

Title: Christmas in July
Text: Exodus 21-40
Theme: God's plan for his glory
Series: Exodus #37 (preview)
Prop Stmtnt Exodus cries out to us for our need of Christ.

Read Text: Exodus 25.1-9

We believe that all of God's Word is profitable and needed so that we can know Him and discover why He has made us, and how we fulfill his plan to receive honor through lives that are satisfied in him. To that end I have been preaching through the book of Exodus. I have wanted you to see God's hand in controlling history on a grand scale as he raises and then sets down empires. I have wanted you to hear God's voice as he calls out of Egypt a people for his name. I have wanted you to be awed by his power as natural forces do the bidding of the supernatural. I have wanted you to be rested and comforted as you watch God fulfill every promise that he makes. I have wanted your understanding of God's character and your conviction of his authority to be certain as you hear him reveal his law. I have wanted your joy in God to increase. And I have wanted you to see how Christ is already being revealed and how God makes our need of him so obvious. But I will confess to you that I thought that preaching through the first half of this book in pursuit of your joy would probably be a little easier than preaching through the second half.

In the first 20 chapters, we have all sorts of movement. Moses is rescued from certain death, then he is raised in Pharaoh's palace then rejected by his own people the Israelites, then he runs from Egypt, then returns 40 years later by God's command to rescue his people from hopeless slavery. The tension builds as Moses and Aaron continually confront Pharaoh, and as God demonstrates his authority in the plagues. Over and over God comes through. Over and over he demonstrates in convincing and irrefutable ways that He is the one and only LORD God. All other gods, particularly the gods of Egypt are imposters. Who is the LORD that I should obey him, Pharaoh mockingly asks? We find out who he is. But as amazing as his power is, what is even more amazing is to see how he uses his power. He is a God who loves to rescue and redeem hopeless people. The night of the Passover, the spoiling of the Egyptians, the victory march out of the country and the enormous deliverance at the Red Sea are great narratives that capture our hearts with wonder. But the story does not end there. We are only halfway through the book. But now the scenery stops changing. The people of Israel after having been rescued from Egypt in order to return to their land stop at a rest area called Sinai. And that is where we left off with the story. God tells his children how they are to live (10 commandments) which is a preview of the Law and then God tells his children how they are to worship by giving them detailed instructions on the construction of the place in which he is going to live; called the tabernacle. So, I was looking at this last half of the book as being basically twenty chapters of laws and building instructions for a tabernacle that doesn't exist anymore. And quite honestly I thought, I've got my work cut out for me if I am going to keep you interested through this. But I knew that even this portion of the text was given by God for his glory through our joy. That conviction has driven me

even as I have wondered why God has chosen to spend so much time on the details of the tabernacle. So in past few weeks I have read and read and read and dug into these last 20 chapters. The result is; that I absolutely cannot wait to walk through these chapters with you. This morning is only a preview of what we are going to uncover in these chapters. I am hopeful that I can give you a taste of the feast that God has provided. In order to do that I want to give you an overview of this section and then help you see why this is so rich and needful and satisfying for us.

1. **Where are we, and where are we going?**

Exodus means to leave. This book on one level tells us the story of a family that grew to become a nation of slaves who escaped captivity in order to live in their own land. But it is not just any family. Since Exodus comes after Genesis, we enter this story knowing from Genesis that God had made a promise to a man named Abraham that he was going to be the father of a nation that was going to be enslaved in Egypt for many years after which time they would leave and go to the land of Canaan where they would live as God's chosen people. Now in Exodus we witness God fulfilling his promises several hundred years later. The human drama element in this book is intense and yet at the same time, Exodus is the story of God who reveals himself to the world. Exiting (Exodus) is only one part of the story. The other part is God unveiling himself before these people. We could actually name this book Revelation because God puts himself on display through his acts and through his words.

So, in terms of the human drama, the children of Israel have been set free from their bondage in Egypt and on their way to their own land have stopped at Mt. Sinai. Along the way, they had to be rescued at the Red Sea which resulted in the destruction of the Egyptian army. Three days later they were complaining about water. Then after that was solved they complained about food. Then after that was solved they complained about water again. It was ugly. It was as if they had forgotten everything that God had done. At the end of chapter 18 they went into battle and miraculously defeated the Amalekites. By chapter 19 and three months after leaving Egypt, they come to the desert of Sinai. What we have learned about the children of Israel is that they are an ungrateful, complaining, whining, demanding, forgetful and difficult group of people. Our hearts go out to Moses. God assembles them at the base of this mountain and then reveals his law to Moses. Chapters 19 and 20 are nothing less than terrifying. God demands to be obeyed and worshiped and God promises severe consequences for those who rebel against him. In chapter 19 God prepares the people to hear his commandments and in chapter 20 he tells them the commandments.

What we are learning about God is that:

There is no God like Him. The gods and idols of this world are colossal failures and frauds.

The true God is faithful to his promises.

The true God is a redeeming God who loves to rescue people who have no hope but him.

The true God is powerful who will move on behalf of those who love him and move against those who hate him.

