

## Called to be a Bridge Builder

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### Exodus 19:1-8

At the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai.<sup>2</sup> They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain.<sup>3</sup> Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites:<sup>4</sup> You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup> Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, <sup>6</sup> but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.' <sup>7</sup> So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. <sup>8</sup> The people all answered as one: 'Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.' Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord.

### 1. The New York Attack

Last Tuesday on October 31, 2017, a 29-year-old man drove a pickup truck in Manhattan, NY. He plowed his truck down a crowded bike path along the Hudson River. He killed eight and injured twelve people. Among the victims, there were five Argentine tourists who traveled to New York for a 30-year high school reunion celebration. Two young American men and a Belgian mother were also identified as the victims. The man who attacked these innocent people is Sayfullo Saipov who came from Uzbekistan in 2010. He has a green card, which means he has been living in the U.S. as a permanent resident.

Federal prosecutors say that the man began planning the attack about a year ago. He decided to use a truck two months ago and took a test run in a Home Depot rental truck last week. He chose Halloween to carry his plan out because more people would be on the streets. This incident is being investigated as terrorism. If it is confirmed as terrorism, this would be the deadliest terrorist attack on New York City since Sept. 11, 2001. In his cell phone, Saipov had about 90 videos, many of which appear to be ISIS-related propaganda. His motivation and the connection with ISIS will be investigated more, but it is sad that there are people in the U.S. and abroad who want to attack other human beings.

I've heard that the attacker had a hard time settling down in the U.S. when he came from Uzbekistan as many new immigrants do. Saipov had to overcome the cultural and language barrier. I wonder whether there was someone who

helped him to begin his new life in the U.S. I also would like to ask him whether he has come to the U.S. to live a better and more meaningful life. I am sure that God had a plan for him. Has he tried to figure out God's purpose for him in the U.S.?

## 2. The Purpose of the Exodus

Today's scripture passage, Exodus 19:1-8, tell us where the Israelites were and what God's purpose was in rescuing the Israelites from slavery. The Israelites arrived at the desert of Sinai two months after fleeing Egypt. The content of Exodus 19 is very important to the Israelites because the covenant between Israel and God is enacted. Exodus 19:4 says, "**You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.**" God's sustaining care and loving tenderness are compared with what eagles do. When young eagles learn how to fly, the mother eagle flies under them with her wings spread out to catch them. Here God reminds the Israelites of how much God loves them.

After this, God says, "**If you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. ... you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation**" (verses 5 & 6). If the people of Israel obey the covenant that God sets forth for them, God promises to make them his "treasured possession," "a kingdom of priests," and "a holy nation." The Israelites would have a special relationship with God, becoming a nation of mediators or bridge builders, and a dedicated nation to the service of God.

As I shared with our Exodus Bible study groups, I see this passage as God's marriage proposal to His chosen people. Hosea 2:19-20 says, "**I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. <sup>20</sup>I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord.**" The relationship that God establishes here with the people of Israel would be like a marriage covenant.

## 3. The Priesthood of All Believers

This morning as we read into this passage, I would like to emphasize one of God's promises from the passage, that is being "**a priestly kingdom.**" According to Leviticus 8, the office of the priesthood was traditionally limited to the tribe of Levi, and to the family of Aaron. The major responsibility of the priests was to offer the various sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins. But God promises the Israelites that each one of them would be a priest, mediating on behalf of God's people. The Israelites would become intermediaries or bridge builders between God and the Gentiles. In Hebrews 9:11 and 12 the author says, "**When Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, ... he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal**

**redemption.**” The author of Hebrews says that Jesus was a high priest and he became a sacrifice for eternal redemption. In 1 Peter 2:9, Peter says, **“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him.”** Here the term “priest” is applied to all believers. When Christians are united with Jesus as members of His body, they join in the priestly work that Christ entered into as our mediator and the Savior of the world.

Certainly, being a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God’s own people is a special privilege for the Israelites. But in 1 Peter 2, St. Peter emphasizes that such a privilege is given to all Christians and the privilege should be used to tell God’s mighty acts to other people. Instead of being exclusive, they are supposed to be inclusive and love to invite people.

So in 2 Corinthians 5:18, Paul stresses reconciliation between God and human beings through Jesus. **“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.”** Paul calls our attention to the fact that **“God has committed us the message of reconciliation”** (verse 19). To the Romans, Paul says, **“He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit”** (Rom. 15:16). Paul interprets the priestly duty differently. They are not supposed to offer sacrifices for forgiveness of sins, but to proclaim the good news of what Jesus has done.

#### **4. The Truths of the Protestant Reformation**

As we celebrated the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation last Sunday, I mentioned that one of the important truths that Martin Luther taught was *sola fide*, which means “faith alone.” Another radical insight of the Protestant Reformation was “the priesthood of all believers.” Martin Luther believed that all baptized believers are called to be priests. In his address *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* in 1520, Luther criticized the traditional distinction between the “temporal” and “spiritual” orders—the laity and the clergy—arguing that all those who belong to Christ through faith, baptism, and the Gospel shared in the priesthood of Jesus Christ and belonged “truly to the spiritual estate”: “For whoever comes out of the water of baptism can boast that he is already a consecrated priest, bishop, and pope, although of course it is not seemly that just anybody shall exercise such office.” Luther said that not only those working in professional ministry but also all baptized believers were called to be priests.

#### **5. The Book of Discipline of the UMC**

The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church is the law of the United Methodist Churches. Chapter 128 deals with “the ministry of the

community.” It says, “**All Christians are called to minister wherever Christ would have them serve and witness in deeds and words that heal and free.**” Some United Methodist Churches say on the front page of their Sunday bulletins that “every member is a minister.”

You might ask then, “What does the pastor do?” The pastor’s responsibility is to equip every member to do ministry. Ephesians 4:11-12 says, “**The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.**” Like a coach or a teacher, a pastor’s job is to help train and equip everyone in the church not only to understand the word of God and who God is, but to be prepared to take on the unique ministry that God calls each and every one of us to.

## 6. Conclusion

The goal of the Exodus was not only for the freedom of the Israelites but also for God to establish His special relationship with the people of Israel through the covenant on Mt. Sinai. Such an exclusive privilege was given not for their own benefit, but for a special mission. Isaiah 49:6 says, “**It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.**” Israel’s mission is not to enjoy their special relationship with the Lord, but to be a light to the Gentiles so that God’s salvation is experienced by everyone.

While I was in St. Petersburg, Russia, I met a Russian pastor whose wife is a fourth-generation Korean Russian. The pastor told me that they began church planting twelve years ago and then helped Russian Christians plant eight other churches. Christine and I had the opportunity sixteen years ago to plant a church in Fairfax, Virginia. I know firsthand how difficult church planting can be. But when I think about the eight churches this couple has helped to plant, I was so amazed by their passion for reaching out to the people in Russia.

## 7. Application

Today in the world there are so many barriers and hatred between different races, countries, people, cultures, traditions, and religions. Many people are so exclusive so that they treat others not as a part of God’s families but as enemies. And everyone seems to worry about national security. How do you think we can have perfect peace and a peaceful world? Ephesians 2:14 says, “**For he [Jesus] is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.**” We are called to do the same as Jesus has done. That is our mission. Paul says to the Corinthians, “**We are ambassadors for Christ**” (2 Corinthians 5:20). May God use us as bridge builders to bring peace. Amen.