

# Establishing the Relationship

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Preacher: Ali Sewell

- [ 0 : 0 0 ] If you've got your Bibles, it'd be worth keeping them open in front of you as we look through that together. If there are some parts of that that feel slightly kind of brutal or shocking in what we just read, yeah, kind of keep those in your mind, and hopefully we'll be dealing with some of those issues later on in what we're talking about this morning.
- But first, I don't know if anyone here has seen the film *The Shawshank Redemption*, a really good film. It's about a guy called Andy Dufresne, who is wrongly in prison serving two life sentences for murders that he didn't do.
- About halfway through the film, he shares this desire that he has, this seemingly impossible dream of living in a small village in Mexico on the Pacific coast, of doing up a fishing boat, and of taking tourists, taking guests out to sea.
- This incredible, and yet this impossible life. If you've not seen the film, and you don't want me to ruin the ending for you, you can put your fingers in your ears now. You've had about 25 years to watch it, so I don't feel too bad.
- But yeah, as the film goes on, Andy manages this incredible escape from Shawshank Maximum Security Prison. He finally crawls his way to freedom out of a sewer.
- [ 1 : 1 9 ] And there's this great scene where he kind of bursts out into freedom in the middle of the night, in the pouring rain, standing there as a free man, free from this unjust imprisonment that he'd been going under.
- And yet that's not the end of the film. The film doesn't finish until we get the chance to see Andy on the white sands of the Pacific coast, restoring this boat, preparing for this new life ahead of him, this new life that he'd been dreaming of.
- And really, the book of Exodus, in some ways, is similar. We've had this great rescue. We've seen this incredible escape. We've seen the people freed from slavery in Egypt.
- And yet this is not the end of the story. It doesn't finish there. The second half of the book of Exodus is really all about, well, what have these people been saved for?
- What was the point of this great rescue? Why has God rescued his people? And we're going to see it. It wasn't just to kind of leave them wandering about. It wasn't just so they could go off and do their own thing.
- [ 2 : 2 9 ] It was so that they could have the most incredible thing you can imagine, a relationship with the God who created the universe.
- That is the goal here. It's not freedom so that these guys could just be their own people. It's freedom so they can be God's people. This great rescue so they can have this great relationship.
- And that is what the second half of Exodus is all about. And this morning we see that relationship established, the foundations of that relationship, the beginning of this new life for the people.

And so before we dig in, it's always kind of helpful to stand back and ask that question, well, so what? You know, why is this kind of historical event interesting for us? And really the reason is this, that the Bible tells us that as humans we've got all sorts of problems and I'm sure you're really aware of all sorts of things that are going wrong with you.

But the biggest problem is this, that our relationship with the God who made us is broken. Now we've spoken a lot about how God offers us a rescue from so much of what is wrong in our lives, and that's true, but the incredible part is that this rescue is not the end of the story.

[ 3 : 47 ] This rescue that the Bible speaks about is so that we too can have this relationship with God. The big picture of the Bible is not just that God gets rid of what's bad, but he gives us the best thing, knowing him, being his people, having this relationship.

And so we're going to see this morning, as this relationship is established, really three things that are at the very heart of it, three things that are at the heart of being God's people.

And the first thing is this, and we see this in the passage, we see it in the book of Exodus as a whole, that God's people are rescued by grace. God's people are rescued by grace.

Grace is kind of one of the great words in the Bible. What does it mean? It means a love or a kindness that could never be deserved, that could never be earned, and yet which is freely given.

And so in this passage, there is a lot of instruction, aren't there? We're going to look at the Ten Commandments. If we'd read on into chapter 21, 22, 23, 24, we'd find even more kind of regulations working out the details of these Ten Commandments.

[ 4 : 59 ] But it's so important we never lose sight of the fact that God's people are rescued by grace. This is not a passage saying, look, here are some rules, and if you keep them, then I'll rescue you, then I'll love you, then you'll deserve it.

Remember, this rescue has already happened. The people are free. We've spent 18 chapters looking about that, about how God took the initiative, how God made a way, how God has rescued his people, not because of what they've done, but because of his grace, because of his love for them.