The true God is sovereign. He ordained Pharaoh's stubbornness as the means to show his power so that the name of God would be proclaimed in all the earth.

The true God is demanding and makes no apologies for it.

The good news is that God is incredibly awesome, the bad news is, no one can obey him like he demands.

What we are learning about ourselves is that:

We are law-breaking, covenant-breaking people.

The story of the children of Israel is in so many ways our story. Back in chapter 19, the people publicly said, (v.8) "We will do everything the LORD has said." Remember that it wasn't until chapter 20 that the 10 commandments were revealed. The 10 commandments were not all that the LORD commanded, but they functioned as a prelude. After the 10 commandments are given, God gives further warnings about idol worshiping and then in chapters 21-23 God gives the Israelite community a series of laws concerning life as a people. These laws address issues such as servants, personal injuries, theft, property damage, dishonesty, immorality, civil responsibilities, and religious observances. In chapter 24, the covenant is ratified. Moses tells the people what God says, and they say – "Everything the LORD has said, we will do" (v.3). They repeat this later on. Moses returns to the top of the mountain to receive the rest of the law, much of which pertains to the construction of the tabernacle. While he is there, Aaron and the people build an idol and worship it!

It's like a guy, on his wedding night, going out to a strip club and picking up a hooker. They break the covenant! The ink is barely dry on the document. This section is at the same time some of the most discouraging and intense chapters of the Bible. The enormity of their sin is heightened by all that has been done for them. God has made himself so clear, and still they rebel. It is incredibly tragic. Some of you naively believe that if our country could just get back to the time when we all obey the 10 commandments that things will be fine. NO ONE OBEYS God! The children of Israel did not do it. We don't do it. That is the point! We desperately need a Savior. We are hopeless if we think that we can obey enough for God's approval. We are lawbreakers. We are covenant breakers and because we have broken God's laws, we are hopeless unless somehow we can be rescued by someone who has not broken God's laws.

In the midst of this most discouraging section comes some of the most powerful pictures of Christ. Because of God's holiness and righteousness and perfect justice, he is prepared to wipe out the nation, and Moses intercedes, offering his own life, if that would help in place of theirs. Ultimately it wouldn't work, but Moses is a preview of Jesus in that scene. Moses gives us a taste of the King/Savior who is going to come. I can't wait to preach through this because God is also a God of mercy and compassion. How can this God who is perfectly righteous tolerate people who are so incredibly unfaithful,

ungrateful, idolatrous and sinful? How is it that God can show mercy without compromising his character? That, my beloved flock, is exactly what I want you to be immersed with in our study of this book. Because this very truth is what the rest of Exodus, and the rest of the Bible is all about. And this is why I am so anxious to teach through this last half of the book.

2. Why this is so amazing.

For years I have wondered why God has given so much space in the Bible to the details of the tabernacle. I believe that I am now beginning to see how it all comes together. Let me start with a smaller lens. At the beginning of the book of Exodus, God calls Moses to lead the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, so that they can formally become the people of God, and live in the land that God had set apart for them. Being the people of God means that they live under the law of God and live, marked by the presence of God. No other nation on earth has the God of the universe living in the middle of them. God's presence is a huge theme in this book. When God calls Moses to lead them out, he promises Moses, "I will be with you." (3.12) The pillar of fire by night and cloud by day that led them out of Egypt was part of the evidence of that. Then at Sinai God gives the building plans to Moses for a tabernacle, in which he (think of this), the Sovereign Creator and King of the Universe would live, right in the middle of his people.

Camping can be fun for a week. But 2 million people, camping in the same place for months, with all of their animals? Can you imagine what that was like? There was no Gander Mountain down the road. But the sights and the smells were not the real problem. These were sinful people. How could God live with such sinful people? But that is how the book of Exodus ends. God comes down in his awesome cloud of glory to live in a tent that has been set up in the middle of where these people are camping.

The tabernacle was designed to be portable. It traveled to the land of Canaan, and was eventually replaced by the temple. The temple was destroyed, rebuilt, and then by the time of Christ was replaced by a greater temple that was destroyed in 70a.d. But, when we read the opening verses of John's gospel we are struck with John's use of Genesis in verse 1 – "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." We are also struck with his use of Exodus in v. 14 – "And the Word became flesh and (lit.) tabernacled among us." We begin to see that the tabernacle not only was organized around a sacrificial system that pointed to and was fulfilled by the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross for us, but the tabernacle itself pointed to Christ who came to this earth to LIVE among his people as their King/Savior. We are the people with whom God lives. As incredible as that is, the tabernacle represents even more.

Now hang with me, because even though this may seem extremely random, I think it will help bring it all together.

