treasure inside of us. Jesus, his Spirit living inside of us. He is what gives us value and meaning. He is what turns this earthen vessel into something of beauty. Why? Because he shines through us.

No, it's not a vase, it's an earthen vessel, and because we see this, maybe now we're ready to look closely at verse 5. Look at it closely with me, "you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine." Now here's identity, okay, we're looking at identity. First off, he says, "I want you to know it's the phrase 'all the earth is mine.'" That's God saying, "Grand Canyon? That's mine. All the gold in South Africa? That's all mine. Everything's mine. I own it all." You see, the point here is this, a king in

his domain actually owns everything but a king has his treasured possessions. He owns everything but he has his special treasure that he keeps that's special to him.

I mean, think about it this way, say, God forbid, house on fire and you've only got a few minutes to grab what you feel is most important. You don't go to the cupboard, I'm sure you don't go to the cupboard and say, "Gotta get those plastic forks and spoons." You don't run into the bathroom and go, "Get all the toilet paper, honey!" You don't do that, do you? No. No. You get your treasured possessions, right? If you've got time at all, you run and you find those things that mean the most, what your grandfather gave you, your grandmother, somebody in your family like gave you this treasured possession, you run and you get that.

You see, what we're seeing here, God is telling Israel, "Whatever your current struggles are, whatever you may feel about yourself, if you are in Christ, you are God's treasure." What you should hear here is this, your identity is, the most important being in all of the universe is saying to you, "You are what means the most to me." That's what we should hear here. Are you hearing that? You see, that will fix, that will fix your shattered, fragile identity. It will. It's designed to do that, what God says about you. Let God construct your identity, not the world, not society, not the culture. But God is giving, he's saying, "Now that I've saved you, now that I've bore you, now that I carried you to myself, let me give you an identity," but then secondly, he gives them a command.

Look at verse 5 again. "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be." Now you're gonna need to listen really closely here, okay? The first thing I want you to notice, what God has done for us is the basis for what he expects from us, okay? That's therefore, that's the therefore. "Since I have done this for you, this is what I expect of you. Now therefore." This is the first place in the Bible that we come across the expression of "keeping my covenant." What is a covenant? A covenant is an agreement. In our culture, marriage has become more of a contract when actually it is to be a covenant, agreement, a promise, okay? You see, up to this point, now I want you to follow me, real careful following, up to this point what was mainly required of the Israelites was faith and trust in God's promise. In other words, they didn't contribute a thing, they're not contributing a thing, just, "Trust me," and God comes and carries them out, but because he has carried them out, because he has brought them to himself, because he has made them part of his family and kingdom, verse 5 he said, "If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant."

Now what is God saying here and this is where we need to be extra careful, because you might change the narrative here and you might go, "Oh, oh, oh, I see, 'if you will.' Okay, if I will. The only way I'm gonna, the only way I can get into God's family is if I keep his rules and keep his commandments." Is that the narrative here? No. Listen, what is God saying here? First, this statement in verse 5 was made to people who were already saved. Listen, this statement was made to people who were already saved. Verse 4, "I carried you out. I bore you out." It was by grace. You didn't contribute anything. You trusted. This whole idea of, "If you will keep my commandments, if you'll obey me," is being spoken to people who were already saved. Don't change the narrative and think, "I've got

to do these things in order for him to accept me." No. No. We're saved by grace, through faith in Christ.

The Israelites have already been delivered from bondage and redeemed by the blood of the Passover lamb. You remember that, right? You go back to chapter 12, they trusted God, believed, put the blood on the doorpost, we'll be saved, we won't die. You see, what you should see here is, first, God rescues us from sin, then teaches us how to live for his glory. Saved first, teaches us how to live next. He saves us in Christ before he calls us to live for Christ. It's so important. It's so important that we understand this.