Now, just in case the Israelites had forgotten that, and we've seen before how they seem to forget quite easily, but God reminds them again in these chapters. Have a look at chapter 19, verse 4.

The very first thing God wants Moses to say to the people, to tell them, you yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

I've rescued you, God's saying. Have a look at chapter 20 and the Ten Commandments. Well, what's so important for people to remember before they have these commandments?

[ 6 : 09 ] Well, look at verse 2. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. I've rescued you, God says. And the commandments that follow are all built on that foundation, the rescue that God has done first by his grace.

I don't know if we have any kind of major take that fans here. This is God really saying, never forget where you're coming from. I could kind of break into song, but I'll just leave it there. You know, this is God saying, remember, these rules is not what is going to make you my people.

I've made you my people, don't forget that. I've rescued you by grace. Don't lose sight of that. Well, as we've seen so many times, what's true in the book of Exodus, it is true, what's true for the people of Israel, it is also true for Christians today, it is also true for the church today.

Remember, as we've been saying, Exodus is kind of like that scale model of the gospel. It gives us a picture on a local scale of what God is going to do on a universal scale, and has done on a universal scale through Jesus.

And so just the same today, God's people are rescued by grace. That's the foundation of Christianity, but I think also something which is so easily forgotten or overlooked about what a Christian is.

[ 7 : 33 ] You know, what is a Christian? How would you answer that question? How would your neighbors answer that question? How would the people out on the street answer that question? Is it just someone who comes to church? Is it someone who acts in a certain way?

Is it people who have certain values or morals? You know, all of those things might come from being a Christian. But what is a Christian? Well, the Bible's really clear.

It's someone who's been rescued by grace. Someone who, just like the Israelites, has recognized their helplessness, and has accepted God's rescue.

The New Testament, that's the part of the Bible written after Jesus, has kind of fulfilled this rescue that Exodus is pointing towards. The New Testament says this, while we were still sinners, that means that while we were still people who were opposed to God, while we were still people who wanted nothing to do with God, who were going our own way, who were trying to kind of worship ourselves rather than God, and just getting ourselves in a total mess that we couldn't get ourselves out of.

The Bible says, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While we hadn't earned it, we were rescued by grace.

[ 8 : 50 ] And really knowing that, it is the key to the beginning of the Christian life. It begins when we say, we put aside our own efforts to kind of earn a relationship with God, to think that we're good enough, that we can kind of gee ourselves up, and instead say, no, no, I just need that gift, that free gift, that grace that comes from God.

And that's the beginning of becoming a Christian. It's also the ongoing pattern of the Christian life. The moment we start to forget that it's all down to grace, well, kind of one of two things happens.

Either we become very proud, you know, we're kind of God's people, because there's something good about us. We're just that little bit better than kind of people out there. We've sussed this out for ourselves. Well, grace says, no, there's no space for pride.

We're only here because of what God's done. Well, if we don't move towards pride, perhaps we go the other way. We can move towards despair. We say, I'll never be good enough for God. I can never reach that perfect standard.

God would not be interested in someone like me. But again, grace says, don't despair. It's true. We can't be good enough for God. But our relationship with God is not about our achievement, but it's about Jesus's.

[ 10 : 03 ] It's about, as we said earlier, that he has reached that perfect standard. And he did that in our place. And so really that, I think, sets Christianity apart from any other religion, any other worldview, which will always say that, you know, you have to do enough.

You have to earn whatever you're going to get. The gospel's unique because it's not about what we do, but about what Jesus has done. And really that's the foundation of Christianity.

That's the foundation of the book of Exodus. All that we've looked at so far, God's people are rescued by grace. And yet that is not the end of the passage.

That's not the end of the book of Exodus. God's people are rescued by grace in order that they might live as his people. And that's what I want us to see secondly here.

God's people are rescued by grace, number one. And number two, God's people are to live distinctively. And to live distinctively for a purpose. You see this, have a look here in verses five and six of chapter 19.

[ 11 : 05 ] The people of Israel are to obey God's voice. They're to keep his commandments, this covenant he's made, this promise he makes with them. So that, verse six, there'll be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

I just want us to think, what does that actually mean? A kingdom of priests. A priest was a quite kind of specific role. It was someone who, I suppose it's best, easiest to say, they represented God to the people.

