

Call To Commitment

Exodus 19:1-8

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

One of our country's most beloved Presidents was Abraham Lincoln. He had the great misfortune of being at the helm of our nation during one of its most troubled times. The once United States had split in two, and the armies of the North and South were waging an incessant war that claimed the lives of more men than have died in any war since.

Lincoln felt the tragedy of this war more than anyone could have guessed. He mourned the deaths of soldiers and spent long periods visiting the sick and wounded in the Union hospitals. The constant shedding of blood was sometimes almost more than he could bear. Then, in the midst of the war, his own son died and the President was literally brought to his knees.

In the middle of the week, Lincoln did what he often did during those days, he found refuge at a Presbyterian church in Washington, D.C. He went with an aide, sat with his stovepipe hat in his lap, and tried hard not to interrupt the meeting by sitting off to the side, near the preacher's study.

The minister opened the Scriptures and taught from God's Word. And when he finished, the president stood quietly, straightened his coat, took his hat in hand and began to leave. His aide stopped him and said, "What did you think of the sermon, Mr. President?" He said, "I thought the sermon was carefully thought through, eloquently delivered." The aide said, "You thought it was a great sermon?" Lincoln replied, "No I thought he failed... he did not ask of us something great."

In the midst of his turmoil, even Lincoln understood that when you listen to God you should expect the Lord to call you to something grand and lofty. You should expect God to challenge us and to call us to something higher than ourselves. But the preacher Lincoln listened to on that day failed. He failed to challenge him. He failed to ask something great of the President and of the others present.

In our story today - Moses is the preacher and the Israelites are the congregation gathered to listen to a message from God. And in the message, God is telling them that He has brought them up out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

1. He doesn't have to remind them of the plagues that crippled the Egyptians
2. He doesn't have to tell them of the parting of the Red Sea
3. He doesn't have to tell them of the drowning of Egypt's mighty army in the sea

All He has to do is say.....**“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.” Exodus 19:4**

That's the message. But then God asks them to do something great God asks them for a commitment. He asks them to stand up and pledge their loyalty to Him. He says: **“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation...” Exodus 19:5-6**

Up until this point, God has done what He's done because of a promise He'd made to their forefathers: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. He's brought these people out of slavery in Egypt and given them an opportunity for a new life because that was the promise He had made to men who were now long dead.

But now, He speaks to this new generation of Israelites and he tells them He's wanting something special from them. He wants to create a relationship with them. A relationship that promises even greater rewards than anything they've experienced before.

God is offering to make them

- HIS holy nation
- HIS kingdom of priests
- HIS treasured possession

No other nation on the face of the earth was ever offered what He was offering them now.....But there was a catch. They had to accept His offer. Notice the word **IF** in His proposal (Look with me at **Exodus 19:5**) **“Now IF you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession....”**

IF you're willing to accept what I'm offering... you'll have everything I can give.

God was calling them to something great.

God was calling them to stand up and **MAKE A COMMITMENT** to **HIM**.

NOW, I got to asking myself: Why would God do that? Why ask the Israelites to make this verbal commitment to Him?

I mean, hadn't the Israelites followed Moses for the past month and a half? Hadn't they spent nearly 50 days in the desert depending on God for their food and water? Hadn't they walked thru the Red Sea and thru the desert following a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night as God had guided them to this mountain? Wasn't that enough? Apparently not.

This wasn't a casual relationship God was asking of Israel. This was a lifetime commitment. And this lifetime commitment called for a physical declaration of their intention to accept.

God's always been big on that sort of thing. In fact, there's a Biblical word for that

action... it's called a **"Vow"**. A vow was when someone deliberately dedicated/ or set apart something for God.

1. A Nazarite (for example) would take a vow to dedicate himself to God's service. All their lives they would refuse to drink fermented wine. They refused to touch anything that had died. They would refuse to even cut their hair. Their entire lives were dedicated to God through this vow.

