

January 28, 2024

*Preparing to Meet with God (Come As You Are?)*

Text – Exodus 19

Congregational Reading – Exodus 19:2 - 6

## Introduction

This morning, we are going to examine the people of God three months after they left Egypt just before Moses went up into Mt. Sinai to meet with God and receive the Ten Commandments (see Map). The people were going to permitted to approach the mountain where God was; they could get close, but they would not be permitted to go up into the mountain. Only Moses and Aaron were permitted to go up, and eventually, it would only be Moses.

In this chapter, we will see that God gave strict instructions for the people as they prepared to meet with God. They were about to approach near to His presence and He wanted them to be sanctified, or set apart, for the experience. This would not be as every other day; it would be a special day; a day of reverence and holiness; a day of worship.

As we examine this Scripture, we want to see what applications that we can make to worshipping God corporately within the context of the New Testament church. We will have to be careful, however that we do not go so far as to put the New Testament church back under an Old Testament Law. We don't want to make any interpretations for the church that were solely for Israel in the period of the Wilderness wandering. But there will be some broad principles seen within this passage that we can draw from today.

## Read Exodus 19

### I. Israel was Peculiar to God (vs. 1 – 8)

#### Notice – v. 5 – “peculiar treasure.”

In these verses, God was making a covenant with the People of Israel. His offer to them is found in verses 4 – 6, and their reply is found in verse 8. God promises that He will make Israel a “peculiar treasure above all people,” and “a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.” In response, the people promised that they will obey God. After this agreement, or covenant, is agreed upon, God will then give them His commandments through Moses.

The phrase, “peculiar treasure,” is translated from one Hebrew word (סְגֻלָּה – cəgullah – [seh-goo-lah']) which means “a valued or treasured possession.” Sometimes we use the word “peculiar” today to refer to something in a derogatory way, but here it just has the idea of something that is different, unique, or special. In the context of these verses in Exodus, the peculiar treasure that

God is referring to is Israel, the people that He had just redeemed from Egypt “on eagles’ wings.” God uses this phrase, “peculiar treasure,” one other time in reference to Israel:

*“For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, [and] Israel for his peculiar treasure.” (Psalm 135:4)*

The Hebrew root word (הַגְּלִיּוֹת – cĕgullah) behind the phrase has also been translated into other English phrases that have a similar meaning, such as: “special people” (Deuteronomy 7:6), “peculiar people” (Deuteronomy 14:2; 26:18), and even “jewels:”

*“Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.” (Malachi 3:16-17)*

In all of the these Old Testament examples, the reference is to God’s People, Israel.

In the New Testament Book of Hebrews, there is an allusion to this idea, also in reference to Old Testament believers:

*“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. ... These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and **confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.** For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.” (Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16)*

*Strangers and Pilgrims* doesn’t just mean that they were from a geographically distant place. It means that they were very different from the other inhabitants of the land. They were peculiar.

Now I want to make a leap here into other New Testament verses and broaden the application of that phrase “peculiar treasure,” to include Christians. Twice the phrase, “peculiar people,” is used specifically in reference to New Testament believers:

*“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this*

*present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself **a peculiar people**, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee."* (Titus 2:11-15)

*"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy."* (1 Peter 2:9-10)

God considers His people today to be a peculiar treasure to Him just as He did (and still does) the Nation of Israel. Notice, however, that He put a caveat in all these verses, regarding how and when He especially sees His people as a peculiar treasure. In Exodus 19:5, it was conditioned on the fact that Israel obeyed God's voice and kept His covenant. In Titus 2:14, it relates to the fact that these believers were redeemed from iniquity, purified, and zealous of good works, and that they [*denied*] *ungodliness and worldly lusts, [and lived] soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.*

In 1 Peter 2:9, these peculiar people are said to "*shew forth the praises of God,*" meaning that their lives were to glorify God.

If you are saved, you are a peculiar treasure to God. You are different from other people who do not have that special relationship with God through faith in His Son. You are not better in yourself than other people who do not know Him, but you are certainly seen by God as something peculiar, very special to Him. You are one of His jewels. Shouldn't your life (and mine) reflect that special relationship? Shouldn't the way we live here on earth "shew forth the praises" of the God who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Sad to say that many of us are hiding our light and trying to blend in with the rest of those that are still in darkness. Ought we not rather embrace the fact that we are peculiar and special to God? It may be that we will then be used of Him to draw more people to Christ.

## **II. Israel Was Instructed to Prepare for Their Meeting with God (vs. 9 – 15)**

Notice v. 14 – "sanctify" (שִׁדְּדוּ from שִׁדְּדָה - qādaš) the people were sanctified, which means "to consecrate, sanctify, prepare, dedicate, be hallowed, be holy, be sanctified, be separate." This day that they were going to meet with God was a special day; it was not a day like every other day; it was a day that would be set apart for worship.

