

## Exodus 24

### 'The Ratification of the Covenant'

#### A bowl of cherries

It was the last Saturday of January, 1993.

John McCarthy picked up Brian Keenan.

Together they went to Broxton Church for a service to dedicate two new stained glass windows.

The stained glass windows commemorated the five years that the men had been kept prisoners in Lebanon.

In the middle of one stained glass window is a picture of a bowl of cherries.

After being released the men told the story of the cherries.

They had been kept in a series of different places of confinement for 4 years.

Each of the places was largely dark and unlit.

They offered no view of the outside world.

Then, in their fourth year, they were given a bowl of red cherries.

It was the first fruit and the first colour they had seen for four years.

The men describe how they were eager to taste the fruit.

But they could not.

The colour and the anticipation were too much.

And so, for a day, they simply gazed upon the cherries in wonder and gratitude.

And then finally they consumed the fruit.

The story of this bowl of cherries is one that I want you to keep in mind today as we look at Exodus 24.

At the end of the story I want to return to it and draw some lessons from it that will help us think about Exodus 24 and the themes that arise from it.

But now, let's go to the book of Exodus.

And to start off, I want us to do some remembering.

After all, it has been a long time since we spent time in Exodus.

Let's have a look and see what we can remember.

#### Remembering where we were

Now, to help us, I have put together a summary of the book of Exodus so far.

GOD	HUMANS
<p><b>God's Action:</b>  <b>Delivery out of Slavery (Exodus 1-14)</b>  <u>The distress (Ex 1-11)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oppression in Egypt (Ex 1)</li> <li>• Moses called and commissioned (Ex 2-6)</li> <li>• God's promise (Ex 3)</li> <li>• Miracles and plagues in Egypt (Ex 7-11)</li> </ul> <p><u>The deliverance (Ex 12-14)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passover and departure from Egypt (Ex</li> </ul>	

12:1-13:16) • The march through the wilderness (Ex 13:17-14:31)	
	<b>Human Response: Praise (Exodus 15:1-21)</b>
<b>God's Action: Preservation (Exodus 15:22-18:27)</b> God meets elementary needs of human existence... <u>Thirst</u> • God supplies water (Ex 15:22-27; 17:1-7) <u>Hunger</u> • God supplies quails and manna (Ex 16) <u>Despair</u> • Because of enemies – God supplies victory over the Amalekites (Ex 17:8-16) • Because of domestic problems – God supplies Jethro and judges are installed (Ex 18)	
	<b>Human Response: Obedience (Exodus 19-31)</b> <u>The Law and the Covenant (Ex 19-24)</u> • God reveals himself at Mt Sinai and declares the covenant (Ex 19) • The Ten Commandments (Ex 20) • The Book of the Covenant (Ex 21-23) • The Covenant is established (Ex 24) • Instructions concerning the Law and the Tabernacle (Ex 25-31)

## Exodus 24

### Summary

Okay, let's now turn to Exodus 24 and have a look at what happens.

As you can see, I think Exodus 19 and Exodus 24 are closely linked.

Exodus 19 is the beginning of this covenant section.

It is where God reveals himself and declares the covenant.

Exodus 24 is where he establishes or ratifies the covenant.

The links between the two chapters are emphasised by the way they are structured.

For example, chapter 19 has seven references to the Hebrew word 'to speak' or 'word'.

So does chapter 24.

Chapter 19 has seven references to the Hebrew word 'to go down'.

Chapter 24 has seven references to the Hebrew word 'to go up'.

The writer obviously wants us to see that Chapter 19 and chapter 24 and everything between them are part of a package.

And the central idea in the package is that God wants to formalise his relationship with his people.

He is the one who called Abraham their forefather.

He is the one who has remembered this relationship with their forefather and has rescued them.

And now he wants to give some shape to the relationship.

And so he talks about a covenant, or a contract, with them.

In Exodus 19 he declares that this is what he is doing.

In Exodus 19 the people of Israel hear that this is what he is doing and give universal assent.

With one voice they say...

*“All that the LORD has spoken we will do.”*

Exodus 24 takes up this theme.

Let's go through the chapter and see how the story progresses.

Look at the steps involved.

- All the people are gathered around the base of Mt Sinai. God calls Moses to bring Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and 70 elders and to ascend the mountain. The elders probably function as representatives of the whole people of God.
- At some point in their journey up the mountain, Moses separates from the others and comes up to the summit of the mountain on his own (verses 1-2).
- Moses then orally outlines the commandments to the assembled people at the foot of Mt Sinai.
- Having heard what Moses says, the people bind themselves to obedience, using the same formula of affirmation as they used in Exodus 19:8 – ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do’ (24:3).
- Now the words of the Lord are put into writing (verse 4).
- In verses 4-6 a sacrificial ritual and blood rite begins. An altar is made to represent the presence of God. Twelve pillars are constructed representing the people of God. And the strenuous activity of slaughtering and preparing the sacrifices is engaged in by the young men of Israel. Blood from these sacrifices is then gathered. Half of it is sprinkled on the altar.
- In verse 7 the written document that Moses has been working on is read to all the people. Again, the people assent to what they hear - “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.”
- In verse 8 the blood rite is completed by Moses sprinkling blood on the people or perhaps on the pillars that represent them.
- The representatives of the people then ascend partway up the mountain again and there experience a manifestation of the divine majesty.
- Then these representatives engage in a solemn covenant meal with God.
- In the final few verses of the chapter Moses goes back up the mountain to receive the formal documents of the covenant from God. He remains there for some time and the glory of God envelops the whole mountain.