2. Someone who decided to make a special offering to God (above what was expected) was said to be making a vow.

3. And, of course, when someone got married, they exchanged vows before God.

A vow went far above a promise. People break promises all the time in their lives. But when someone made a vow to God..... God expected them to keep it.

Ecclesiastes tells us: **"It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the [temple] messenger, 'My vow was a mistake.' Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?"** [Ecclesiastes 5:5-6](#)

A vow was a commitment to a special relationship with God. And vows impressed God because they were a statement of devotion and dedication. They were a statement of faith in God and His faithfulness

Marriages are an excellent example of the nature of vows. When a man and woman exchanged vows they were said to be making a covenant. Their vows were a dedication to a special relationship that no one else could take part in. They had become dedicated to one another. But why not just "live together"? Why go thru all the hassle of a public ceremony? I mean, didn't they love each other... wasn't that enough?

Apparently not! According to an article in the Washington Post, last year- People who had been divorced or separated are 27 percent more likely to have shorter lives than those who were married. **(Rob Stein, *The Washington Post* 8/20/06)**

Not only that, but **Sociologist Patrick McHenry of Ohio State University** analyzed surveys about 6 years ago that showed responses from 5,991 people ranging in age from 19 to 80. He found that symptoms of depression are more common among the single and divorced than among married couples. Why? Well, McHenry says that tying the knot provides a **"protection effect."** He speculated that unmarried couples lack institutional and familial support, and the commitment that gives married couples a greater sense of well-being. **(Reader's Digest 11/01 p. 178)**

A Reuters report from last year told of a 15 year study which found that divorce among baby boomers reduced personal wealth by 77 percent when compared with people who remained single. Married couples saw their wealth double during the same time period.

Research Scientist and author of the study **Jay Zagorsy** summed up his findings saying, "If you really want to increase your wealth, get married and stay married. On the

other hand, divorce can devastate your wealth." **Reuters, Marriage Builds Wealth More Than Being Single?, January 20, 2006**

So, divorce causes people to live shorter lives and cause the lives they do live to be less satisfying. And divorce robs people of the financial security that they'd otherwise have if they'd been able to remain married. Its little wonder God hates divorce! And its little wonder God embraces and lifts up marriage vows.

Now, this doesn't mean that "being married" makes people happy. How many of you know of people who've been very unhappy in their marriages? Of course you do. But, as Christians, we need to understand the central role that our marriage vows can make in creating successful marriages even in the midst of difficulties.

In his book, "**The Christian Counselors Manual**" **Jay Adams** tells of a man who came to him and said, "I know you hate to hear this preacher but my wife and I don't love each other and we are going to get a divorce." The preacher said, "I do hate to hear that you don't love each other, you need to repent of that and start loving each other because the Bible commands, Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and you are a Christian so you have to obey the Lord's commands.

And the man said, "Well, I just don't feel anything toward her any more." The preacher said, "Okay, lets go down to a lower level then. The Bible commands love your neighbor as your self. She's your closest neighbor. So you have to love her regardless of how you feel about her. That irrelevant."

The man said, "I going to have to be honest with you preacher, I despise her. She despises me. We can't stand the ground that we are walking on and we just cannot get along." Oh! The preacher said, "You are going to have to go down to a lower lever then. The Bible also says to love your enemies as yourselves. You have no option. You are commanded to love."

He said, "How in the world can I do that when I don't feel anything." "You are going to have to understand that feelings are irrelevant. That's the Hollywood concept of love. That is the romantic concept of love. A Christians love is Agape love. Doing the right thing regardless of feeling. So make a list of the ten things that you would do if you were madly in love with her and go and do them anyway.

One counselor said, "If you act the way you wish you felt, eventually you will feel the way you act." So go do them regardless of feeling." The man said, "I couldn't do that, that would be hypocritical. And the preacher said, "No that is not hypocrisy. That is obedience. Hypocrisy is NOT acting contrary to the way you feel. Hypocrisy is acting contrary to the way you believe."

