

Tuesday, July 21, 2026

Sermon Title

Exodus 19:3-6, 10-20; Exodus 20:1-17; 1 Peter 2:9

Tonight, we are going to talk about weddings.

Some of you may already have your future wedding planned. You know where it will be held, what colors you will use, what kind of food will be served, and what song will play as you walk down the aisle. The only small detail you have not figured out yet is whom you are going to marry.

Others of you are thinking, “I am just trying to survive school tomorrow. Marriage is not anywhere on my radar.”

That is okay. We are not talking about weddings tonight because I am trying to get any of you married. We are talking about weddings because understanding an ancient biblical wedding can help us understand what happened when God met Israel at Mount Sinai.

When most people think about Mount Sinai, they picture God giving Israel a list of rules. They picture the Ten Commandments as God saying, “Here are ten things you had better do.”

But what if Mount Sinai was not simply the moment God handed Israel a rulebook?

What if Mount Sinai was a wedding?

What if the Ten Commandments were not merely rules, but the words of a covenant relationship?

And what if God rescued Israel not only so they could belong to Him, but so they could join Him in His mission?

AN ANCIENT WEDDING

Imagine a young Jewish man named Reuben who has reached the age when he is ready to be married. In the ancient world, this would not have been a decision Reuben made completely by himself. His entire extended family would have been involved.

The Hebrew word for the extended family or household is **mishpacha**. The mishpacha could include parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and several generations of relatives who lived and worked together. Life was much more communal than it normally is for us.

Reuben and his family might decide that a young woman named Rebecca would be a good match. The families would meet and discuss whether the marriage would be good for both of them.

Once the families agreed, Reuben would offer Rebecca a cup of wine as a sign of covenant. By receiving the cup, Rebecca would be accepting the relationship.

After that, Reuben would return to his father's house to prepare a place for his bride. Families often lived in large compounds, so Reuben might build another room onto his father's home.

The son would work on the room, but the father decided when it was ready. Reuben might think the room looked good enough, but his father could look at it and say, "That wall is crooked. That roof is leaking. You are not bringing your bride into this room yet."

The son did not decide when it was time to return. The father did.

Meanwhile, Rebecca had to remain ready because she did not know exactly when the groom would return. It could take weeks or months. She knew he was coming, but she did not know the day.

When the father finally said the room was ready, Reuben and his family would travel to Rebecca's village. When the groom was spotted, the announcement would spread: "The groom is coming!"

Rebecca would then go through a process of cleansing and consecration. The sound of a **shofar**, a ram's horn, would announce that the ceremony was beginning.

The bride and groom would stand beneath a wedding canopy called a **chuppah**. The canopy represented the covering and presence of God.

During the ceremony, they would exchange a written covenant called the **ketubah**. The ketubah described the promises and commitments that would define their relationship.

Does any of that language sound familiar?

Jesus told His disciples, "In my Father's house are many rooms," and, "I am going there to prepare a place for you."

Jesus said that no one knew the day or hour of His return except the Father.

Jesus told stories about people waiting for the groom to arrive.

At the Last Supper, Jesus offered His disciples a cup and called it the new covenant in His blood. He said He would not drink from the fruit of the vine again until He drank it with them in His Father's kingdom.

That is wedding language.

Jesus presents Himself as the bridegroom who loves His people, makes a covenant with them, prepares a place for them, and promises to return.

But this wedding picture did not begin in the New Testament. One of its clearest examples is found at Mount Sinai.

COVENANT, NOT CONTRACT

God's covenant relationship with His people began long before Sinai. In Genesis 12, God called Abraham to leave his father's household and go to a land God would show him.

God promised to bless Abraham and make him into a great nation. But God also said that all the nations of the world would be blessed through him.

God was not choosing Abraham so that Abraham and his family could keep God to themselves. God was forming a people through whom He would bless the world.

Abraham's descendants eventually ended up enslaved in Egypt. For hundreds of years, they were oppressed by Pharaoh. They were treated like property, forced to work, and surrounded by death.

Then God came to rescue them.

God sent Moses. He defeated the power of Pharaoh. He led Israel through the Red Sea. He provided for them in the wilderness, and then He brought them to Mount Sinai.

Listen to what God says in Exodus 19:

"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself."

God did not merely bring Israel out of Egypt. He brought them to Himself.

That is relationship language.

God then says:

"Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession."

"Treasure" is the language of love and covenant. God is inviting Israel into a relationship with Him.

This is important because a covenant is different from a contract.

A contract says, "I will do my part as long as you do your part."

A covenant says, "I am giving myself to you. I am promising to be faithful."

The Ten Commandments were not given as a cold business arrangement. God was not negotiating terms with strangers. He was entering a covenant with the people He had rescued.

