



MT. ROSE REFORMED
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

God's Treasured Possession

Reverend Scott Johnson | September 21, 2025 | Exodus 19:1-15

Old Testament Reading

Our Old Testament reading is Exodus chapter 19, verses 1 through 15. And this is the infallible and inerrant word of our God.

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 Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain 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, you yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagle's 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.

So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord commanded him. 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. And the Lord said to Moses, Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe you forever. When Moses told the words of the people to the Lord, the Lord said to Moses, Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow and let them wash their garments and be ready for the third day. For on the third day, The Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or

shot. Whether beast or man, he shall not live. When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain. So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people. And they washed their garments. And he said to the people, be ready for the third day. Do not go near a woman.

This will be our sermon text for this morning, so you can keep your place there.

New Testament Reading

But for our New Testament reading, let's turn to 1 Peter chapter 2, verses 9 through 12. Part of this was also our New Testament reading from last week as well. But the apostle Peter, he draws directly from our passage this morning in this passage in 1 Peter 2 verses 9-12 But 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. 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. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 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. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

As you may probably know, the tallest mountain in all of North America is Mount McKinley up in Alaska. Depending on who the president is, sometimes it's called Denali, but whatever you want to call it, it is a very, very tall mountain. It's just over 20,000 feet high. But what's most impressive about Mount McKinley when you see it is that the height from the base of the mountain to the very peak of the mountain is 18,000 feet, which I understand makes it the tallest mountain in the world if you measure it from the base to the peak. And so, if you're ever up there and if you're blessed to have a clear day, which usually is not the case, but if you're able to see the entire mountain from a good vantage point, You can see that the whole mountain from base to peak, and it is a very impressive sight. It is a truly imposing presence. It towers over the entire landscape for hundreds of miles around.

And in our passage this morning, we learn about another mountain, Mount Sinai. And scholars don't know exactly what mountain In the Middle East is the biblical Mount Sinai, but whatever mountain it is, it is not nearly as tall or physically imposing as Mount McKinley. Nevertheless, in

different ways, Mount Sinai is just as imposing, just as dominating as Mount McKinley is. In a metaphorical sense, Mount Sinai towers over the landscape of the Bible. It was here that the Lord appeared to His people in a way that left them terrified. He came down in a thick cloud with fire and smoke and thunder and lightning, and there was a piercing trumpet blast. It was here that the Lord made His covenant with His people. It was here that the Lord gave to Israel the Ten Commandments, and He spoke to them in a voice that thundered. In the landscape of the scriptures, Mount Sinai towers as this great mountain of God. And it also towers over our spiritual landscape because Mount Sinai stands for the law of God. It represents the holy, uncompromising, perfect moral law that condemns us for our sin. And it is from that condemnation that we must be saved. And so in our sin, Mount Sinai towers over our conscience as the law of God that demands justice, condemnation.

But praise the Lord, we have one who has saved us from the law of God. We have the Lord Jesus Christ. And in our passage today, as we're working our way through Exodus, We have come, along with the Israelites, to the foot of this towering mountain, the mountain of God, Mount Sinai. And so we will spend much time here at the foot of the mountain. This morning, we will focus our attention on the words that the Lord speaks to the people of Israel through Moses in verses 5 and 6. And as we continue on in Exodus, we'll consider everything that takes place at this mountain. But for today, we're going to focus on what God told the people of Israel as they prepared to come nearer to Him, to draw closer to Him by coming to the foot of the mountain. But in these verses, particularly verses 5 and 6, the Lord tells the people of Israel that as his people, they will be three things, or they are three things.

Background

First of all, they are his treasured possession. Secondly, they will be a kingdom of priests. And thirdly, they will be a holy nation. And so these are the three points that we will consider this morning. But before we begin that, let's consider the background to this message by looking at verses one through four. In verses one and two, Moses describes for us how the people come to Mount Sinai. So it's three months after the Exodus, three moons after the people have been brought out of Egypt. We've considered some of their wilderness wanderings. Now they have left Rephidim and they've come into the wilderness of Sinai. And of course, that is where Mount Sinai was, the wilderness of Sinai. And even though the ultimate destination for the people of Israel is the promised land, it is Canaan. That is why he brought them out of Egypt, to bring

them into this promised land. Nevertheless, in the book of Exodus itself, it is Mount Sinai that occupies the bulk of the book of Exodus.

