

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Exodus: Set Free, Live Free
TITLE: The Weirdest Wedding Vows Ever

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 21-24
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We are in a series on the Book of Exodus from the Old Testament. Why study this book? Exodus is the Old Testament story of the salvation of God's people that points forward to the great salvation that comes to us by faith in Jesus. Exodus helps us better understand what it means for God to *set us free* from our broken, messy lives so we can *live free* in loving, personal relationship with God.

God has set Israel free from slavery, and they have just recently arrived at Mount Sinai. Israel has been given the 10 Commandments. There are 613 laws and regulations in the first five books of the Bible (called "the Law" or "Torah" in Hebrew). Not only are those 10 the first of the 613, they are also a summary of the remaining 603 commands.

But here's the question that Christians have wrestled with for years: *How do we read these laws?* They're not binding to us any more because Jesus has fulfilled Torah (Matthew 5:17-20). So, what do we do with these laws, some of which appear pretty strange at first glance?

Broadly, we should understand these regulations were part of a covenant God made with Israel. And understanding ancient covenants is hard for modern readers. However, a modern wedding ceremony is a perfect example of how Ancient Near Eastern covenants functioned. Ancient covenants like the one at Sinai had five formal steps.

1. Like a modern wedding, **ancient covenants began with a statement of purpose** (i.e. "We are gathered here today to celebrate the coming together of Charlie and Karen."). And we see this purpose in Exodus 19 when Yahweh basically says, "The purpose of this covenant is that you are to be my people for the world."
2. **There's usually a relationship story about how a couple got to the wedding day.** Also in Exodus 19, God says, "Do you remember how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself?"
3. **There are promised vows and conditions** (i.e. "To love you and cherish you in sickness and health, til death do us part."). This implies that the vows for Yahweh and Israel's ceremony are the 10 Commandments.
4. This step includes **blessings for faithfulness** (and curses for unfaithfulness). At modern weddings, there is often an encouragement to remain faithful to the vows, and that

faithfulness will result in blessing. In Exodus, the specific regulations of chapters 21-23 were part of the way to keep the 10 Commandments and live in God's blessing.

5. Just as there are "witnesses" in our modern covenant context of marriage, there were also **formal witness in the ancient covenants**. For Israel in Exodus 24, they had the witnesses of the the blood of the covenant and the book of the covenant to encourage them to ongoing covenant fidelity.

So, while this might help explain a better framework for the dozens of commands in Exodus 21-23, how does this help us appropriate them as New Covenant Christians under Jesus? Well, because Jesus fulfills the Law, we who believe in Jesus are now called not to obey the letter of the law, but to *embody the spirit* of the law. This means that we should...

1. **Remember WHY you are in the covenant.** This is about God's purpose and our vocation to partner with him to show others his grace and truth.
2. **Remember WHOSE you are in the covenant.** We belong to Jesus. We are dating Jesus. We are his, and he is ours. And as the true Passover Lamb, he has freed us and brought us to himself through his own blood.
3. **Remember WHAT you are called to.** Don't ever forget your wedding vows. And as New Covenant believers in Jesus, our call is to love God and love others. That's what we have pledged to do.
4. **Remember HOW you are called to do it.** Part of the HOW is remembering the WHY, WHOSE, and WHAT. And this HOW includes faithfully, humbly, and compassionately embodying the Gospel's love that brought you into covenant relationship with God.
5. **Remember the witnesses to the covenant.** Similar to Exodus 24, for Christians, the blood of the covenant (the cross) and the book of the covenant (the Scriptures) should stand as ongoing testaments to our vows to love God and love others.

Thinking about Exodus and Torah like this will help us as we seek to follow Jesus.

For Discussion:

1. In what ways do you see marriage as a picture of our relationship with God?
2. In your own words, how should we think about and apply these strange parts of the Law as Christians today?
3. What's one unanswered question that you might still have from today's passage?
4. How does Jesus fulfill the Law, and what does that mean for us?
5. How can the marriage illustration push you to further faithfulness and obedience to God?