Prepare to Meet Your Maker

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[0:00] Many of you will have seen The Prince of Egypt, slightly dated now, but still a classic.! Those of you who haven't seen The Prince of Egypt, it is an artistic interpretation of the story of! God's great rescue of them, up to about chapter 15 of Exodus, and the point where the people walk through the walls of water, and then they come crashing back down, and the people sing for joy.

Then the scene cuts to Moses walking happily down a mountain, holding two stone tablets in his arms, with the Ten Commandments on them. And the movie ends. Hopefully, even if we have never thought up until now that that is odd, perhaps now we will. What happened, we think, to the grumbling?
The bread, the water, the battle. In fact, we wonder what happened to the golden calf. It's not until at least chapter 34 that Moses could be pictured smiling as he came down the mountain with the Ten Commandments. The first time he came down, he threw them onto the ground and smashed them, because God's people had already broken God's commands before the ink was dry.
But of all the scenes to cut, chapters 19 and 20 seem like the most glaring omission, because the Lord has told us time and time again in this book that what happens in our passage today and next week and the next 20 chapters after that is the whole point of his rescue.
The very reason he brought his people out of slavery, that they would know him, that they would come to him, belong to him, serve and worship him.
[1:54] Now it's interesting that that's the bit that often gets cut, not only in movies, but also sermon series, and more so, I think, in our own minds. The bit that we're mainly interested in is what God's people are saved from.

Exodus up until now has been Old Testament greatest hits, hasn't it? Freedom from slavery, darkness, enemies, grumbling, death. The bit we're less familiar with, if we're honest, less interested in, is what God's people are saved for.
How can this only be halfway, we think? 20 more chapters of Exodus to go, what else is there to happen? Brothers and sisters, everything, everything is left to happen. This is only the beginning of the story.
I think that reflects something of the way we think of our lives as Christians, too. If you've turned and put your trust in the Lord Jesus, you have been saved from spiritual, slavery, darkness, enemies, sin, and death.
That is half of the best news that we could ever hear. But so often we think of it, don't we, as the whole of the good news, as if our freedom from our old master's sin were the end point of the story, instead of the beginning of our freedom to serve our Savior, the Lord.
[3:28] Well, today in our passage, the Lord turns to stage two of his rescue plan. Stage one has been completed. Out of slavery, stage two is just beginning, into a new and better slavery.

In the coming chapters, Israel will meet her maker as never before. And in our passage this morning, the Lord prepares them to meet with him.
And so as we come to this turning point in the book, he invites us today to ask, too, do I truly know him? Am I ready to meet him?
Am I in a right relationship with him? Exodus says, prepare to meet your maker. There are three parts to that in our passage this morning, beginning with verses one to nine.
Receive a new identity from him. The movement into a new section of the book is marked by the people's movement into the wilderness of Sinai.
[4:31] That's made a really big deal of here. If you remember way back to January, we saw God reveal himself to Moses in the burning bush and tell him, I will be with you, and this will be the sign that I have sent you.

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When I've brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain. So, chapter 19, verse 2, they came to the wilderness of Sinai.
There Israel encamped before the mountain while Moses went up to God. God's people have questioned many a time on the way whether the Lord was really with them.
Early on, Moses turned to the Lord in desperation. Why did you ever send me? If they ever needed a sign that God is true to his promises, well, this was it, that they are standing at the foot of the very mountain that God vowed he would bring them back to.
His rescue package, as it were, has been signed, sealed, and delivered. His people are now officially redeemed. And the Lord wants his people to know it.
[5:40] And he does that by giving them a new identity. I guess we've seen this kind of thing maybe on TV. Earlier in the year, I watched a series called Steel.

Without giving too much away, it's about a heist that goes terribly wrong. And one of the accomplices, at one point, is offered a way out. A new name, a new passport, a new identity.
If she can buy her freedom, redeem herself, then she can start a new life. But without that new identity, her freedom won't last long.
There's no point in her being rescued if she's going to be haunted by her old life. She'll only end up trapped again. And the Lord is doing something similar here, but with a couple of key differences.
For one thing, his people have not had to buy their own freedom. But the Lord has done it for them.
Have a look at verse 4. Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel, you yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagle's wings, and brought you to myself.
[6:50] From beginning to end, the Lord has done it all. The only thing that his people contributed was that they saw the Lord do it, which is no contribution at all.

