

Paradise Promised

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[0:00] Please open up your Bibles again to the book of Exodus. We're going to continue reading from the beginning of chapter 24 to verse 18.

! It's on page 64 of the Blue Church Bible. Exodus chapter 24 from verse 1.

Then he said to Moses, Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. Moses alone shall come near to the Lord, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.

Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do.

And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel.

[1:21] And he sent young men of the people of Israel who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar.

Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient. And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, Behold, the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet, as it were, a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness.

And he did not lay his hand on the chief man of the people of Israel. They beheld God and ate and drank. Then the Lord said to Moses, Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.

So Moses rose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up to the mountain of God. And he said to the elders, Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Her are with you.

[2:47] Whoever has a dispute, let him go to them. Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days.

And on the seventh day, he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel.

Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain, and Moses was on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights. Amen.

God's holy, living, and active word. Please keep that page open. It's quite a long passage, 23, 24 today, so help if you've got that open. And let's pray that we would hear God speak to us in our hearts.

Father, we thank you that your word is indeed living and active, that it pierces through the division of bone and marrow, soul and spirit. And Father, we know that we are open like a book before you today.

[3:57] And so we pray, Father, that your word would search our hearts. Lord, we pray that your word would correct us where we need corrected, comfort us where we need comforted, that you would heal us where we need healed, and stretch us where we need stretched.

We thank you, Lord, that each of us is known to you. And even as we read your word, we pray that your word would be reading us and speaking, Lord, into our lives.

This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I hope that you have enjoyed and benefited from our summer series in the Ten Commandments.

If you've just joined us this morning, you're new to Bon Accord, we've been walking through the book of Exodus in Sunday mornings this year. In July, we landed in chapter 20, and then we hit the brakes because Exodus hits the brakes, and we've just been sitting in the Ten Commandments and the unpacking of them in these legal rulings and case law that God gives us in the following chapters.

And that's taken us to some uncomfortable but important and maybe even surprising places as we've seen slavery, abortion, pornography, economics, social media, to name a few of the areas that we've touched on.

[5:25] God has shown us that his good and loving rule extends to every corner of human life and existence, not least our own hearts. And if it's felt like its own little mini-series in the middle of our bigger series, well, that's right in a way.

In chapter 24, verse 4 just now, we read Moses wrote down the words of the Lord. That is everything since at least chapter 20, verse 22, and the Lord said to Moses, dot, dot, dot, and what Moses has written here is called the book of the covenant.

And so in a sense, chapters 20 to 24 are a mini-series. It's a little book in a big book, the book of the covenant. And I think seeing that helps us in three ways as we kind of emerge from it today.

Firstly, it reminds us that everything we've heard from the end of chapter 20 has been God speaking directly to Moses. That is, if you can imagine this, the speech marks open in chapter 20, verse 22, and the Lord said to Moses, open speech marks.

And they don't finish until chapter 23, verse 33. If you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you, close speech marks. And so Exodus claims explicitly that chapters 20, 21, 22, 23, everything that's been preached on on Sunday morning since the start of the summer was written down verbatim from God's own mouth as he spoke from Mount Sinai.

[7:10] Of course, we believe the whole Bible is God's word, but here is God's direct speech. It comes to us with a sense of immediacy and urgency. And that helps us give proper weight then to the application today as we hear what God wants us ultimately to do with what he said.

Secondly, it helps us see that Moses was faithful over all God's house as a servant. The Lord told him at the beginning of the little book, thus you shall say to the people of Israel.

And so now at the end he does. Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and the rulings. He took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. Moses has a massive role.

At this point in God's great rescue story. He brings God's words to his people and he brings God's people before God. And it is important we see he played that part faithfully and obediently.

Again, that will help us as we apply what we're hearing this morning. And finally, seeing this is the book of the covenant tells us what God's great purpose is in all of this.

[8:30] We might have just thought, wow, we're wading through all of these random rules and statutes and legal cases and this and that. It is to make a covenant with his people.

That is God's great goal in all of this has been relationship. In this book of the covenant, he's introduced himself to his people.