RESCUED FIRST

Notice the order of the story.

God did not give Israel the commandments while they were still enslaved in Egypt and say, “If you can obey these rules, I might rescue you.”

God rescued them first.

He defeated their enemy. He led them through the sea. He provided food and water. He carried them on eagles’ wings and brought them to Himself.

Grace came before commandments.

Rescue came before responsibility.

Relationship came before obedience.

Israel did not obey so that God would rescue them. They were invited to obey because God had already rescued them.

The same is true for us.

We do not obey Jesus to convince Him to love us. We obey because He has already loved us.

We do not serve God to earn salvation. Salvation is a gift we receive through faith in Jesus.

We do not live differently so that God will finally accept us. Because of Jesus, we have been forgiven, accepted, and brought into God’s family. We now learn to live like members of that family.

Obedience responds to grace.

That is what we need to remember whenever we read the commandments. God’s commands are not a ladder we climb to reach Him. God came down to rescue us.

He rescues us first, and then He teaches us how rescued people are supposed to live.

THE WEDDING AT THE MOUNTAIN

Look at what happens when Israel arrives at Sinai.

God tells Moses to go down and **consecrate** the people. They are to wash themselves and prepare to meet with God.

That sounds like a bride preparing for a wedding.

Then a thick cloud covers the mountain. The people gather at the foot of the mountain beneath the cloud of God's presence.

That cloud is like the chuppah, the wedding canopy.

Then the sound of a loud trumpet, or shofar, fills the air.

The people have been consecrated. The shofar sounds. They gather beneath the covering of God's presence. Then God gives them the Ten Commandments.

Those commandments function like a ketubah, a covenant document describing what faithfulness in the relationship will look like.

Listen to how the commandments sound when we hear them through the language of covenant:

"I am the God who rescued you. Do not give your heart to other gods. Do not replace Me with an image you created. Treat My name with honor. Set aside time to rest in My presence. Honor your father and mother. Protect life. Protect marriage and sexuality. Do not take what belongs to someone else. Tell the truth. Do not spend your life wishing you had someone else's life."

These are not random restrictions. They describe a faithful relationship.

Imagine someone getting married and saying, "I love you, but I do not want this relationship to affect any of my decisions. I still want to live as though I am single. I will spend my time however I want, date whomever I want, and make every decision without considering you."

That would not sound like love.

Love changes how we live.

That is why Jesus says in John 14:15:

“If you love me, keep my commands.”

Jesus is not saying, “Earn My love through obedience.”

He is saying, “Your obedience reveals that your love for Me is real.”

Obedience is not the price we pay to enter a relationship with God.
Obedience is how we respond to the relationship He has already given us.

God’s instructions were also teaching Israel how to stop living like Egypt.

Egypt taught them that powerful people use weak people. God taught them to protect the weak.

Egypt taught them that people were only valuable when they produced something. God commanded them to rest.

Egypt taught them to take whatever they could get. God taught them to be generous.

Egypt built its kingdom through fear, violence, and oppression. God wanted Israel to demonstrate a different kind of kingdom.

God was teaching former slaves how to live as free people.

A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS

Why did God rescue Israel and enter into a covenant with them?

Was it simply so they could enjoy being God’s chosen people while everyone else remained outside?

No.

God says in Exodus 19:

“You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

God was looking for a people who would represent Him to the world.

A priest stood between God and the people. A priest helped people understand what God was like, helped people experience forgiveness, prayed on behalf of others, and cared for those who were in need.

God told Israel that the entire nation was supposed to live like priests.

Hundreds of years later, Peter uses the same language to describe followers of Jesus. First Peter 2:9 says:

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

Peter is quoting Exodus 19.

He is telling followers of Jesus, “This is your identity. You are a royal priesthood. You are God’s treasured people. You have been called out of darkness so that you can put God’s light on display.”

That means this calling belongs to us.

You have been called to be a priest in your school, on your team, at your job, in your family, in your friend group, and online.

That does not mean you need to wear a robe or stand behind a pulpit.

It means your life should help people see what God is like.

BE THE BLUE THREAD

God once told His people to place tassels on the corners of their garments. These tassels were called **tzitzit**. Within each tassel, they were to include a blue thread.

The tassels reminded them of God’s commands. The blue thread reminded them of their calling as a kingdom of priests.

When they looked down and saw the single blue thread standing out among the others, they were reminded, “I belong to God. I represent Him. My life is supposed to be different.”

The biblical word for holy is **kadosh**. It means set apart or different.

Being holy does not mean acting as though you are better than everyone else. It means belonging to God and therefore living differently.

A blue thread does not stand out because it yells at all the white threads.