This is the concern that we'll have as we continue through Exodus, what takes place at this mountain. This is where the Israelites will hear the voice of God. This is where they will receive God's commandments, where he will enter into a covenant with them. In fact, they will end up spending about ten and a half months at Sinai. This is where they will build the sanctuary. This is where they will receive not just the Ten Commandments, but all of God's laws for them as a people. But when they first arrive there, it is Moses who goes up on the mountain. And the Lord tells Moses this in verses 3 and 4 about halfway into verse 3 we read this the Lord speaking to Moses 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 And so the Lord has taken the people out of Egypt. They're about to draw near to Him. And then in verse 5, He calls them to obey His voice, to keep His commandment. And we'll look at that in a moment. But first of all, in this way, in the words that the Lord says to Moses to tell the people of Israel, verses 3 and 4, He reminds them of what he has done for them. He has rescued them out of their bondage in Egypt.

He doesn't explicitly talk about the ten plagues and the parting of the Red Sea, but all of that is surely comes to the minds of the Israelites when they are reminded of how they have been brought out of Egypt, that God rescued them with these signs and wonders, that by his almighty power, his grace, he brought them out of Egypt. And he uses this wonderful image of an eagle carrying its young on its wings and describing how he brought them out of the house of bondage. Many of you, I'm sure, have read the book *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien. And there's that wonderful scene in *The Hobbit* in which Bilbo Baggins and his fellow hobbits are about to be killed by the evil goblins. And then out of nowhere, these eagles come flying to them and rescue them by picking them up and delivering them to safety. And it's that picture of an eagle lifting her young out of danger that the Lord uses to describe the way He delivered His people out of Egypt and carried them to safety. And this picture speaks of the sovereignty of God, the power of God. It reminds the Israelites that their salvation was entirely because of His grace and His power. They did not rescue themselves out of Egypt. They were doomed to destruction. They would surely have perished had the Lord not brought them out. And so He reminds them of that. And he brought them out to take them to himself, to make them his people. And now he's about to draw near to them, to speak to them on the mountain.

A Treasured Possession

And so in verse five, the Lord calls his people to obey his voice. He says in verse five, Let's stop there for a minute, verse five. And notice the order in which the Lord tells these things to the people of Israel. First, He speaks to the Israelites of the grace that they have received from Him, of the salvation that is theirs because of His mighty power. He says in verse 4, I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to Myself. And it is only after telling them how he has saved them, how he has been made his people, or they have been made his people. Only then does he say in verse 5, obey me. He says, now therefore if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant. you shall be my treasured possession and so the order is this first salvation first salvation and then the command to obey his voice the call to obedience and this is the way in which God works with us as his people first is salvation first God saves us through his grace through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ first he saves us he brings us to himself and then He commands us to obey His voice, to keep His commandment, to keep His covenant.

We've seen this over and over again, and this is one of the lessons that the book of Exodus teaches us. This is what the Spirit wants us to take from this book, at least partly, and that is that we are to see ourselves as the Israelites were in Egypt, helplessly in bondage. By nature, because of our sin, we are enslaved to sin. We are helpless in our captivity to sin and evil. We cannot rescue ourselves. We cannot free ourselves. Just like the Israelites, we're under the tyranny of Pharaoh. But through the death and resurrection of Christ, through what God has done for us in His Son, Jesus Christ, through what the Lord has accomplished for us He has saved us from that bondage. He has brought us out from under the tyranny of sin and death forever. He has carried us on eagle's wings and brought us to Him. And now, as those people whom He has loved, those whom He has redeemed, those whom He has rescued, He calls us to obedience.

And so, as Christians, like the Israelites then, so you and I, as the people of God, we are commanded to obey His voice. to keep His covenant, to entrust ourselves to Him, to walk according to His law. Again, we are not saved by any obedience that we render to God. First, we are saved by the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ, by the perfect life that He lived, by the death that He suffered for us. And even by the Spirit of God, by the grace of God, as we begin to render to Him that obedience that He requires, our obedience is never complete or perfect, and yet He calls us to obey His voice. And as we keep His commandments, however imperfectly, as we do so out of a heart that is filled with gratitude to God for His salvation, it is in

that way, by walking before the Lord by seeking to keep His commandments, that we fully enjoy all the blessings of communion with God, of knowing Him as our God and Savior. And so we are saved entirely by the grace of God, but we are saved in order to keep His commandments, and in keeping His commandments, in keeping His covenant, in walking with the Lord by His grace, seeking to do His will, it's in this way that we find the fullness of that blessedness, that peace, that joy of knowing Christ as our Lord and Savior.