As Moses told them at the time, the Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent. That image of being carried on eagle's wings is a really striking one.
At the end of Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Bible, as Moses sings to God's people one last time, he describes God's rescue of them like this.
He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness, he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.
Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, the Lord alone guided him.
[7:51] No foreign god was with him. It's a very beautiful picture of God's almighty care for his people as he saved them. There they were in the howling waste, or void, and the Lord fluttered or hovered over them like an eagle over her chicks.

Interestingly, the only other place in the Bible we get those two words together is in the opening words of Genesis. The earth was without form and void, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
What's Moses, the author of all those books, saying, as God created the earth out of nothing, so he formed his people out of emptiness. He found them in a howling waste, fluttered over them, carried them on his wings, brought them to himself.
They are, in a sense, his new creation. Brought from darkness to light, out of chaos into order, from emptiness into fullness. And as he named his creation in the beginning, so now he names the beginning of his new creation here.
Therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.
[9:23] To be really clear, the condition there, if you will obey me, it's not a repayment scheme to pay back God for their rescue. The Lord has said it's done.

No, what he's saying here is that if his people are willing, he will take them as his treasure. The groom has got the bride to the wedding day, calmed the nerves, silenced her doubts, made sure she's eaten enough and drank enough water.
Now comes the question, will she take him to be her wedded husband? Of course, if she does, there is a responsibility on her to live as his wife, not to break her vows.
But if she does, she will be his treasure. Here, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, his rose among the thorns. That is the question the Lord is putting to his people through Moses here.

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Will you be mine? If you will, though all the world is his, they will be his in a special way.
[10:36] This is another big difference, isn't it, from getting a new identity to cover your tracks. The whole point of that is that you disappear. But this identity that God gives his people is all about them pressing deeper into relationship with him.

They will be his treasured possession, his kingdom of priests, his holy nation. That's who they are because of whose they are, the holy gods, holy people.
The first people who read Exodus would have known exactly what it meant for them to be treasured and holy and priests. Inside the tabernacle, gleaming gold, fragrant incense, beauty, radiance, set apart to be God's throne room on earth, his courts.
The priests set apart for his service, going in and out of his presence through the curtains. Here they are told by God that as the priests are to the people.
So now the nation will be to the world. A nation that lives in God's presence, their way of life, beautiful in his sight, their worship, fragrant to him as a doorway through which the world could see and enter into God's presence as well.
[11:56] They will be set apart among all the families of the earth to be his and through them he will bless every family of the earth.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord has saved us for himself, set us apart to be his own and from the moment we become his we gain a new identity.
And just as the people of Israel came into that identity through Moses, so we enter our new identity in Jesus Christ. So in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 Paul can write, therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation.
The old has passed away, behold the new has come. All this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself. Like them we belong to a new creation, a new humanity redeemed from the curse of sin and death.
Like them too our identity is no longer as slaves of darkness. But as sons, children of God in Christ, God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts crying, Abba, Father, so you are no longer a slave but a son.
[13:14] And if a son, then an heir through God. Or, as we heard at the very beginning of our service from 1 Peter 2, like them, we in Christ are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people to his own possession, that we may proclaim the excellencies of him who saved us from darkness to light.

Friends, there is no better birth certificate, no better passport, no better ID to carry in this world than the one that our God gives us in Christ.
He calls us his treasure, holy, blameless. That is an identity far more worth having than the fragile, shifting personas that we grasp at and strive to keep for ourselves, and he gives it to us for free.
What a great thing that in every changing season of life, however we feel, and in all the spiritual ups and downs that we go through, to know that you are God's treasured possession, his precious child, his new creation.
If you belong to him this morning, he simply wants to remind you who you are now in Christ. And if you're not yet in him, just look at the new you that you never knew you could be.
[14:44] However stained or messy your past is, today you can be washed clean and holy, set apart from God. Whatever your job is, maybe you're studying, raising children, you're working or unemployed, you can be a priest in his kingdom, fit to enter his presence and be the way in for others who see his work in your life.