Application - Today – our special day that is set aside for worship is Sunday. It is the day that we remember Christ's resurrection. We meet corporately on Sunday. It is even called "the Lord's

Day” in Revelation 2:10. For the Christian, it should not be an ordinary day; it is the special day that we gather corporately to enter the presence of God. It is a day that should be sanctified, or set apart, from the rest of the week.

Notice also in v. 14, they were to wash their clothes. They were going to meet with a thrice holy God; they were to try to remove as much of the filth of this world from their garments. One Bible commentator put it like this: “the inward preparation for meeting with God was mirrored in the outward actions of maintaining bodily cleanliness.”<sup>1</sup> They used to joke in the old days about taking baths on Saturday. Why was it Saturday? Because Saturday was the day you prepared for Sunday.

Application – Israel was to prepare their clothing when they were entering into God’s presence. Should not we at least recognize today that entering God’s presence, particularly on Sunday morning for our main worship service, is a time when we should be set apart as well? Should we not be giving our best attention to the Lord? Even to the extent that we consider ahead of time what we will be wearing. I am not advocating here for any particular dress style here, but it wasn’t too many years ago that the terms “Sunday best” or “church clothes” were common parts of our Christian communication. Ladies, I am not saying that you must wear a long dress, though you should dress femininely and modestly, which are both biblical principles regarding attire for ladies. Men, I am not saying that have to have a suit coat, shirt, and tie in order to worship God, but shouldn’t you give some consideration to your appearance when you enter into God’s presence.

Notice in v. 15 – “come not at your wives” – Although I cannot be absolutely sure, it seems as if Moses was commanding husbands and wives to refrain from physical intimacy. They were to be focused on God, not their own pleasures.

### **III. Israel Experienced Partially the Presence of God (vs. 16 – 25)**

You will notice here the people could only approach so far to the presence of God. There were boundaries. There were things that could and could not do. They could only watch from a distance. They would be killed if they actually touched the mountain. I bet they kept their children very close to them. Only Moses and Aaron could get close to God’s presence.

However, today it is different. You and I who are saved can enter into His presence whenever we want:

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur Jr., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 123.

*"19 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; 21 And having an high priest over the house of God; 22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) 24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." (Hebrews 10:19-25)*

But I must caution you that even though you and I can approach unto God as often as we like, we must remember that we are approaching a holy God.

## **Conclusion**

Years ago, I wrote a blog article entitled "Come as You Are?" I read it to the folks the other day in our Noon Zoom prayer meeting. It was suggested by a couple of people that I preach a message based upon the article.

I want to close by reading the original article that I wrote. I believe it sums up the heart and spirit of this passage very well:

Notice in chapter 19 the reverence the people had when they were entering into the presence of God. They washed their clothes, they abstained from physical intimacy, and they trembled. I bet there was not one person from the congregation that was not present. I bet the children were silent, being kept under very close watch by their parents. The people understood that they were meeting with the omnipotent Creator of the universe. He is holy and He was not to be approached by the people of Israel in a flippant and carefree manner. They came with a reverent attitude of worship.

Fast forward now to today. Many of God's people show up late, if they show up at all. They arrive wearing shorts and ripped tee shirts. The children are running all over the sanctuary while their parents are obliviously engaging in their own conversations about anything and everything except the worship of God. We have certainly come a long way down as far as our reverence to God is concerned. We sing half-heartedly, talk during prayer and special music; and then sleep when the Word of God is being preached: all the while wondering how long this is going to take. We've got more important things, like football, to worry about today. Do I exaggerate or is this an accurate description of the attitudes of many in our churches today? God help us!

Now, I wish to be very clear about this: I do not consider myself to be pharisaical or legalistic at all. I understand completely that salvation comes solely through a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, beginning with faith in His shed blood at the cross of Calvary. I know that God is not impressed when we show up at the church with our white shirts and ties, or our long, modest dresses. I get that. I know that God dwelleth not in temples made with men's hands, and that the believer's heart is the temple of God. And I realize that God looks upon the heart; and if a man shows up at church in shorts and a ripped tee shirt because that is all he has or perhaps because he doesn't know better, I think God is pleased. I know that I am. Believe me, I am thrilled that people just show up at all, and I am not the least bit concerned about the way they are dressed. I am, however, very concerned about the heart attitude of God's people today when they come to worship the infinite, omniscient, omnipresent, and all-powerful God. It's not a ball game that we are coming to on Sunday. We are not gathering together simply to meet with friends, or to hear a man speak. We are corporately entering into the presence of God. We have become way too casual and careless. People give more thought when they are meeting with earthly dignitaries or when they are going to a friend's wedding. God help us to remember that worship is a holy undertaking. Let's give God our very best attention. I want people to come as they are, but I want them also to realize Who it is they are coming to worship, and I also want to see them leave a little more conformed to His image. I think this "seeker sensitive" thing has gotten way out of hand. Should we not be a little more "Saviour sensitive"?