I am the Lord your God. And he's told them who they are to him. You are my treasured possession among all peoples, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

He's told them what he's already done for them. I'm the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. And so because of that, he's told them how he wants them to respond to him now in the present.

That's the Ten Commandments as applied and illustrated by the case law that we've been in. In our passage this morning, God tells them what he wants for them in the future, how he'll bring them to the promised land, what to expect when they get there.

[9:40] And finally, the relationship is launched, so to speak. The covenant is cut. And God calls Moses and the leaders of the people up the mountain to sign and seal the covenant relationship with a meal.

It was paradise lost. It is not yet paradise regained. At this point, it is paradise promised.

But it will only be paradise, says the Lord, through a right relationship, covenant with him. So with that big relationship in mind, let's hear then this morning, firstly, a promise made.

Stick with the angel and enter the promised land. Having spelled out his law, the Lord lifts Moses' eyes to the horizon. What does he promise going forward from here?

Just have a look. Chapter 23, verse 20. Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and bring you to the place I've prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice.

[10 : 56] Do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him. But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.

So the message is clear. Stick with the angel and enter the promised land. But hang on. Where has this angel come from?

What? Who is this angel? Why is it him that we're to listen to and obey? Now those are not incidental questions. The Lord is saying here, he will deal with his people based on how they relate to his angel.

If they carefully obey his voice, the Lord will defend them. If they rebel against him, he will not forgive them. Suddenly it seems that the whole covenant relationship and rescue between God and his people is hanging on this so-called angel.

Or is it suddenly? See, we have met him before. He hasn't claimed the spotlight. And yet this angel has been there at all the key moments in Exodus up to this point.

[12 : 14] When the Lord first revealed himself to Moses in chapter 3, verse 2, it says, the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire in the midst of the bush.

When the Lord saved his people from Pharaoh at the Red Sea, we read chapter 14, verse 19, then the angel of God who was going before Israel moved and went behind them, coming between Egypt and Israel.

And now the Lord is promising to take them safely onto the land, and it will be my angel who goes before you. That all seems, does it not, like a big part for simply an angel in the rescue of God in the Old Testament.

And indeed, the text suggests that this is not just any angel. See, the actions and words of this angel are the words and actions of God himself.

At the burning bush, when the Lord saw Moses, he, God, not the angel, called to him out of the bush. At the Red Sea, not only the angel, but the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud and by night in a pillar of fire.

[13 : 35] And now looking forward, the Lord says of his angel, my name is in him. And so they will be delivered if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say.

See, the text wants us to ask, is it the angel doing those things or is it God doing it? And the answer seems to be, yes.

It's both. Either can speak and it is the words of the other. Either can act and it is the other acting too. As you relate to the angel, so you relate to the Lord and vice versa.

Who then can this angel be? Listen to Jesus in John chapter five. Jesus said, whatever the father does, that the son does likewise.

For as the father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the son gives life to whom he will. The father judges no one, but is given all judgment to the son, that all may honor the son just as they honor the father.

[14 : 48] Whoever does not honor the son does not honor the father who sent him. A uniquely close relationship, both speaking and acting as one, to honor the one sent is to honor the one who sent him.

The two answers normally given, therefore, to the question of the angel are either that it is a pre-incarnate revelation of God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ.

Indeed, the word angel literally means messenger, so we're definitely not saying that Jesus is just an angel, like the JWs over the road. The other option is that the angel is a type and shadow of the saving work of God's Son.

However, the letter of Jude in the New Testament puts it bluntly as if this should have been obvious when he writes, I want to remind you that you once fully knew it that Jesus, who saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterwards destroyed those who did not believe.

Hang on. Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt. It's not a stretch then to say that in this angel we see as in a room richly furnished but dimly lit.

[16:15] Something of the triune nature of God at work for the salvation of his people, Father, Son, and in a couple of weeks Holy Spirit. Now, if you tuned out of all of that, wake up now, okay, lights are on.