And so the Lord calls His people to obedience, and then He promises them in this passage what they will be as they keep His commandments. First of all, He says that they will be His treasured possession. And this is our first point then. that is the church of Jesus Christ, you and I are God's treasured possession. He says in verse five, 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. Do you have a treasured possession? Think of what is most near and dear to your heart. And apart from your loved ones, obviously, who are your most treasured possessions in that sense, but what is it that you own that you would hate to part with? Is it something that you inherited from your parents? Is it a new car that you purchased recently or your home?

Robin and I have talked about what we would try to save from our house should it ever catch fire and the photo albums are at the very top of the list. We are old enough to still have actual prints of pictures saved in photo albums and so if there's ever a fire in our house after all the living creatures obviously are out of the house we will go in to rescue those pictures and if we do rescue those successfully I will go back in and start saving my books. And so we have our treasured possessions in our home that God has his own treasured possession. When you consider the fact that according to verse five, all the earth belongs to God, that whatever God treasures must be a true treasure. Whatever God says, this is my treasure, this is what I delight in, that must be something of near infinite value and worth simply because it is God who treasures it, it is God who values it. and that treasure is his people.

Of all the worlds that God has created, of all things in his virtually infinite, his vast universe, of all things that he has made, it is his people, his church, whom he delights in, whom he loves, whom he treasures, the people whom he has chosen in eternity. The people for whom His Son laid down His life, those who will be with Him in glory forever. This is what is near and dear to God's heart. It is His people whom He loves and treasures. And the Bible expresses this truth in different ways. And one way that the Bible expresses this is to compare the relationship

between Christ and His people as that of that fills the hearts of a groom on the day of his wedding as he sees his bride walking down the aisle. There is nothing in all the world that fills him with more delight and happiness than his bride. And that is the way that the Bible describes Christ's thoughts towards us as his people. He delights in us.

We are his bride whom he loves. I know the way that the Bible describes this is that we are the children of God the Father. You who are parents, you know how much you love your own children. You love your own children more than life itself. You would give up anything for the sake of your children. and multiply that love by infinity, and you get a sense of the love that God has for his people in Jesus Christ. You can see, or begin to see, you get a glimpse at least of just the depth of the divine love that the Father has for us as his sons and daughters. And so, as those who belong to Jesus Christ, we are God's treasured possession. brings up a question that it is good to ask ourselves. Do I treasure what God treasures? Do you treasure what God treasures? Do you love what He loves? Do you delight in that which He delights in? When you look at one another as fellow members of the body of Christ, as brothers and sisters in Christ, do you see what God sees? That this is a treasure, a delight, that these brothers and sisters are those whom God himself loves, and therefore I too should love what God loves.

And as we see others in the church in this way, as we see them as God sees them, as the apple of his eye, as his treasure, we cannot but begin to treat one another with the care, with the respect, with the love, that is due to those whom God loves and cares for and delights in.

A Kingdom of Priests

After the Lord calls his people his treasured possession, in verse 6 he says that they will be a kingdom of priests. A kingdom of priests. When I was in seminary, it happened to be in an area where a lot of Catholic people lived, and a lot of times when people found out, when I told them that I was a seminary student, A lot of times they said, oh, you're going to be a priest. I said, no, I'm married. Not going to be a priest. I'm actually going to be a minister, a pastor. I'm a Protestant. But what I could have said was actually, I'm already a priest. And I have been a priest from the moment that I put my faith and trust in Christ. And I could have said that because that is true for every single Christian. as one who belongs to Christ by faith.

You are a priest of God. And what that means is, is that by virtue of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on your behalf and through Christ, you have free, unfettered access to God the Father, to

Almighty God. You can come into the presence of God through Jesus Christ. You do not need a human priest to mediate. You can lift up your prayers to God through Jesus Christ. You can know that you are received and heard by the God who loves you, by the God who joyfully accepts you in His Son Jesus. And also as a priest, through Jesus Christ, you are one who brings your sacrifices of praise and worship to the Lord. Again, not through a human priest, but through Jesus Christ, you render to God that sacrifice that glorifies Him and that pleases Him, a sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise. 1 Peter 2.5, 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.

