

The Savior's Sermon 2) Be Different

Exodus 19:1-8 • 2023-02-05 • Epiphany Series: "Savior's Sermon"



There was an ad campaign used by a major computer and software company over 25 years ago that had the slogan "think different." Back then that same computer company had started to lose a lot of its initial popularity. To have one of their machines with its logo of a fruit on it made you a little bit different from most other people. The company wanted people to feel good about being different from so many other computer users.

Of course, that was 25 years ago. Now this company has the majority market share of smartphones in the US. To have one of their products, ironically, doesn't really make you different. It just makes you like many others. But people still like to display their computer's fruit logo. I guess it can still make some feel a bit different or perhaps more special.

But what makes us really different and special as Christians? Today we continue our series looking at Old Testament reflections of Jesus' messages in the sermon on the mount. At one point in his sermon on the mount Jesus tells his disciples how they are different from the rest of the world. God made them to be different from this world and to stand out. What is it that makes a Christian stand out? We'll consider that today as we look at Exodus 19 and consider how God made the people of Israel to be different. And we'll see how the savior's sermon still rings true.

God had made a great change for the people of Israel. And they couldn't deny it! They had been living in a helpless condition. A few months earlier they had been enslaved by one of the most powerful nations of their time. They were completely trapped as slaves in Egypt. And the years leading up to their exodus from Egypt were years of brutal oppression. Moses notes that, "the Egyptians used them ruthlessly." They needed divine intervention to escape their slavery. They needed God to rescue them.

Then God changed everything for them! He brought them away from Egypt and to a safe place. He says he did it by carrying them the whole way. He reminded them, "*You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.*" Notice firstly that they had no real part in their rescue. All they could do was stand by and observe. They saw what God did. They saw how God carried them. They saw how God brought them to himself. God brought the great nation of Egypt down to its knees by sending the plagues and the death of every first-born. He annihilated the attacking army of Egypt in the Red Sea. And then God gave the people of Israel a nightlight for the night and a guardian for the day. He led the people with a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. Then he poured water for them. He made bitter water turn sweet and brought water out of the rock. He gave them victory over the hostile Amalekite army. He was like a mother eagle powerfully swooping down to protect her young. He let the children of Israel ride on his pinions and experience his saving power. It was as if you could say the nation of Israel was like a child and God was like an indulgent Father giving them everything they could possibly ask for.

But God didn't do this so that they could just act like a spoiled and indulged child. They were given the awesome privilege of being God's special and treasured possession. They were supposed to live differently from all the rest of the world and all other nations. "*Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*" What other nation could claim to be God's treasure? What other nation of people could make the claim that they were God's kingdom of priests and holy nation?

As a treasured possession they were spoiled by God. He gave them his presence, his guiding power, and his holy Word. As God's kingdom of priests, they had the privileged position of representing their God before all the world. On behalf of every other nation, they would serve as God's messengers. They would be the ones to have the closest access to God. They would be the nation that could approach God for guidance and instruction. They would be the nation that could follow God's direction for offering up sacrifices and building a house of worship. No other nation held such a high position like Israel! And with all these gifts God set them apart as a holy nation. They would consecrate themselves to serve the Lord. They would be *different* from the world.

But if you know anything about the history of the nation of Israel you might object. Israel did not deserve such a position! They didn't look at all different from the world when they grumbled and complained. They grumbled at Moses and Aaron for even asking Pharaoh's permission to let them leave Egypt. When they finally left Egypt and slavery, they told Moses "leave us alone, let us serve the Egyptians, it's better to serve them than to die here in the wilderness!" (ch 14) Then not long after miraculously escaping through the crossing of the Red sea they once again showed their fickle faith. Despite God's constant care they grumbled to Moses like a spoiled child "I'm thirsty!" (ch 15) They showed that they didn't deserve a relationship with God.

It even seemed like they didn't want a relationship with God. Not long after receiving fresh water they snapped, "If only we were back in Egypt we had all the food we needed there!" And Moses had to remind them, "Hey! don't you realize you aren't complaining to me but to your God?" And when God gave them food from heaven some of them

disobeyed God and tried to selfishly hoard it up! Finding themselves thirsty once more they said, "Is the LORD among us or not?" They were not a small crowd of grumbling children. There were over 2 million men, women, and children who were slow to serve God. Different nation indeed! They were like all the other spoiled souls of this world.