That wasn't theological hair splitting. It is actually really all important for us to know who it is we're dealing with, is it not? because God's message is stick with the angel and enter the promised land. We, like them then, are not being asked to give our obedience merely to a creature, even an angelic creature. We are being asked to give our most careful attention, our full obedience to God himself as he has revealed himself.

Even they knew that, that as they devoted themselves to the angel and his voice, it was ultimately God and his voice that they were following. So, as we stick with the Lord Jesus, who saved a people out of Egypt, pay careful attention to him and obey his voice, follow him to the place he's prepared for us, God promises he will guard us on the way and he will bring us safely home to the promised heavenly land.

If we rebel against him and disregard his voice, we will not and indeed cannot be forgiven because he is the one that God has sent alone to save us.

[17:55] You know, there was no option, was there, in the desert for the Israelites simply to love God and not carefully obey his angel, just as there is no option for us to simply love God and ignore Jesus.

That is the unmissable, the unmistakable message of the whole Bible. Whenever we wonder what it means to truly belong to the living God, it's right there on the surface of the page.

Recently, a group of us met up as parents to talk about how we can support each other in raising our children in the Lord. We got a hold of a whole bunch of really beautifully illustrated Mark's Gospels from the Scottish Bible Society to take home to kind of read as families.

And the delivery arrived back in July, so I cracked it open and over the summer in our house we've been road testing it. We hit chapter 8 the other week. Jesus said he must be killed and after three days rise again.

Whoever wants to be my disciple, he said, must say no to themselves. They must pick up their cross and follow me. Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and the good news will save it.

[19:16] Hmm. I don't know about that. Is picking up a cross and following Jesus really the way to live forever with him, save my life?

Turn the page, chapter 9. Jesus and the disciples were up a mountain. A cloud appeared and covered them. A voice came from the cloud. It said, this is my son who I love. Listen to him. Listen to him. How can I be saved? I must listen carefully to Jesus, obey his voice, and follow him to the cross.

One of the things we worked hard on over the summer was a refresh for Little Lambs. It's by far the biggest outreach opportunity we have as a church family.

Friday morning, if you're free, mums and toddlers, carers, dads in the church hall, and people from all different backgrounds come in and see a different kind of community than they see in their other play groups.

[20:20] Muslims, Hindus, agnostics, nominal Christians, atheists. And as we thought about what to do, these verses from John 10 came to mind.

These are our key verses for the Little Lambs this year. Jesus said, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. Can those families on a Friday morning be part of God's people without listening to the voice of Jesus?

Jesus says they can't. But that's why he came. But through his death and resurrection, they would listen to him and follow him as true little lambs of the one good shepherd.

He is the only way to join God's flock, his people. Friends, can we reach the promised land, get into heaven, new creation, if we don't stick with Jesus?

[21:32] Jesus said, in my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself that where I am you may be also.

Thomas said to him, Lord, we don't know where you're going. How can we know the way? Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth and the life.

Nobody comes to the Father except through me. you can reject it but nobody can deny that that is the clear message of the Bible.

When the Lord says he sent his angel to guard us on the way and bring us to the place he's prepared, it's not like picking up a hire car at the airport with a sat-nav and you might turn the sat-nav on and listen to its instructions or if you're feeling quite confident you might turn the sat-nav off and put it in the glove compartment and ignore it.

No, you will not make it to the new heavens and the new earth without paying careful attention to the one God sent and following him.

[22 : 53] If you rebel against him, set your heart against him, close your ears to his voice, ignore him, he will not forgive you. But if you carefully obey him, follow him, listen to him, believe in him, he will bring you safely home to heaven.

Stick with him, enter the promised land. It's really important we see that the destination here is a shadow of the world to come in these verses and not life here and now.

Because if you are following Jesus this morning, you could read verses 25 and 26, couldn't you, of chapter 23 and think, well, we've gone, of course, somewhere along the way. Look there with me. You shall serve the Lord your God and he will bless your bread and your water. I'll take sickness away from you. None shall miscarry or be barren in your land. I'll fulfill the number of your days. No more hunger, sickness, death. That's where Jesus is taking us. But it's not where we live right now, is it?