But secondly, he's also saying something else that we need to pick up on here. He's not calling for perfectionism. So you might read verse 5 and go, "If you will keep my rules, keep my... If you obey, if you'll do that, but you gotta be perfect." Oh, I'm telling you, I'm telling you, it is so easy to read that in there, just read it in and just assume that means perfection and you might think, "Oh, I can never do that." Is it perfection that God is calling for here? Listen, we're going to find out in chapter 34 of Exodus something beautiful about God but let's just go ahead and open the package right now. When Moses says to God, "I want to see your glory," and God says, "Nah, you can't do that. You can't do it, but I'll put you in the cleft of the rock and I'll walk by and you'll see my hinderparts," and the hinderparts were this, that he forgives trespasses and sins. Now think with me. If God is calling for perfection here in verse 5, why would he say later, "I'm a God who forgives trespasses and sins"? It couldn't be anything other than he anticipated that his beloved people would fail. Secondly, he will go on to establish a sacrificial system where sacrifices, offerings will be made for sin and failure, all of which to deal with our failure.

So God is not calling for perfectionism, he's not calling for works salvation. No, what he is calling for, verse 5 is about a trajectory of heart that embraces the responsibilities and rules of belonging to God's family and living out our identity. It's simply this, God says, "You're part of my family. You've been graced in. Now here's how you live." And the idea should be, we should be so overwhelmed and like, "What? I'm in? By grace? Me? I'm in the family of God? I am your treasured possession? Tell me what to do? Tell me how to live?" And that's what God's doing.

Let's be clear: access to God is granted as a gift of grace, God's grace, not our actions. It's the foundation for our identity, however, access to God is always transformative. Access to God is always transformative, in other words, God's grace will not leave us the way we was. Access to God will bring about transformation, therefore, who we are will show up in what we do. If we are truly his, it will show up in what we do, how we speak to others, how we treat others, how we handle our money, how we handle our time.

It will show up so God says, "Therefore, since I have carried you, I bore you out, you have an identity." Secondly, "Therefore you have a command." And finally in verse 6, a purpose, "and you shall be," notice future, "you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Notice identity leads to responsibility which leads to purpose. Now the Bible tells us that we are made in the image of God. Remember earlier when we had our

call to worship and we read where that our tongue can be so confusing. We can bless God with this tongue and then the same tongue curse people who are made in the likeness of God, or another way of saying it, in the image of God. Just so you'll know, you might be looking, "Oh, that person was so nasty. They were so mean. They were so rude. They were this. They were that." And then you just go at them, you know? What God is saying is even though, even though they're a mess, they were created in the image of God. You're gonna run into some people this week that you're gonna think, "Oh my goodness, I don't want nothing to do with you. I don't want to talk to you." They were made in the image of God.

What does that mean? What does it mean for us to be made in the image of God? Well, it means at least this. 1. That we are connected to God; that we are created for a relation to God; that we were made to represent God; that we are accountable to God. Fundamentally to be created in the image of God is about participation with God. It's about our lives being in participation with what God is doing in the world. So we were made, created in the image of God, but when Adam and Eve rebelled against God, the image was shattered. It was not destroyed but it was, indeed, shattered. Scripture teaches us that we, you, me, we were born in sin and that the image of God in us is shattered and we do not fulfill the design of our Creator. No matter, no matter, listen, no matter how many times we try to look like the vase, or no matter how many times we try to fill in the holes and the gaps and the cracks, you see, when we do that, when we do that we try to cover up our weakness and what we're doing, we're not allowing the power of God to be seen in us. We can't fix us. The image is shattered.

And what we see in verse 6, now I want you to see this as we begin to turn for home. Look at verse 6, "and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." What is God doing here? Now listen, God already knows that his image within his people had been shattered, but what he's doing, in essence, God is remaking his people as the functioning image of him on earth. God's saying, "Okay, I know there's been a mess. Things have been a mess up until now, but now we're gonna restart and here's how you're going to participate with me."