And so just as the Israelites, in part, fulfilled their calling and their role as a kingdom of priests by worshiping the Lord, so you and I, as Christians, as those who are priests of God in Jesus Christ, we fulfill our role, in part, by coming to the presence of God to worship Him, to offer to Him our sacrifices that are acceptable to Him through Christ. And when you consider who we are in that light, that we are those whom God has created and redeemed to be his priests, to worship him, to bring him sacrifices in the sense of thanksgiving and praise, when you consider who we are in that light, it impresses on us just how important it is that we do what God has called us to do, to worship, to worship. This is why we come here on Sunday. This is a non-negotiable for us as Christians, a top priority, to worship together. My dad often used to describe somebody who would do something very, very consistently, like a friend who played golf every weekend, he would say he does it religiously. Well, how many people would say of us they go to church religiously? But that should be so true of us. There should be nothing more important to us, if we can be, to be with the people of God, to worship Him because we are His priests. He has created us and redeemed us to be His worshipers.

But there's even more significance to this phrase, the kingdom of priests. It means even more than the fact that we can come to God through Jesus Christ, that we are called to worship Him. It also has reference to the role that we have in this world as His people. and then this promise that the Lord makes to Israel that they are to be a kingdom of priests what we see here is the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise that God made to Abraham way back in Genesis 12 verse 3 the Lord said to Abraham I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed And so the Israelites, as part of their calling as the priests of God, were to be in the world a blessing to the nations of the world, to the peoples of the world, as they worship the Lord, as they bore witness to the truth of who God is, as the true God. And the nations would be blessed through them as they saw that

example, and as they too, by the grace of God, would come to know the true God and also to worship Him. And the same is true for the Church of Jesus Christ today. We can say it in truth, and this is not, we're not somehow making ourselves look good by saying this, but we can say it truly, we are God's gift to the world as the Church.

Because it is through the Church, it is through the Church that the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ the Son of God is made known. It is God's will that this message of salvation be made known through his people, through the church. And it is through the church that the knowledge of God spreads throughout the world. And so it is through the church now that God's promise to Abraham is more and more being fulfilled that all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. But even short of salvation and the knowledge of God, the church has been the means by which the world has been blessed due to the presence of God's people in the world. When you consider it historically, the world has received incalculable benefits by virtue of having the people of God in the world, the rule of law, the dignity of man as God's image bearer, the care of those who are weak, of those who suffer, The abolition of slavery, these are all values that derive from Christianity. And these are values that have spread into different parts of the world, but they come through the church. And when you consider that, what a privilege it is that you and I have been called to be a part of this kingdom of priests. What a privilege it is to be a priest of God in the world.

A Holy Nation

Thirdly, the Lord tells us, or the Lord tells Moses to tell the people of Israel that they will be a holy nation, a holy nation. Groucho Marx once sent a telegram to a Hollywood club that he belonged to. And this is what he wrote in the telegram. Please accept my resignation. I don't want to belong to any club that will accept people like me as a member. And that kind of describes our relationship to the church, doesn't it? God says that the church is a holy nation, and we would love to be part of a holy nation, but we know that because of our own sin and unholiness, if a society that is holy accepts us as members, it's no longer holy as it once was. But what this phrase, holy nation, refers to first of all, and most of all, is the fact that God's people are set apart from the world.

That is what makes us holy, is that we are distinct, we are set apart from the world to belong to God. And so holiness, first of all, does not refer to the amount of inherent righteousness or holiness that is in us by the grace of God, but it refers to the fact that we are devoted to God,

that we belong to Him, that we are distinct from the rest of the world. So we are holy in that way. And that is why the Lord goes on to tell Moses in this passage that the Israelites were to consecrate themselves before they came into the presence of God. They were to wash their garments. They were to refrain from marital intercourse. And this is how they were to show forth that they belong to the Lord, that they were holy. These things were not sinful in themselves, of course, but at least for this season, they were to do these things to manifest their belonging to the Lord. So it's not that God chose Israel to be His people because they were holy. God did not choose Israel to be His people because they were more numerous than other peoples, because they were more gifted than other peoples, because He saw in them something better than the rest of the world. He certainly did not choose them to be His people because He saw that the Israelites were more righteous or holy than other people in the world. but he chose them out of his good pleasure, his goodwill, to be his people, and he has made them holy by choosing them, by setting them apart from the world.