### ***Excursus: The blood rite***

There is a summary of the chapter.

Now I need to say that the blood rite performed here is almost unique in the Old Testament.

The only thing that anything like it occurs in Leviticus 8 and involves the ordination of Aaron as High Priest.

What's more, nowhere in the Old Testament do we have an explanation of what this event means. However, I think we can have a good guess as to its meaning. And to do this, I think the best thing is to imagine the scene. Significant numbers of animals have been slaughtered. Blood has been gathered. This blood is split into two. Half is splattered on the base of the altar that represents the presence of God. Half is splattered on the people. Life has been shed to initiate this covenant. This covenant involves obligations between the two parties. And these two parties are bound together in solidarity. They belong to each other. The book of the covenant binds them. And the blood of the covenant binds them. They are inextricably bound to each other. They belong to each other. And the covenant belongs to them.

## Thinking Biblically

Okay, so there is Exodus 24.

What I want to do now is to think about what this passage means in the larger framework of the Bible.

Now at this point I need to say that there are a lot of ways we can go.

For example, we could pursue the whole idea of covenants in the Bible.

We could start with God's covenant with creation and go through to the new covenant in the New Testament.

Or we could take a look at how Jesus takes up this chapter in the language of the Lord's supper.

And each of these exercises would be very profitable.

But tonight I want to concentrate on one small section in this chapter.

I want to concentrate on two ideas that spring out of this chapter and that are taken up elsewhere in the Bible.

They both come from the same small section.

The first has to do with the covenant meal.

And the second has to do with seeing God.

Let's deal with the covenant meal first.

## Eating with God

Let's read Exodus 24:9-11.

Exodus 24:9-11

*<sup>9</sup>Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank. (ESV)*

It's a delightful picture isn't it?

Here are the representatives of God's people.

They are allowed to come up the mountain.

And God gives them a small glimpse of himself.

They behold God.

And then they sit down and eat a meal in his presence.

Here is a small snapshot of God's intention for the world.

You see, when he created the world he created it as a place where he could have untainted, unspoiled relationship with human beings.

This is his desire for his world and for the people in it – right relationship with him.

What he wants of his human creation is to be able to sit down together with them and enjoy their presence as they enjoy his.

What happens on the mountain on this first day of the ratification of this covenant is what God wants of every day of this covenant.

He wants to be friends.

And he wants a friendship where the parties involved have nothing to hide.

Now the sad story is that the intimacy pictured here did not last.

Within a few short weeks it was shattered by idolatry and breach of covenant by God's people.

Some of the chief ringleaders were the very people who were present at this gathering on the mountain.

And the end result is that the prophets of God began to look forward to a day when this ideal would return.

They longed for the day when God and humans would sit down again in friendship and solidarity.

You get small snapshots of this desire in the Old Testament.

Take a look at Isaiah 25:6-9.

*<sup>6</sup>On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.*

*<sup>7</sup>And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.*

*<sup>8</sup>He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.*

*<sup>9</sup>It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."*

*(ESV)*

This is what the world looks forward to.

A day when the Lord of Hosts will spread table.

Not just for Israel.

Not just for a select group of humans.

No, he will spread table for all the nations.

The table will be covered with the richest of food.

It will have the best aged wine.

The veil that covers his presence and glory will be stripped away.

Sin will be dealt with and its consequence – death – will be done away with.

God will reach his hand out and wipe the tears of suffering and pain from the eyes of those gathered there.

And the peoples of the earth will rejoice in his salvation.

The book of Revelation imagines this time in Revelation 19:7-9.

*<sup>7</sup>Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready;*

*<sup>8</sup>it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*

*<sup>9</sup>And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God." (ESV)*

The picture here is slightly different.

The picture here is not just of a meal.  
It is of a special meal – a marriage supper.  
At the centre of the marriage supper is a bride and a bridegroom.  
The bridegroom is Jesus Christ.  
He has made the marriage possible by his sacrifice on the cross.  
And the bride is all of those who have believed in what Jesus has done.  
For he has brought them into unfettered relationship with God.  
He is the salvation that was promised in Isaiah 25.  
He is the one who has lowered the veil that surrounds God.  
The one who has caused death to be swallowed up.  
The one we have waited for.

### **Seeing God**

Now this idea of a meal with God or fellowship with God is linked with the next idea I want to pursue – seeing God.

You see, if you are eating in the presence of God then you are before his face.

You can see him and he can see you.

Now to explore this idea I want you to come with me to Mark 9:2-8.

Let's have a look at it together.