However small or unvalued you feel, however unseen you are by others, you can be God's treasured possession, his child, part of his bride, his church.
When we are saved by putting our trust in Jesus' death and resurrection, we are united with him and he gives us a glorious and unchanging new identity. The only question is, will you be his?
Well, you say yes to a new, right relationship with him in and through Jesus Christ. All the Lord has spoken, said his people, we will do. Let me invite you today, whoever you are, to receive this new identity from the Lord.
And so, be ready to meet him. This is our second point. Read with me in your Bible from verse 10.
When Moses told the words of the people to the Lord, the Lord said to Moses, go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow.

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[16:11] Let them wash their garments and be ready for the third day. For on the third day, the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. Now, we might wonder why this day is different from all the days the Lord had been among his people.

Of course, he was very much present when he fought for his people's freedom in Egypt. And he was with them on the way through the wilderness, the pillar of cloud and fire.
But all the way along, there has been someone standing between God and his people. Moses. God has acted and spoken through Moses and his brother Aaron to the people and the other million Israelites relied on them to be the go-between.
But now the Lord will come down on Sinai and speak directly to his people. They will hear his voice and see his majesty in a way they never had before.
They were about to be exposed directly to the holy presence of God. And so they needed to be ready. Now I imagine, I might be wrong, that you don't have a nightly routine of washing and changing your clothes before you sit down to watch the 10 o'clock news.
[17:29] Even though there is a very real risk, isn't there? That there could be a story about his majesty's government or indeed about the king himself or his family we don't usually have direct exposure due to royalty.

Normally we are separated from the king by a screen or people who speak for him. But if you were invited to Balmoral to meet the king, then I take it that you would wash and change your clothes. There would probably be guidelines about where you could go, how to approach him, where to sit, and so on. That's what these instructions to be ready are about. Israel has been summoned into the presence of the great king of all the earth, this time not through a screen or even a spokesperson, but face to face.
And so they are to wash and dress in clean clothes, verse 10. Not go too near the mountain or touch it, verse 12. Wait to be told to come by a trumpet blast, verse 13.
Perhaps confusingly to our ears, not go near a woman, verse 15. I take it that that simply means that they were to abstain from sex.
[18:45] You'll be glad to know there is absolutely nothing in the Bible about women being unclean or separate. But we're told in Leviticus that certain bodily fluids would make both men and women unclean and so unfit to come before God.

The key word in all of this, though, is in verse 10 and it's repeated in verse 14. Consecrate. Consecrate is not a word we very often use.
It means to set something apart as holy because God is holy and they were being set apart for him. Now, maybe when you saw the title of this point, you were bracing yourselves for me to give you loads of instructions about how to be ready to meet with God, what to wear, where to sit, when to come and so on.
Thankfully, for all of our sake, I don't need to do that and nor should I because if we're in Christ, well, God has already set us apart as holy for himself.
The only washing that we are told to do in the New Testament is with the water of baptism, which itself is a sign of the washing clean of our soul.
[19:59] The main thing we're told about what to wear is that we're to put on Christ and clothe ourselves with humility. We're told about boundaries and limits between us and God and that there now are none, that we can come directly to him in the name of Jesus.

And we're told that far from being unclean, food, drink, marital sex are things to thank God for and receive gladly. Brothers and sisters, if you put your trust in Christ, you are fit to enter his presence. You are holy. He has consecrated you, set you apart for himself and nothing can now defile you or muddy you in his sight.
Now that's not often how we think about holiness, is it? But actually that's the main way that the Bible speaks about holiness, not as something that you gradually become over time, but a tag, a label that God puts on you, something he calls you, holy to the Lord.
In Christ Jesus, we have been washed, we have been clothed, we have been drawn near, we are clean in his sight and holy to him. So as we hear the Lord calling his people to be holy and come to him, let our hearts respond, that's me.
[21:23] how often do our hearts condemn us when God draws us near rather than rejoice in his call? When you hear the call to worship on a Sunday, when you hear his encouragement to pray in the week, when you hear his promise of entering heaven and the world to come, we can say to

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ourselves, he's calling me to come because he's set me apart as holy to himself in Jesus.

and when we hear our old slave masters calling us back into sin and idolatry, it means that we can say back, that's not who I am anymore.
You know, even if Pharaoh were to come riding through the wilderness to recapture God's people, they could now answer him back, I used to be a slave of your evil, but now I am the Lord's treasure. I am a priest in his kingdom, I am holy to him, his firstborn son. You can call me a sinner, a slave, cursed, unclean, but that's not who I am anymore because God calls me holy.
Friends, if we're in Christ, that is the best answer that we can give to our temptations, our sins, the idols of our hearts when they come calling. We don't just have a new set of rules or a new lifestyle, but we have a new identity.
[23:01] Sinful thoughts and desires still well up in our hearts, but that's not who I am anymore. And those old masters don't have any claim on me or my obedience because now I belong body and soul in life and in death to my faithful savior, Jesus Christ.