One British journalist put it this way, how odd of God to choose the Jews. And the same is true for you and me and Jesus Christ. How odd of God to choose us. to belong to Him. But at the same time, because we are set apart to belong to a holy God, we also are to be holy in the sense that our lives are to reflect the righteousness, the purity, the holiness of God. So God did not choose us because of our holiness, but because He chose us, we are to be holy. We are to strive for that holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Now, the wonderful truth of the gospel is that in Jesus Christ, we already possess that perfect righteousness and holiness. It is already ours by virtue of the imputation, the reckoning of it to us through the gospel. However, at the same time, we are to strive for holiness. We are to die to sin. We are to repent of sin, to live lives that please God, that are righteous and holy according to His Word.

In 1 Peter, the passage that we read from 1 Peter, it's obvious how Peter just lifts this language right out of the Old Testament and applies these same descriptions to the church of Jesus Christ. He says in verse 9, 1 Peter 2, You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, and so on. Now, Peter is writing to a people who are living in a pagan and a morally bankrupt world. He was writing to former pagans who once shared in the corruption, the worldliness, the evils of that society. And so the Greco-Roman world in which Peter was writing, it was filled with evils that were rampant. You name it, adultery, prostitution, homosexuality, slavery, all the abuses connected with slavery, abortion, infanticide, all of that was just part of the world as it is today. And so Peter was writing to a world, to Christians living in a world filled with ungodliness, wickedness. But Peter's message to them was to be holy, He

says in 1 Peter 1, 14 through 16, as obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct since it is written, you shall be holy for I am holy.

So Peter says, don't be the people you once were. Don't be the people that surround you in this fallen, corrupt worlds, but be holy. And then later in the passage that we read, 1 Peter 2, 11 through 12, he says, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 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. So what Peter is doing here, he is connecting the holiness, the righteousness of the people of God to the salvation of others who do not yet know God. And he says that as a result, in part, by the holy conduct of God's people, this will result in those who are unbelievers now giving glory to God on the day of visitation, which means that the holiness of God's people will be used by God as a means to bring others to faith in Jesus Christ so that at the return of Jesus Christ they will give praise and thanks to Christ for the holiness and the righteousness of the lives of the people of God whom they once reviled. Because God used that holy conduct on the part of God's people to bring them to faith in Christ.

And then Peter goes on, if we were to read further along in 1 Peter 2, he goes on to show them what that holy and honorable conduct looks like in very ordinary ways. They were to show forth that they were a righteous people. They were to submit to all lawful authority. They were to honor Christ in their marriages. They were to be united in love. They were to return blessing for evil. They were to be ready to suffer for righteousness sake. And he says more. And so what Peter's saying here is this, that as God's holy nation, when we look out at the world and we see the sin and the evil that is ever present in the world around us, our first priority as a church, our first priority as the people of God is not to denounce the sin and the evil of the world. Now, of course, there is a place for the church in her prophetic calling to call sin, sin, to call evil, evil. Again, as we find ourselves in this world surrounded by those who do not know Christ, in a society that is filled with the very same kind of evils that Peter knew all about, living in that Greco-Roman world, our first priority is not even to call the world to repentance and faith in Christ. That is not our first priority, even though that is the mission of the church. That is what we are to do in this world. We are to make disciples of all nations, but that is not even our first priority.

Our very first priority, as those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, is to pursue holiness and righteousness in our conduct in the world, at home, at work, and in the church. Because if we do not, if we ourselves are not pursuing this holiness that is God's will for us, then when we call sin, sin in the world, we are only hypocrites because we have not forsaken that sin ourselves. And by the same token, if we do not pursue holiness as the people of God are preaching, the gospel will sound hollow and false. because we will fail to bear testimony to a gospel and the power of God that saves us from sin if we are not ourselves pursuing righteousness. And so we can put it this way. With this fallen world full of perishing souls, what this world needs from us as the church most of all, first of all, is for us to be the church. for us to be the people of God whom he has called us to be. A people who are pursuing righteousness, forsaking sin, living righteous lives in our homes, in our marriages, in our dealings with one another. This is what the world needs us to be.

The world needs us to be a colony of heaven here on earth. A place where there are true demonstrations of love and righteousness. A place where Jesus Christ is truly worshipped in spirit and truth. Of course, we need to proclaim the gospel. But this is even more basic. And this is how, as the church, we will most profoundly influence the world. We want to see the world change. I know you want to see the world changed. that the world would be most influenced by us as the people of God, as we are obedient to the call of God, to pursue holiness, pursue righteousness, beginning in our own hearts, beginning in our marriages, beginning in our life as families, in our life, in our dealings with one another, by being the holy nation that God has made us to be and calls us to be. Again, verse 12 from 1 Peter, 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. Let's pray.