Someone who kind of connected the people and God together. So the people came to the priest and God worked through the priest and through that, the people met with God. And the point here that God is making is that this whole nation, his whole nation of Israel was supposed to be a nation that revealed God to all the other nations who connected the people around them with God so that, as we saw last week, the outsider could be brought in.

So that, as we saw last week, God could have this relationship with all sorts of people, people from every different tribe and tongue and nation, people from every different walk of life. And the question is, I suppose, how is that going to happen?

How are God's people going to be this kingdom of priests? What's going to happen is they live a kind of distinctive life, as they stand out and as they show really a better way to live that points people to God.

[ 12 : 28 ] And that's where the Ten Commandments come in, how to live as God's people. Remember, this isn't how to become God's people, but how to live in response to this gracious rescue, how to live out this calling to be a nation of priests.

We talked about the Ten Commandments earlier in the catechism that we did. I'm sure there's some of you thinking, isn't Ali incredibly well organized just to fit all these things together like that?

I really appreciate it if anyone is thinking that. I'm very flattered, and you're very wrong. But it is great how these things have all kind of come together, yeah, and they tie together. We could pause here for the next kind of ten weeks and look through these commandments one by one, and that would be helpful.

And yet that's not actually what we're going to do. What I want us to see is just really think about the kind of the bigger picture of this kind of distinctive life that they give us. It's really, as we were saying earlier, that these commands are about loving God, numbers one through to four, and then loving other people, numbers five through to ten.

And the important thing to see for us this morning is that these come hand in hand. These commandments all come together. Loving God and loving people can't be separated.

[ 13 : 46 ] And so as a church, we want to be, and we speak about being a community that loves other people well, that it's a welcoming community, that's a serving community. And yet that can only come if we first love God well.

If we have him as our number one. And really that's what the first commandment, kind of the key commandment, is all about. Verse three of chapter 20, you shall have no other gods before me.

And perhaps we read that and we think, well of course, we don't kind of follow other gods. Or we look at that second commandment, don't make idols. We say, well of course we're not going to make an idol. Actually the Bible says that we're constantly trying to put things in God's place.

And they become other gods. They become idols. And it's when we fail there that we fail everywhere else. It's when we break that first commandment that we then go on and we break the others.

What does that look like? Let me try and give a couple of examples. It's when the God of comfort takes, when the God of a comfortable life takes over from the true God.

[ 14 : 51 ] You know, when that becomes our ultimate goal, when that becomes kind of an easy life, the thing that we hope for, that we're striving after. Well it's then that we start to kind of envy other people, isn't it?

The stuff that they have. The lives that they live. The ease that they seem to have. It says we break that first commandment, serving a God of comfort, that we start to break that tenth commandment.

Coveting, wanting what other people have got. It's when the idol of being kind of popular becomes our God, becomes the thing that we need, the thing that will really make kind of life worthwhile.

Well that's when we start to not murder, but kind of drag other people down, isn't it? Make ourselves look better at their expense. Jesus says, again in the New Testament, that actually, not only are we not to murder, we're not to say bad things about people.

He says that's just, you know, those things are basically just the same. It's breaking the sixth commandment. We could think of loads more examples, but the point is, whatever we put as number one, whatever God we're worshipping, well it shapes how we live the rest of our lives.

[ 15 : 57 ] It's not kind of the God of the Bible or nothing, it's the God of the Bible or something else. Bob Dylan has a really insightful song and the chorus says this, you're going to have to serve somebody.

Yes indeed, you're going to have to serve somebody. Well it may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're going to have to serve somebody. He's saying, and the Bible would back this up, you know, everybody has that something or somebody that they put as number one that they're seeking after, that they worship ultimately.

It's only if we serve, only if we have as number one the true God that the rest of life makes sense. it's only as we follow a God who rescues us through his incredible grace, who gives us what we don't deserve, who provides us with everlasting hope and security, it's only as that God is number one that we're really then freed to love others by sharing that love that we've received with them.

It's only then we can live this distinctive life as a kingdom of priests which point people to the goodness of God. And so as a church we're called to be that royal priesthood who reveal God to people through how we live and through how we serve them.