[24 : 06] It's not where the Israelites lived right then. It's not the world that we live in yet. But it will be where you live, says the Lord, if you stick with my angel.

In a small way, the people then who did that did know the material blessing of God in the promised land. But we know that that was only ever hinting towards an infinite and eternal blessing in a world redeemed from sin and death.

He will wipe away every tear from our eyes and death will be no more. Neither shall there be mourning or crying or pain anymore when the former things have passed away.

Brothers and sisters, do not look at the wilderness now and wonder why it isn't paradise. God says, look to the one he sent to lead you through the wilderness of this life and through him look forward with great expectation and a sure and certain hope of paradise in and through him on the other side.

Do not be tempted away from him by other voices that promise the world now and therefore drift away from Jesus and forfeit the world to come. There will be, says the Lord, other gods to bow down to.

[25 : 33] Don't listen to them. Get them away. Shut your ears. If you don't, he says, they will surely be a snare to you. They will make you sin against me. Don't stick with my angel.

Hedge your bets and you will not make it to my promised paradise. Brothers and sisters, a reminder, isn't it, that following Jesus is not simply a case of setting out with him and then spending a few years or decades doing our own thing and suddenly being teleported into heaven when we die.

Being saved is about setting out with Jesus and sticking with him all the way home. And so if you are walking at a distance from Jesus today, be warned by God's word, you are risking everything, everything for a more comfortable pace, an easier route, a bit of personal space.

Lose sight of him, stray from his path, you may not make it home. There's a word in our passage that we don't often use, is there, when we talk about our faith or religion more generally in the world. It's the word careful. Did you see that? Careful. Pay careful attention to him if you listen carefully to his voice. Friends, I wonder how far would you say that word could describe your own following of the Lord Jesus today?

[27 : 19] How careful are you in your relationship with him? How careful in your obedience? How carefully do you listen to his voice in the Bible? Is your devotional life a vague nod in his direction?

Or does it involve careful study of his ways and his word? When you sin, are your prayers broad and sweeping? Or, in the words of the confession, you confess your particular sins particularly?

In your day-to-day is the question at the top of your mind, how can I live for Jesus in this situation, in this relationship? Or is it how can I serve myself and bolt a bit of Jesus onto the side as I go?

In the immortal words of Paul, look carefully then how you walk. Only if you stick close to Jesus will you be with him in paradise.

But does that then mean that it is just kind of dry barren wilderness on the way until we get there? Well, no. Our next point assures us that we have God with us on the way as he calls us into his holy presence here and now.

[28 : 32] This is our second point. A covenant cut, come up to the covenant Lord and enter his holy place. So Moses now comes down from the mountain, verse 3.

He told the people all the words of the Lord. They respond, we will do them. So Moses builds this altar at the foot of Mount Sinai. Sacrifices are made and if you're a bit squeamish look away at this point.

He collects the blood from the sacrifices and throws half of it over the altar representing God and he throws the other half over the people and says behold the blood of the covenant the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.

What's going on? Well covenants were not written in the ancient world, they were cut. Animals were slaughtered, blood poured over both parties. It was a sign they had entered into a life and death relationship.

If one was to break the covenant on their head be it. So God and his people are now bound by God's word to be faithful to their new relationship.

[29 : 40] relationship. And now that the relationship has been signed with blood it needs to be sealed not with a kiss but with a meal.

Now the next bit we tend to just blank out because we don't really know what to do with it. But look what happens next. chapter 24 verse 9 there are Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and 70 of the elders of Israel went up and they saw the God of Israel.

They saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as if there were a pavement of sapphire stone like the very heaven for clearness. Now in only a few chapters time God's going to tell Moses man shall not see me and live and yet now they do.

Moses does think it's worth saying he did not lay his hand on them as if usually he would stretch out his hand in his holiness against them but here they didn't.

So what is going on? Well Moses gives us a clue when he describes what's under God's feet as like the very heaven for clearness.