*<sup>2</sup>And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup>and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup>And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup>And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." <sup>6</sup>For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. <sup>7</sup>And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." <sup>8</sup>And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only. (ESV)*

Now the first thing I want you to do is to recognise the similarities between Exodus 24 and these verses.

- First, there are three disciples that accompany Jesus, just as Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu accompanied Moses.
- Second, Jesus alone is transfigured, just as Moses alone sees the glory of Yahweh (Exodus 24:2) and bore the mark of a transfigured face (Exodus 34:29-34).
- Third, there is a voice from the cloud just as God spoke in Exodus 24:16.

But there is something unique in Mark 9, isn't there?

Can you see it?

The thing that is different here is that God's revelation of himself is not mediated as it was at Sinai.

It is direct.

God shines solely through Jesus.

God shines directly through Jesus.

He is God's glory.

This is the picture of the New Testament as a whole.

We see it most graphically in John's gospel.

Listen to John 1:18.

*<sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. (ESV)*

Or listen to John 14:1-9.

Jesus says...

*<sup>1</sup> "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup> 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? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. <sup>4</sup> And you know the way to where I am going." <sup>5</sup> Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" <sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup> If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."*

*<sup>8</sup> Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." <sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? (ESV)*

Jesus is clear.

To see him is to come face to face with God.

He is radiance of God's glory, the exact imprint of his nature.

But the New Testament authors go on one step further.

For where they personally met Jesus face to face, we don't have that luxury.

But what we do have is their writings.

And in their writings we too can meet Jesus face to face (cf. John 20).

We too can have fellowship with him and fellowship with his father.

Listen to John in 1 John 1:1-4:

*<sup>1</sup>That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—<sup>2</sup>the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—<sup>3</sup>that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (ESV)*

The language is clear.

John and the other apostles heard, saw, and touched he who was the word of life.

They testified to and proclaimed what they had experienced.

And they do this so that we too may have fellowship with them, with Jesus and with his Father.

Their teaching, their proclamation, is our way of access into what they experienced.

## Contemplating God

I want to close today's sermon by returning to the bowl of cherries that I mentioned at the beginning.

The world of the captives of Lebanon was a dark one.

It was untouched by colour or the taste of the good things of life.

For years they languished.

And then, after four years, came the glow of some ripe, red, cherries.

It was more than their senses could take at once.  
All they could do in the presence of such grandeur was to sit and observe for a day in awe.  
How much more grand is it for sinners to be brought into the very presence of the living God.  
To be sat down at table for a meal of friendship and fellowship.  
This is what happened on Mount Sinai that day.  
This is what happened on the Mount of transfiguration.  
And this is what happens when we receive Jesus Christ and all that he has won for us on the cross.  
At the core of Christian faith is this experience.  
The experience of being overpowered by grace.  
The touch of the hand of God when we feel his presence and forgiveness in spite of sin.  
The experience of knowing that we who were far off have been brought near through the blood of Christ.  
The knowledge and experience of Christ is the very guts of Christian faith.  
And it is something that the true Christian can never leave for very long.  
The true Christian never tires of this.  
Never tires of hearing about Jesus.  
Never tires of going back to Jesus.  
Never becomes weary of the delight in finding him yet again.  
In preparation for this sermon I picked a New Testament book at random.  
The book I selected was the book of Ephesians.  
I decided that I would read Ephesians and record every direct reference to Jesus.  
I would write down every time when the words 'Jesus', 'Lord', 'Christ', 'he' or any other reference to Christ was made.  
These are not allusions.  
They are direct references.  
I've recorded my findings on a graph.  
Let's take a look at it.  
There are 157 verses in Ephesians.  
In those 157 verses, there are 108 direct references to Christ.  
It is a phenomenal thing to observe isn't it?  
The NT writers are infatuated with Jesus.  
They cannot leave him alone for more than a few sentences.  
He saturates their thinking.  
He saturates their words.  
He saturates their lives and experience.  
And every true Christian since then has followed in their footsteps.  
Just think about the structure of the NT itself.  
Those who compiled the NT in the first couple of centuries of Christian history were not happy with just having just one Gospel narrative.  
They wanted the story to be told over and over again four times.  
They wanted four Gospels.  
They wanted Jesus to be seen from every perspective imaginable.  
You see, they had experienced what Moses and Aaron could only imagine.  
They had experienced unfettered access to the God of all the earth.  
And one day they would sit down at an endless party with him.  
But I suspect that the first stages of that party will be preceded by something else.  
For I suspect that like the captives in Lebanon, the first thing that they will do is simply gaze in wonder and awe.

Please understand what I'm saying.

If you are bored with Jesus...

If you tire of hearing of him...

If you are looking for something more...

Then I ask you to wonder if there might be something wrong at the core of your faith.

You see, Jesus is the beginning and the end.

The alpha and the omega.

The first and the last.

The source of your salvation and the goal of your salvation.

This is not to say that we Christians will not deal with other issues.

However, no matter what we deal with, we will never be able to stray very far from Jesus.

You see, he is where our relationship with God started and where it will finish.

To see him is to see the Father and to be brought into his presence.

To fellowship with him is to fellowship with God himself.