Friends, if you know who you are in Christ, the Lord says, be who you are in Christ. This week, let's renew our resolve to live out our identity as his holy people.
And finally, let us stand in awe of his majesty. Let's hear this again from verse 16. On the morning of the third day, there were thunders and lightnings and the thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast so all the people in the camp trembled.
Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln and the whole mountain trembled greatly and as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him on thunder.
[24:22] The Lord came down on Mount Sinai. It's a truly awesome sight. Thunderstorms, earthquakes, wildfires, these are things that we cannot control.

They overwhelm us. We feel our smallness in the face of such unstoppable and immense forces. When the Lord of heaven came down on Mount Sinai, the way he chose to reveal himself was through all of that at once.
It's a sensory overload as the God of creation comes to meet his people. It's not just his majesty on display, it's his kingly majesty.
Now, the smoke and the fire, they're familiar, aren't they? They have been led by a pillar of smoke and fire all the way through. Interestingly, I'm told that is how an ancient king would lead his army through the land using a smoke signal created by a burning pot of fire.
Well, now that smoke signal comes to rest on the mountain. The king is in residence. The trumpet blast is also from that world. It would have signaled the king's approach louder and louder like a fanfare.
[25:38] But of course, this is no ordinary king. This is the lord of all the earth, the king of kings, whose approach makes the very earth and sky tremble.

Friends, behold his greatness, his majesty, his immensity, his glory, as he comes down to his people, and his people are summoned before him.
Now, perhaps we're thinking, if I had been there and seen that, well, of course, I would tremble too. It would be easy to stand in awe of God if I'd seen all of that. And indeed, as we heard earlier, Hebrews chapter 12 confirms that we haven't come to a mountain like this that can be touched, a blazing fire, darkness, gloom, and a tempest, and a trumpet, and a voice who made the hearers beg that no further words be spoken to them.
We are not standing at the foot of Mount Sinai. But what are we told? Lest we think that we are missing out, Hebrews assures us that we have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to innumerable angels in festal gathering, to the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.
We, here and now, are in the presence of the self-same God, who is a consuming fire, but who does not reveal himself to us in outward majesty, but in unseen glory.
[27:27] glory. We do not need to see it ourselves, do we, for it to be who he is. We are in the presence of angels, the church triumphant in heaven, the same God and savior who we meet in Exodus meets with us now, but now standing between us and him is not Moses, but Jesus, the

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mediator of a new covenant.

covenant. We are sprinkled not by the blood of bulls and goats, but by his own blood to wash us clean of our sins. Friends, how much more glorious is this mountain than that mountain?
We are no less in the presence of the great king, only now he meets us not in smoke and fire, but by the Holy Spirit, who is God himself. Not with the blaring sound of a trumpet, but by his living and eternal word, not only in all his greatness and glory, but in his gentleness and grace.
Surely then we come to God in Christ, not with less awe and trembling than they did, but with more. Is that how we have come to him today, in awe of our great God of grace coming down to us in Christ and by his spirit?
Is that how we live our lives before him day today, indwelt by his Holy Spirit, set apart for him forever? The Lord has not gotten less holy with time, and so Hebrews exhorts us, let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.
[29:16] Brothers and sisters, let us learn as his people to stand in awe of God's majesty. Exodus leaves us watching Moses make the steady climb up the mountain to meet with God as his people wait with bated breath and trembling to hear his word.

What will he say? Come back next time and prepare to meet your maker. Let's pray together.
Almighty God, we bow before you and worship you, the great and awesome God.
Forgive us, we pray, when we think little of you. Forgive us, we pray, when we do not give ear to your word. Forgive us, we pray, when we do not think of ourselves as the people you have called us to be and made us in Christ.
Lord, how often we live as if we were the old self and not the new, when you in Christ have given us freely a new life to live, a new identity in freedom and holiness.
[30:36] Help us, we pray, to know who we are in him and to live as we are in and to glorify him and enjoy him. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

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