

17th April 2016

Called to be priests - Exodus 19:1-15

If the beginning of Genesis asserts that we were *created* for worship, then the book of Exodus celebrated that we have also been *redeemed* for worship. Exodus is the dramatic account of God's rescue of the Israelites from slavery. The end point, however, is not just deliverance *from* bondage but liberation *for* worship (Ch.3:12). This all comes to a climax in Ch.19 as the freed Israelites finally arrive at Sinai. Here God comes down (in dense cloud, lightning and thunder) to dwell among his people and to offer a specific covenant within the wider Abrahamic covenant. All this is expressed in 6 beautiful verses (Ch.19:3-8), a carefully constructed poetic summary of Israel's covenant theology. In essence it is a moving revelation of God's heart for his people - to create a holy, priestly nation offering worship to him. Redemption is for the purpose of God's people returning to Adam's original priestly vocation, serving God in the garden-sanctuary.

1. There is first a beautiful description of **God's deliverance (v.4)** 'I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.' It speaks of God's soaring strength and yet his gentleness in bringing his 'brood' to safety. God's ultimate purpose was to re-establish communion. We worship both a Creator and a Redeemer.
2. What follows is a description of **God's desire (v.5-8)**. It is expressed in three terms which become highly influential in Scripture and offer important pointers about worship.
 - **'My treasured possession'** – loyalty is at the heart of worship. It speaks of God's delight in his elect people but it implies God's direct claim on their allegiance (v.5 **'If you obey me fully and keep my covenant.'**) The description in Deut.7:5-6 is in the context of a renunciation of idolatry. God looks for covenant loyalty far more than impressive music or enthusiastic singing!
 - **'A kingdom of priests'** - in worship all of us equally are called to serve God. It is not quite clear where the emphasis should be. Is it speaking about the whole nation being set apart in a priestly way or is it also emphasising that all are priests? The latter certainly seem to be part of the meaning. 'The priesthood of all believers' implies all God's people having the privilege of serving God in worship.
 - **'A holy nation'** – our worship is to impact the world. Notice the words 'Although (or Because) the whole earth is mine'...Israel is called to act as God's representative for and to the other nations. We too are called to showcase God's grace to the nations cf Peter 2: 9-10.

Home Group Questions

Read Exodus 19:1-25

1. This chapter is a climactic chapter in Exodus. As you survey the whole chapter what different (and contrasting) aspects of God's character are revealed?
2. Which elements that you have identified do not feature (perhaps as much as they should) in typical Sunday worship?
3. Sinai is famous as the place where the Law was given. But it is first the place where grace was celebrated. Re-read verses 3-8. How do you think the Israelites reacted when they heard these words and what strikes you most about these verses?
4. What do these verses tell us about what God is most looking for in our worship?
5. In what way does what happens in our lives during the week (positive and negative) affect our worship on a Sunday?
6. What do you think it meant to be a 'kingdom of priests'? And what does it mean for us today? Look up 1 Peter 2:9-10 and Rev 1:5b-6; Rev 5:9-10.
7. Do you think there are things about the way we conduct our corporate worship on a Sunday that hinder true worship. If so what may they be?
8. **'Because the whole earth is mine, you will be for me....v.5b**. What do you think is the implication of these words? How are worship and mission related?

Read together Psalm 136 where both creation and exodus are celebrated in worship and use it as you pray and praise.