As Christians, our wedding vows are declarations of what we intend and of what we believe. And they are declarations that we make in God's presence. In our marriage vows we are declaring our intention to make a special life-long commitment to that one person we have standing beside us.

And that's what God was asking of Israel at the base of His Mountain. He was asking for a lifelong commitment from Israel and He tells them when they do that He'll make them **“a peculiar treasure.....a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.” (Ex. 19:5-6)**

Now, that was in the Old Testament. But in the New Testament, the Bible tells us that when Jesus died and rose from the dead, there was a new arrangement.

Titus tells us that Jesus **“gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a PECULIAR PEOPLE, zealous of good works.” Titus 2:14**

And Peter wrote that we **“are a CHOSEN GENERATION, a royal PRIESTHOOD, an HOLY NATION, a PECULIAR PEOPLE; that you may proclaim the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” 1 Peter 2:9.**

And **Revelation 1:6** tells us that Jesus **“has made us to be a KINGDOM and PRIESTS to serve his God and Father— to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”**

Under the Old Testament, the Israelites were called to be

- A Holy Nation
- A Royal Priesthood
- A Peculiar Treasure

And when we became Christians, Scripture tells us that we became

- A Holy Nation
- A Royal Priesthood
- A Peculiar Treasure

We've been called to something great! We've been called to make a commitment to God thru Jesus Christ. For the Israelites, that commitment took place at the foot of Mt. Sinai. For us Christians, it takes place at the foot of Mt. Calvary!

According to **Romans 6**, God's call to that commitment begins at our baptism. Turn with me to **Romans 6** **“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin - because anyone who has died has been freed from**

sin.” (Romans 6:1-7)

When we were buried in the waters of Christian baptism we were making a declaration to God. We were committing ourselves to die to our past. And when we rose up from that watery grave, we were resurrected to a new life. Now notice what **Romans** goes on to say in verses **12 & 13** **“Therefore (because you’ve made this commitment) do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.”**

Don’t surrender to sin (He says) you’ve made a commitment to God. Therefore **“offer yourselves to God... as instruments of righteousness”** In fact, **Romans 6:20** says **“When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.”** You didn’t belong to God back then. And **verse 22** continues: **“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.”** When you became a Christian, you made a commitment at the foot of Mt. Calvary to a unique relationship with God. And it’s that relationship that makes all the difference in our lives

Conclusion: A young boy came up to his mother one evening and handed her a piece of paper. On that paper he had written the following list:

- 1- For cutting the grass: **\$5.00**
- 2- For cleaning my room: **\$1.00**
- 3- For going to the store for you: **.50**
- 4- Baby-sitting my kid brother while you went shopping: **.25**
- 5- Taking out the garbage: **\$1.00**
- 6- For getting a good report card: **\$5.00**
- 7- For raking the yard: **\$2.00** Total owed: **\$14.75**

His mother looked at him for a moment, and then she picked up the pen, turned the paper over and wrote the following words:

- 1- For the nine months I carried you while you were growing inside me: **No Charge.**
- 2- For all the nights that I’ve sat up with you, doctored and prayed for you: **No Charge.**
- 3- For all the trying times, and all the tears that you’ve caused through the years: **No Charge.**
- 4- For all the nights that were filled with dread, and for the worries I knew were ahead: **No Charge.**
- 5- For the toys, food, clothes, and even wiping your nose: **No Charge.**
- 6- Son, when you add it up, the cost of my love is: **No Charge.**

When the boy finished reading what his mother had written, there were big tears in his eyes, and he looked straight at his mother and said, "Mom, I love you". Then he took the pen and in great big letters he wrote: "PAID IN FULL" That’s the value of our relationship with Jesus. We don’t gain salvation because we’ve earned it, but because

we've made that commitment to making God our Father by accepting His free gift of salvation.