They should have been abhorred by God as spoiled and rotten. And this is true. It was only by God's grace that they were chosen to be his "treasured possession." God reminds them of this when he says, "You have seen what I have done." They knew they didn't deserve all he had done. Nor did they deserve to be considered his treasured possession. God reminds them of this when he says, "*Although all the earth is mine.*" God could have chosen any other nation to be his treasured possession. As the sovereign Lord of the universe, he had every right to tell Israel, "Fine. if you don't want to be my people then good riddance!" In fact, this is what God would tell them later.

What about you? God has done everything for us too! We can't deny this! Enslaved by sin even from birth, we were born helpless. It is only by God's divine intervention that we have escaped the slavery and oppression of sin which we brought upon ourselves. We needed God to rescue us. It does us good to remember what God has done. To free us from slavery Jesus came to this earth he carried our sins for us all the way to the cross. He carried us out of the slavery to sin, death, and the devil. He brought us into the forgiveness and freedom of his care. We are now free from the punishment of sin and free from all guilt of sin. "If the Son has set you free then you are free indeed."

And we are still daily carried by him on his wings. He provides life, breath, and all our basic needs. When we dig into our meals without even so much as a thought of "thank you Lord" he still provides. Even as troubles come our way, he assures us that we are still under the protection of his wings. Most importantly he gives us living water from his Word. Jesus says, "whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst." And he satisfies all our spiritual hunger. He did all this, and he does all this to bring us to himself. His love for us is greater than the love of a Father who indulges his child's every need and desire. His love for us is like the undeserving love he continued to show the people of Israel in the wilderness. "Carried on the wings of an eagle."

But do we act any differently from ancient Israel? When God provides us with spiritual food, spiritual shepherds, daily food, do we fall on our knees and praise him as we ought, or do we sometimes complain like spoiled children? Or when troubles hit our lives don't, we sometimes join with the people of Israel in asking, "Is the LORD with me or not?"

But God in grace invited the people of Israel to enter a covenant. He invited them to think differently and be his own possession by keeping his Word. The Word of the LORD was brought before the leaders of these 2 million people. Did they want to honor the God who was their Savior-God? The elders met with Moses and then met with the people. All the people came to a unanimous decision: "*We will do everything the LORD has said.*" namely, "We will not be disobedient and spoiled children, but set-apart by God be his people his kingdom of priests. We will be different." They failed, but they learned they had to live by the grace of God, not by their own deeds.

All believers are now by grace God's treasured possession. Someone might object, "But that's not fair? Christians think they are somehow special people in God's eyes and the unbelieving world is not?" And they'd be right. It's not fair. In many ways Christians are no different from the rest of the world.

Except they have a gift of grace. Since not even Israel could keep his covenant, God did what he long had promised the world. He sent his Son to keep it for us. His Son was altogether different and holy. Jesus was the perfect priest and member of the Father's kingdom. And he now calls us his own through Jesus' perfect life and sacrificial death for us. We are only his treasured possession because of his grace, his undeserved love. Treasured because of the precious blood of our Savior which covers our sin. He has changed us by making us holy. You have been set apart as God's holy nation. And it no longer depends on a covenant you must fulfill. It is all because of God's grace and fulfilled promise.

When he spoke to his disciples Jesus didn't say, "You will be special if you obey me." And he didn't say "become the salt and light of the world." He said, "you are the salt. You are the light of the world." He has made us stand out because of his grace. He brought us to be his own. Just as Israel was made to be God's own so that they could share the word of God to the world around them, you are made to share his Word. Be different! Don't give into the temptation to live as if you are entitled to all that God has done. Marvel at his grace. You yourself have seen in his Word all he has done for you. You have seen how he carried you on his wings and brought you to himself.

God says, "I brought you to myself." He did this through Christ. We read in Revelation about the work of the Lamb of God who has bought us to be his own. "*You were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God*" (Rev 5)

Maybe it's not the popular thing, but the message of the cross and empty tomb that makes you special! The savior's sermon tells you to be different and let that message ring out. He reflects the words given in the Old Testament and fills them with grace upon grace. Experience the amazing privilege of being his kingdom of priest. See how the Savior's sermon is reflected in the Old Testament and it rings true for you today. He has made you his own to be his own. Be different from the world.