Now we know they failed, okay? We're gonna get to that in just a second. They failed, but let's at least look and see what the purpose was. It says, "you shall be to me a kingdom of priests." What does that mean? It means that every single person in God's kingdom was called to serve and worship God. Everyone. They were a people with a special closeness to God, therefore a special calling from God. Why? They were God's treasure. You, listen, if you are in Christ, you have a special closeness to God that the average person in this world does not. You are his treasure. You have a special closeness to God, therefore you have a special calling from God. You are to represent him in this world.

So they were a kingdom of priests but they were a holy nation. What does that mean? Well, we're called to be distinct, set apart, categorically different than the world around us. But Israel failed at their purpose. All of which God is telling them, he's giving them an identity, he's giving them a command and saying, "Here's your purpose." They failed,

and rather than making God known, they only conveyed confusion. Listen, if you go out of here this week and you live as if Christ is not your Lord, you live against God's design yet you say you're one of his, you will sow confusion in this world and that's not what we're called for. We're not to be people of darkness, people of light. Not people of confusion, people of order, people of design, people of purpose.

Israel failed but there was one who did succeed. In Colossians 1, you'll see this verse, "He," Jesus, "is the image of the invisible God." Just those few little words mean so much. It means this: Israel failed, you failed, I failed, but Jesus did not fail. Jesus was the perfect representation of God. He obeyed the Father perfectly. He did not sow confusion, he sowed beauty and truth and grace. He did not fail. We failed. We are not the hero, Jesus is the hero.

So what does that mean for us? What does it mean for Jesus to perfectly represent the Father, be a perfect image of God? What does that mean for us? Well, think about it this way: in the Bible it uses a lot of imagery to speak about the relationship between Jesus and his church, sometimes it uses the imagery of a shepherd and sheep, but it also uses this imagery of Jesus as the bridegroom and the church as his bride. Jesus came to gather a bride, his church. So picture that with me. Jesus came to gather a bride. He came to look for and gather a bride. But wait a minute, we were not a lovely bride that was being rolled through a grove of trees, were we? Oh no. It wasn't like Jesus said, "Oh my, look at her. Oh my, what a beauty." No. I mean, Stewart saw that in Hannah, "What a beautiful bride." But not us. No, in fact, there was nothing lovely about us. Why? Because the Bible said that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. We were not lovely. We weren't beautiful. We were enemies. We were enemies of the living God. We were, the Scripture says, alienated from God. We were not lovely. We were enemies, alienated, yet in spite of that, in his grace he came to us and he carried us. Isaiah says he bore our iniquities. He took everything sinful in us, he took all of our cracks, all of our brokenness, all our confused identity, he took it all upon himself. He bore us. He carried us. He carried us and reconciled us to God, the hero, the one who represented the perfect image of God. What we could not do, he did for us and he gives us his Spirit to work in us, to remake and restore us to the functioning image of God.

That's the work that's going on in you and me. From the day that you came to saving faith in Christ, there's been a work going on in you to remake you and restore you to reflect the image of God, to represent him well in this world, and therefore he gives not to Israel but to his church the same task. In 1 Peter 2, and we'll close with this, notice. These words familiar? These words familiar? "But you," you who? It's not Israel. The church. The called out ones. Those redeemed by the blood of Christ. "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."

What we are means, what all of this means as we close, we are what means the most to our heavenly Father. Don't forget that this week. We are what means, the church, we are what means the most to our heavenly Father therefore he says demonstrate who you are by what you do. In other words, be obedient. He calls us to obey so that we will represent

him well. We are his people and what we do will indicate who we are, and who we are will be indicated by what we do. And finally, your purpose this week, in fact for all of your days, all the days you have left, all the days I have left, our purpose is to make him known, it's to proclaim his excellencies, and you can do that because he's given you his Spirit. The hero has given you his Spirit. What you could never do on your own, you're empowered to do by his Spirit. So let's go do it.