Proper 6A 2020 The Joy of Belonging to God

Exodus 19: 2 - 8

2 They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, 3 while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: 4 ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

7 So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. 8 All the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.

Romans 5: 6 – 15

6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. 11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— 13 for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. 14 Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.

What sort of things do people put in safes or security boxes at banks? If you have a safe at home, what would you put in it? Cash, stocks and bonds may be the obvious. Then, perhaps gold and jewellery. And then there may be items of sentimental value such as a locket of hair, baby’s first shoes or pictures of loved ones from younger years.

Now what do you suppose is most precious to God? You might say everything, since God made everything. Everything indeed belongs to God. And you would be right in saying that for ownership comes with the responsibility of the one who builds it.

But God does not tuck away gold or silver as His prized possession. He has no need for awards or medals of valour since He has no need for the praise of anyone, nor from angels. No, what God holds nearest and dearest to Himself, is a people. Not just any people, but people who fear Him and keep His name holy.

The OT prophet Malachi (3: 16 – 18) wrote about those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name that God says of them: They shall be mine … in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him.”

God clearly demonstrated how much he loved the enslaved nation of Israel by sending the plagues on Egypt, by parting the Red Sea and then drowning the Egyptian army therein. That is historical fact not fiction. Ancient Egyptian records attest to this defeat as do actual chariot wheels on the bottom of the sea.

No idol of any nation could pull that off, for idols exist only in the sinful hearts of people. But God always was, way before He made us. Idols belong to people because they made them up. The one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, delights in having for himself a people.

When God gathered together the saved nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai, he spoke to them through his servant Moses these words: You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.” Fledgling eaglets don’t always succeed on their maiden flight. Their watchful parents swoop down beneath their fluttering youngsters and carry them back up to safety.

See how great a love God had for Israel in freeing them from slavery and bringing them to himself at Sinai. He did not do this for any other nation. Why not? Is this discrimination? Doesn’t He love everyone the same?

Was it because the Israelites obeyed him? God did say: If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine …”

That is a very big IF. If is conditional. If one keeps God’s commands then he or she belongs to God. That is true. But what did the people of Israel actually do? Their immediate and united response to God was “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” But did they?

They grumbled and complained about living in the terrible conditions of the wilderness. They took off their gold earrings and persuaded Aaron to build a calf that received their sacrifices and devotion. They said that their ears would listen to God’s word but see how the gold from their ears went into building idols that were made in their sinful hearts.

Over and over again they broke God’s commands. Over and over again they embraced the idolatrous and adulterous ways of the pagan nations around them. Their obvious disobedience to God would exclude them as God’s people.

What about us? Why did God choose us to be a member of His church, His chosen people? Is it because of our obedience to His word? Or that we at least try to keep his commands from a sincere heart?

We want to take at least some credit for belonging to God. The more we can, the less dependent we become on God. It finds its way into these thoughts. “I hope I’ve done enough for God to take me to heaven.” “God knows my heart and I have always tried to keep his commands.”

Moralism reduces Christianity into improving one’s behaviour. It preaches that “if one keeps the law, then you can rest assured you belong to God”. It refuses to hear that obedience is an all or nothing. It always wants to take credit for its goodness rather than the obvious total corruption and depravity of our hearts.

When we keep score of our good deeds in the hope of winning God over, then we are truly to be pitied. If we cling to this hope, then Christ Jesus will say to us on the Final Day: Depart from me for I never knew you.

How can I be sure I belong to God? First re-hear Paul’s words from Romans 5 “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. … but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Jesus said to the Pharisees in Matthew’s house after many tax collectors and sinners found a warm welcome by him: Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. … For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

In the same way, God chose Israel as his people, not because of her goodness, but only because He loved her. God kept his word to Abraham that his children would be given a land flowing with milk and honey, by grace not merit.

The law came by Moses but grace and truth came from Jesus Christ, God’s Son. (John 1:17) Our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:14)

What an amazing God we have. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God in Three. The only true God has the right of ownership over all creation, however He loves us so much that He wants to adopt each of us as His children. Together, both those in heaven and on earth and those not yet baptized, we are the Church, the Bride of Christ, which reflects just how amazingly special we are to Him. This is …

 Our joy in belonging to Him!

Do we throw away the law? Of course not, it was spoken by our heavenly Father. But we no longer keep it to prove our worth or gain His affection, but gladly want to keep God’s commands to show our heartfelt thankfulness that He has saved us sinners and made us holy by the blood of His Son, so that we can rest assured we will always belong to Him.