It stands out because it is different.

That is what your life should be like.

When everyone is spreading gossip in a group chat, you refuse to join in.

When everyone is making fun of someone, you defend them.

When cheating is easy and no one would ever know, you choose honesty.

When people treat dating like a game, you treat others with dignity.

When everyone wants attention, you ask whether your words and posts honor Jesus.

When your teammates are blaming one another, you encourage them.

When someone new walks into youth group, you learn their name and help them feel welcome.

You do not have to announce, "Look at me! I am holy!"

Just be the blue thread.

Live in such a way that people begin to wonder, "Why are they different? Why did they forgive me? Why did they tell the truth? Why did they sit with me? Why did they help me?"

Then you can point them toward Jesus.

PUT GOD ON DISPLAY

A priest helped people understand atonement and forgiveness. Today, we do not offer animal sacrifices because Jesus became the complete sacrifice for sin.

But we still help people understand what Jesus has done.

There are people around you who believe God could never love them. They think they have failed too badly or gone too far. They feel dirty, unwanted, forgotten, or beyond forgiveness.

Your calling is not to stand over them and remind them how badly they have failed.

Your calling is to point them toward Jesus.

You can tell them, “Jesus gave His life for sinners. Jesus offers forgiveness. Jesus can make you new. You do not have to hide from God.”

A priest also stands in the gap and prays for others.

When Israel sinned, Moses pleaded with God for mercy. On the cross, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them.”

That is the heart of a priest.

Priests do not simply talk about people. Priests pray for people.

What would happen if you began praying for your classmates instead of only complaining about them?

What would happen if you prayed for the person who gets ignored?

What would happen if you prayed for your teachers, your teammates, or even the person who hurt you?

Praying for someone does not mean that everything they did was okay. It means you are placing them in God’s hands.

Priests were also involved in caring for those who were poor, oppressed, or in need.

You may think, “I am a teenager. I do not have many resources.”

But you have more than money.

You have time.

You have attention.

You have a seat at the lunch table.

You have influence.

You have the ability to listen.

You may have the courage to invite someone into your group.

Sometimes the most valuable thing you can give another person is the feeling that they are not invisible.

Putting God on display means showing people His mercy, truth, generosity, justice, welcome, and love.

RESCUED FOR RELATIONSHIP, SENT ON MISSION

Let's put the whole story together.

God rescued Israel from Egypt and brought them to Himself.

At Sinai, He entered a covenant relationship with them.

The commandments described what faithfulness in that relationship would look like.

Then God gave them a mission. They were to become a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, and a people who put Him on display.

The same pattern appears in the gospel.

Jesus rescues us from sin.

Jesus brings us into a relationship with God.

Jesus teaches us how to live.

Then Jesus sends us into the world to represent Him.

You were not saved simply so you could attend church and wait to go to heaven one day.

You have been rescued for a relationship and sent on a mission.

You have been called to put God on display.

You have been called to point hurting people toward Jesus.

You have been called to pray for others.

You have been called to care for people in need.

You have been called to be the blue thread.

The question is not merely, “Do you call yourself a Christian?”

The question is, “Can people see what God is like by watching the way you live?”

Can they see His faithfulness in the way you keep your promises?

Can they see His mercy in the way you forgive?

Can they see His truth in the way you speak?

Can they see His generosity in the way you share?

Can they see His welcome in the way you treat outsiders?

God is not asking you to save the entire world by yourself. Jesus has already done the saving.

He is asking you to be faithful in the place where He has put you.

Your classroom can become a place where God’s character is displayed.

Your team can become a place where God’s character is displayed.

Your friend group can become a place where God’s character is displayed.

Your home can become a place where God’s character is displayed.

Your life can become a blue thread that points people toward the God who called you out of darkness and into His wonderful light.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning, we talked about a groom offering a cup to his bride.

On the night before Jesus went to the cross, He took a cup and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.”

Jesus was offering us a covenant relationship.

But He did more than make promises. He gave Himself for His bride.

Jesus carried our sin to the cross. He died in our place. He rose from the dead, and He offers forgiveness and new life to anyone who trusts in Him.

He is preparing a place for His people, and one day He will return.

Until then, we have been called to remain faithful.

We do not obey Him because we are terrified that He will stop loving us.

We obey because He loved us first.

We do not serve others to earn a place in His family.

We serve because He has already brought us into His family.

We are His treasured people.

We are His royal priesthood.

We are the people He has called out of darkness and into His wonderful light.

God is putting the world back together, and He is inviting us to join Him.

Will you be the blue thread?

Will you put God on display?

Will you point hurting people toward Jesus?

You have been rescued for a relationship.

And you have been sent on a mission.

Let's pray.