[30 : 50] It is as if God has stretched heaven down to meet with them on the mountain and there they ate and drank with him. Now where else would that have happened in the knowledge of most Israelites?

Well it is in the soon to be holy place of the tabernacle in God's tent. There was the table the bread of the presence the lamp stand where the priests would eat the sacrifices as a sign of the peace they had with God his friendship welcome hospitality towards his people.

Come in says the Lord come in eat and drink with me at my table. Outside of course in the courtyard the ordinary Israelites the altars the burnt offerings for atonement the peace offerings to show the peace they have with God just like at the foot of the mountain.

mountain. And within the holy of holies only the priest the high priest could go once a year into the very throne room of God. Verse 12 the Lord said to Moses come up to me on the mountain and wait there that I may give you the tablets of stone which I have written down.

Now only Moses can go further up further in to the very top of the mountain through the veil of the cloud into the near presence of God on behalf of his people.

[32 : 21] And you see what's being dramatized here is the reality in a sense of what happened every time God's people came to the tabernacle to the tent with their sacrifices and it is glorious.

Mount Sinai if you like is a kind of vertical tabernacle or more properly the tabernacle is a horizontal Sinai. The point is that in this covenant relationship with God signed in blood sealed with a meal his people have what?

Access to him. To draw near to him. To eat and drink with him. They have peace with God through the types and shadows of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They have God's friendship, his hospitality, his welcome. Not only when they get to the promised land, but every step of the way home.

Not only for us in heaven and the new creation, but every day of this life we spend following the Lord Jesus Christ. There's a great hymn we sometimes sing.

[33:33] It says in one verse this, O Christ, he is the fountain, the deep sweet well of love, the streams on earth I've tasted, more deep I'll drink above.

I wonder, what are you looking forward to most about heaven? Whatever it is, heaven is only a forever deepening of the very blessings of the Christian life that we enjoy now.

Do we long to see God's face? Well, as they saw the glory of God through Moses, so now we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Do we hunger for the feast of heaven? As they ate and drank with God through the priests, so we are fed by Christ, our great high priest, inwardly by his word, and yes, as we take the bread and wine on our lips and hear the words, this is my blood of the new covenant poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Do we long for heaven on earth? Well, as they entered into the sapphire courts of heaven through Moses, so we are raised with Christ, and even now, says Paul, seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

[35:01] If you have been raised with Christ, says Paul, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, set your minds on things that are above, not on things on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Brothers and sisters, in so many ways, we expect more than God has promised us in this life, life, but in other ways, we expect far, far less than he has promised.

He calls us to come to him today through Christ, our great high priest, to enter the holy place of his presence, to know and enjoy him each and every day as we journey through this world to the place he's prepared for us in the world to come.

Do we know now what it is to have all pain, sickness, sadness, and grief taken away? No. But is that future reality a deepening of the blessings we have right now in Christ?

Yes. A joy that cannot be stolen by circumstance, a security that cannot be rocked by the changing of this world, a love that will not let us go, in the here and now presence of our God and Savior.

[36:30] And in his son, Jesus Christ, he calls us now today to come near and dwell with him in peace. And so, brothers and sisters, if we say yes, we draw near to God through Jesus, we can taste today the promise of paradise to come.

for it is ours, yes, more deeply then, but even now here, through Jesus Christ, our Savior, and in the presence of his Father and ours, if our trust is in him.

Let's pray that we would taste that sweetness of him. Let's pray together. Amen. Amen. Our Father, we thank you so much for the promise of the world to come for those who love you.

Lord, we confess, so often it feels so far off, we don't see and feel it in the way that we expect.

Father, we pray that we would be trained to look to the Lord Jesus, guide our eyes to him, we pray.

Help us to look to him and through him to the promised world to come. help us, we pray, each of us not to stray from him. Help those of us, Lord, who are at a distance from him to grow nearer to him.

[37:58] Help us, Lord, we pray those of us who are not following to truly follow him, for he is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to eat except through him.

Guide us, we pray, our great Redeemer, for we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.