And so God's people are rescued by grace but God's people are rescued to live distinctively. And it's worth saying before we move on I think to live distinctively by its very nature can be difficult.

[ 17 : 29 ] It means, doesn't it go against the flow? It doesn't have the same values as the world around us values because it values as number one a God that the world has rejected.

And so living this out can be a real challenge. It's like the saying that the nail that sticks out gets whacked with the hammer or I'm sure it's more pithy than that usually but being a Christian can feel like that sometimes.

It's distinctive and that makes it difficult. And yet we need to remember God's rescue is not so that we can just have a comfy life but God's rescue is so we can have this distinctive life as his people to love God and to love others so that people can see the attractiveness and the hope that comes from being God's people from accepting that rescue and that offer which is for everyone.

Okay, so God's people are saved by grace. In response to that God's people are to live distinctively. The last thing we're going to look at here is that God's people need a mediator.

Okay, what do I mean by that? I don't know if you noticed as Debbie was reading the passage God in these chapters is kind of scary. So this relationship is being established.

[ 18 : 44 ] At the beginning of Exodus the people in Egypt it seemed like God was a long, long way away. Well now here God is here with his people and they've come close but very much God is at the top of the mountain and the people are at the bottom they're behind a barrier which in fact they're not able to cross or they'll die.

And you know God is pretty scary here. One of the big questions in the rest of Exodus is well how's this relationship going to work? How is this perfect holy God really going to come and live with his people who are not perfect?

Who are very ordinary? Who will fail time and time again to live as they should? And the answer that we see here is that God's people need a mediator to go between them and God and that's Moses' unique role in this passage.

God's at the top of the mountain the people are at the bottom four times in chapter 19 Moses goes up to hear from God down to speak to the people up to God down to the people Moses has like thighs of steel by the end of chapter 19 but there is this gap there's this gap between God and the people a gap that Moses has to fill and look at the end of chapter 20 verse 19 the people say to Moses you speak to us and we'll listen but don't let God speak to us unless we die verse 21 the people stood far off while Moses grew near to the thick darkness where God was and so this relationship begins but it needs Moses this mediator and really we can't help but think you know is this it is what we're seeing here at Mount Sinai is this really the great relationship that has been promised I could never really call this an intimate relationship and as the book of Exodus goes on that distance is actually going to grow closer until God is in the camp with the people but still this need of

Moses as a mediator is going to be a key and again this is pointing us forward this is showing us something fundamental about the gospel about the Christian message this is pointing us forward to see Jesus as a better Moses Jesus as a better mediator Jesus is that mediator that reduces the distance between us and God down to zero how is that because unlike Moses he wasn't a man he was God himself come to be with his people he was both fully God and fully man and so he was able to deal with that gap between a perfect God and an imperfect people because he lived the perfect life and took the penalty for our imperfect imperfections he rescued us by his grace that undeserved love that we talked about it was Jesus who on the cross died that death that the people would have faced had they strayed onto the mountain had they got too close to God but because of

[ 21 : 54 ] Jesus' death the way back to a real and intimate and perfect relationship with God is possible it's really important that we see here Jesus does not make God kind of soft and warmer and cuddly God is still the same holy and perfect God that we see here that we see throughout the Bible and yet that gap is bridged by Jesus the better Moses the better mediator who brings us together with God and what we celebrate as God's people is a relationship which isn't distant but it's pictured in the Bible in the most intimate terms it's spoken about as kind of the perfect marriage it's spoken about as the kind of perfect parent-child relationship it is that close it is that relationship that we were designed for when we're kind of recommending Christianity to people and if you're here this morning and you're not really sure about Christianity what we're holding out is not just a set of rules for people to live by it's not a kind of a philosophy or approach to life that you may or may not find kind of satisfying what we're holding out when we recommend

Christianity is a relationship an invitation to a relationship with the God who made the universe the God who made each one of us and a relationship made possible through Jesus the perfect mediator bringing us and God together through the cross through his perfect life and his sacrificial death and so God's people are rescued through his grace and God's people in response to that rescue live distinctive lives pointing others to God and this great relationship which is possible and all that is possible through Jesus the perfect mediator who unites us with God now and forever if we put our trust in him let's pray together