

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Third Sunday after Trinity, June 28, 2009**

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Hymns: 373:1-5, 371:1-2, 380, 320, 373:6-7.

Lessons: Exodus 17:1-16, Romans 5:6-11, Matthew 9:35-10: 8.

Text: Exodus 19:1-8

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

These events occurred at the beginning of the third month after the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had left Egypt at the time of the remarkable first Passover and then the crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of the chariots and warriors of Egypt.

But within these three months the Israelites have already complained and complained. They complained about the bitter water at Marah that God then made sweet. They complained about no food so God miraculously provided quail and manna for their daily food. They complained again at Massah and Meribah that there was no water, so God miraculously provided water when he told Moses to hit the rock with his staff. They were attacked by the Amalekites but the battle against that pagan nation was miraculously won by Joshua when Moses held his hands up all day, helped by Aaron and Hur holding his hands up.

Now they are camped at the foot of Mount Sinai. Now God speaks to Moses and commands them to obey him fully and keep his covenant, and says ***“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.”*** In the very next chapter, God speaks to them from the Mountain through Moses, starting with the words we know as “the Ten Commandments”. Today we shall see that

**GOD GIVES HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE PROMISES**

1. **They are to obey God fully.**
2. **Can they?**
3. **We, too, are to obey God fully.**
4. **Can we?**
5. **So what is our hope?**

God speaks to Moses and tells him exactly what to say: ***“This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel.”*** In our Gospel lesson you heard Jesus give this command to his apostles: ***“As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’”*** God has the same kind of command for his servants today. Today we preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. As you heard in our Gospel lesson, we are to ***“Ask the Lord of the harvest ... to send out workers into his harvest field.”*** Over the centuries those workers have had different responsibilities and different titles, depending on the needs of God’s people and the needs of the rest of the world. We today exercise the priesthood of all believers and call pastors to serve us. They are to proclaim what God has told them to say. God doesn’t speak directly to us today, but we have everything we need to know, and teach, and proclaim in his Holy Word. But think also about the responsibilities of even Christian parents. They, too, are to teach their children what God says. Their pattern, their source, their norm and standard is also God’s Holy Word, the Bible. And we must never forget that parents have the first responsibility for teaching their children, not the state or day care centers. Those of you who are familiar with day care know that your children learn a lot there, and maybe learn some things you wish they didn’t learn. But you parents too are to tell your children of what God says.

God reminds the people called “the children of Israel” or “Israel” of what he had done for them: **“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.”** We know that part of Bible History, too, but those who heard Moses repeat God’s Words had actually lived through it, had experienced it first-hand and just three months earlier!

Then comes God’s command and reminder of the covenant which the Passover led them to. **“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. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”** God repeats part of the promises he had made to Abraham. He tells them they will be his jewel, his special treasure. They will belong to God, but they will be a special, treasured possession. Notice the emphasis of **“treasured possession”**. We all have many possessions, but only a few are “treasured” or “special”. Those are the ones we take special care of. And notice that he makes reference to what we call in the New Testament era “the priesthood of all believers” in telling them they will be for him **“a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”**.

Saint Peter speaks of this more fully in 1 Peter 2:4-9: **“As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,” and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message--which is also what they were destined for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”**

But notice from our sermon text that there is a condition: **“if you obey me fully and keep my covenant.”** Well, you might think, what is there to obey? Some people might think of “ten rules” – the Ten Commandments. **“The people all responded together, “We will do everything the LORD has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD.”** They had the best of intentions, they promised to do everything God told them to do. Their intentions are all good.

But, can they obey God fully? Can they keep their promise? There is a one-word answer to part two of the sermon outline: NO. The Law as a mirror should have shown them that they couldn’t obey God perfectly, as much as they might have wanted to. Their history as recorded in the Old Testament shows that not only were they unable to obey God but they didn’t. They broke his laws and commands again and again. In fact, they were such terrible lawbreakers that almost all of those who made this promise three months after being delivered from Egypt died in the wilderness journey of 40 years and didn’t enter the land promised to Abraham. Even Moses himself, although he was permitted to see the promised land from a mountaintop didn’t even get to enter it himself, because of his sinfulness!

OK, you might be thinking. God demanded that kind of obedience in the Old Testament. What about us? Well, Jesus repeats that demand for all men, using a man learned in the law of God as an example and as representative of all men: **“On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.””** Luke 10:25-28. That makes it abundantly clear that only through perfect obedience to the complete Law of God as identified in the two tables of the Law can we inherit eternal life. We are to love God completely and we are to love our fellow humans completely. As those who have been called by the Holy Ghost to be God’s holy children, we have the best of intentions, too, like the children of Israel in our text. We want to obey God perfectly. Many humans want to or even think they can obey God well enough to earn at least some part of their eternal salvation.

Can we do it? Can anyone obey God fully? There is a one-word answer to part four of the sermon outline, too: NO. Why do we learn the commandments? Is it so we can follow the pattern of what God demands and lead good lives so we can earn what he promises? No, for if we really understand the commandments, if we really understand God's Law, we must realize that we cannot obey them. Luther's explanations make that clear. The Law as a mirror shows us our sinfulness. If we truly understand sin, we must agree perfectly with St. Paul who wrote in Romans 7:18-25: ***"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"***

Right there is the full answer to the question "Can anyone obey the Law of God fully or perfectly?". So what am I to do? What is anyone to do? Well, if I had read just two more verses from Romans 7 you would have heard: ***"Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin." "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."***

That is exactly what you heard in our Epistle lesson today when you heard ***"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly."*** Scripture assures us that we don't have to be "good" to receive God's love: ***"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*** We are to repent and turn from our sins and believe in Jesus as our Savior from Sin. Of course, then we WANT to behave like God's chosen people. We WANT to, as fruits of faith, as results of our faith, out of love for God, we want to please him and do what he demands. But we don't earn salvation. It is a gift. It is free. It has been earned for us by God whose only-begotten Son kept all his laws perfectly. And then that same Son of God was punished for breaking all God's laws. He suffered the torments of hell in our place.

We are sinners, and God still died for us to redeem us!

What do we do now? We ***"rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."*** We have been reconciled, and brought back to God; we are no longer his enemies because his Son Jesus was the mediator to make peace between man and God.

So, like the Israelites, we may have the best of intentions. We may have the desire to obey God. We may even vow to ourselves that each day we will be better than yesterday. But sin gets in the way. We must today and always depend on Jesus Christ to redeem us, to pay the price for our sins, for that is exactly what he did. We repent daily. We turn from our sins. We trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.

We are God's chosen people, just as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were. In fact, we are part of that spiritual children of Israel, the children of God. Peter writes in his first letter (2:9) ***"you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."***

Our hope is Jesus Christ. Look at all Jesus did for those who are helpless, like people without a shepherd. You are God's chosen ones, made holy by Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit in you. You belong to God! Show forth his praises today and always! Amen.