Our neighbors have two little boys who are a blast to watch. They fight, they conquer, they build, they rule, their play is full of taking land, building castles and defending it from all foes. Why do boys love to conquer, build and rule? It goes all the way back to

the garden of Eden which God created as a perfect sanctuary, where he could live with and rule through his people. The earth is the kingdom. God is the king and humans were made to rule the earth under the Sovereign/Creator King. So, God tells Adam in Genesis 1.28 – “Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it.” In other words, make the rest of the world look like Eden. Just as Eden was the place where God lived his people, the entire earth was supposed to become that. When you see what could have been, it helps you feel the weight of how great the loss really was when Adam and Eve sinned against God. They lost the sanctuary. They lost the garden because unfaithful, ungrateful, and idolatrous people cannot live in the presence of God. Mercifully an angel drove them out and guarded the entrance to the garden.

The focal point of the tabernacle was a rather small, perfectly square room called the Holy of Holies, in which the Ark of the Covenant was placed. The Holy of Holies was sectioned off by a curtain in which angels were embroidered who symbolically stood guard. For more reasons that I will bring out in this series, I am convinced that the Holy of Holies and the tabernacle was designed by God to represent the Garden of Eden. The place where God could once again live with and rule over and rule through his people had come again to earth. God had come back down. The children of Israel were the people through whom God desired to show the rest of the world that this is what life is supposed to be. Canaan was supposed to become like Eden; a garden, flowing with milk and honey where people lived in the presence of God and in harmony with each other. But, as you know Israel couldn't handle it. They rejected God's laws, and even though the tabernacle had been replaced by an impressive Temple, Ezekiel wrote how the glory of God left. For several hundred years, God's concentrated presence on the earth was gone. And then in the weakness of a baby, God came to earth. Jesus was the tabernacle. He was the priest, the bread, the lampstand, and the Holy of Holies. He was the offerer and the offering. In Christ God had come and through Christ, we can come to God.

Again, God was rejected. It was all part of the plan. When the sinless lamb of God, was slain on the cross, the veil in the temple that guarded the Holy of Holies was ripped in two. Christ had, by means of his death on the cross made a permanent road into the presence of God. The way to Eden was open! But this time it was open to all nations. A point the prophets had made. Jesus said, “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” Mark 11.17.

So, when you go to the end of the Bible, you read in Revelation 21.1-5 about the New Jerusalem, the new dwelling place of God with his people. You find out from verse 16 that the New Jerusalem is perfectly square and you begin to realize that the tabernacle in Exodus was a little model of the world that is come. But, as much as I want you to see this, and stand amazed at how a Sovereign God puts every little detail together of his plan to live with and rule through his people, I desperately want you to see what how the tabernacle speaks to your life – right now.

This week, the FBI arrested a number of politicians and even Rabbi's in NJ and charged them with some serious offenses. We are painfully aware of how in this world so many people use their positions of power to crush others. The kingdoms of this world are full

of pretend kings who rule and subdue through abuse, fear, intimidation, torture and death. But, there is coming a day, when every mountain will be laid down, and every valley will be leveled and the rough places made smooth and the earth will see the glory of God and the trees of the fields will applaud with thunderous clapping. The true King does not use his throne so that he can crush and destroy. He left his Father's so free, so infinite his grace and divested himself of his rights as the very Son of the Sovereign Creator and died for Adam's helpless race. He came to this earth and did what the first Adam could not do. He came and did what Moses could not do. He came and did what Israel could not do. He came and did what no one in human history can ever do. He came and lived a perfectly righteous life so that he, the King could become your Savior. He used his power to die for the helpless. Because only through the death of a perfect and infinite sacrifice could God ever forgive the sins of unfaithful, ungrateful, idolatrous people who repent and trust only in Him. And that is what He did. That is our King! And his character is to be breathed out in everything that we do. His kingdom is an upside down kingdom, where the meek rule, and the humble are exalted and those who mourn over their sin rejoice. When the King comes back, he will straighten everything out, but that day is not here yet. But that day has dawned. That day started when the veil of the temple was ripped because of the death of Christ. Not only was access now given for us to come to God, but now, (don't miss this) the garden was going cosmic. It was more than you can come into God's presence, the ripping of the veil symbolized that God was breaking out. The sanctuary was going public. Do you see now why Paul told believers in 1 Corinthians 3.16 – "You yourselves are God's temple." And what did Jesus tell his disciples – "Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations." In other words, you, the followers of Jesus Christ, are His body, the temple. You are to go and invade every facet of this world with the message and life of Christ. We are the holy of holies, who represent the presence of God and his world-wide kingdom. We are on this earth now, living, breathing, working, eating, raising children, doing life for the purpose of showing to the world what the whole thing is all about.

I am done with the preview. In the coming weeks (months) we will immerse ourselves in this glorious picture that God painted and then built on the desert floor at the base of Mt. Sinai. But first of all, a word to parents:

This is what your kids were made for. They have a God-ordained DNA that gives them a hunger and desire for something that is so much greater than themselves. We live in a culture that promises them happiness in an X-Box, Gamecube, sex, clothes, cars, a winning fantasy football team, diplomas and stuff. It won't satisfy. They were made to fly, and this stuff is like drinking salt water. They have to have the true gospel of Jesus Christ. They have to know the King. They, like you were born as citizens of the wrong kingdom. The only way out is through Christ. You must trust in Christ alone. Otherwise, life is like driving to the stadium, but never getting out of your car and going to the game.