

## RELATIONSHIP – IT'S WHAT GOD WANTS!

### (Part 1)

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**Scripture:** Exodus 19: 2-8

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<sup>2</sup>The Israelites 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>Moses went up to God, and 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 yourselves 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, then 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 and summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him. <sup>8</sup>All the people answered together and said, "Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do!"

When Israel arrived at Sinai, they weren't there by accident. The wilderness of Sinai was not a detour. It was not a delay in God's plan. It was the very destination God had intended from the very beginning. In fact, years earlier, when God called Moses at the burning bush, He had said, "When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain" (Exodus 3:12).

God's purpose was never simply to get Israel out of Egypt. His purpose was to bring Israel to Himself. That is why when they stand at the foot of Mount Sinai, God reminds them of their story. He says, "You, yourselves, have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself." Notice where God places the emphasis. He does not begin with commandments. He does not begin with obligations. He does not begin with what Israel must do. He begins with what He has already done.

"You have seen. You have experienced. I carried you. I brought you." The relationship begins with grace. Before there's a covenant, there's compassion. Before there is obedience, there's deliverance. And before there is commitment, there's just this extraordinary love that God has for His people.

We know that Israel had been in a very dark place. For centuries, they had lived under oppression. Generation after generation had known nothing but slavery. They rose before dawn to make bricks for Pharaoh's cities, their backs were bent beneath impossible burdens and their lives were controlled by others. Their future seemed hopeless. Perhaps, the hardest part was knowing that nothing was going to change. Day after day became year after year, and year after year became century after century. And the cries of one generation were replaced by the cries of another.

Many must have wondered whether God had forgotten them. But if you read the closing verses of Exodus 2, we find that the curtain is pulled back to show us what is happening from heaven's perspective. The Israelites groaned under their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry rose up to God.

Then scripture gives us four beautiful statements:

- God heard their groaning.

- God remembered His covenant.
- God saw the people of Israel.
- God knew.

What a comfort! Before Moses ever stood before Pharaoh, God had heard. Before the plagues began, God had remembered. Before the Red Sea parted, God had seen. And before Israel knew what God was about to do, God knew what He was going to do. When Israel felt forgotten, they were not forgotten. When they felt unseen, they were seen. When they felt abandoned, they were actually known.

And from that moment forward, God began acting to draw them to Himself. He intervened. He broke the power of Egypt. He opened the sea. He provided bread from heaven. He gave water in the wilderness. He guided them by cloud and fire.

Now, God tells them what He has been doing all along. "I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. That's what I was doing all this time, children of Israel. I was holding you and bearing you on wings like eagles.

I believe that this is one of the most beautiful pictures in all of scripture. An eagle is strong enough to soar above the storm, and yet careful enough to watch over its young. The image is one of strength and tenderness.

In fact, Moses would later return to this very image when describing God's care for His people. In Deuteronomy 32:11, it says, "As an eagle stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions, the Lord alone guided Him." What a remarkable picture!

The eagle does not simply leave its young to fend for themselves. It hovers over them. It watches them. It stirs up the nest, teaching them to fly. And when they are unable to do what they must do on their own, it swoops beneath them and bears them up on its wings.

And that is how God cared for Israel. Watched over them, guided them, protected them, sustained them. When they were weak, He was strong. When they were afraid, He was present. When they could not carry themselves, He carried them. God is saying, "You did not get here by your own wisdom, your own strength, or your own determination. Every step on the journey, I was carrying you.

They may have thought they were simply escaping Egypt. But God says, "No. I was drawing you to Myself."

Israel saw deliverance, God saw relationship.

Israel saw escape, God saw communion.

Israel saw the journey, but God saw the destination. And the destination was Himself.

I believe that is the heart of the passage. The greatest gift God gave Israel was not freedom from slavery. It was Himself. He gave Himself. The destination was merely a land. The destination was a relationship. The destination was God Himself.

I believe that that same truth speaks powerfully to us even today. Some of you find yourselves in dark places. Some of you are carrying grief. Some of you are battling fear. Some of you feel lonely, forgotten, exhausted, or overwhelmed.

And some of you wake up each morning feeling as though you're in a freefall. You reach for something to hold on to. You try your wisdom. You try your strength. You try your resources. You try to control the situation. But nothing seems to stop the fall.

Then you discover a truth that you could never have learned any other way. Hear this. Underneath are the everlasting arms. When there's nothing left for you to hold on to, you discover this eternal divine truth that someone has got you. That is our God, beloved. That is our Father, the one who carried Israel still carries His people today.

The one who drew Israel to Himself still draws men and women to Himself even today. The God who heard their cries, hears yours. The God who saw their suffering, sees your suffering. The God who carried them through the wilderness can carry you through whichever and whatever wilderness you're in. You may have nothing left to hold on to, but God has not let go of you. Hasn't. Never will.

I believe that Exodus, this passage in particular, is a wonderful pattern of redemption that finds its fulfillment in Christ. God's purpose has always been the same. Not merely to rescue people from something, but to bring them to Himself. The same God who said to Israel, is still drawing people to Himself today.

What God did for Israel in Exodus was not merely a historical event. It was a picture of a greater redemption that was yet to come.

Israel was in bondage to Pharaoh. We were in bondage to sin.

Israel could not free itself, neither could we.

Israel needed a deliverer, and we needed a Savior.

Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:18 "Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous." Why? In order to bring you and me to God. That was what He accomplished. He brought us to God.

Notice the similarity. God brought Israel out of Egypt to bring them to Himself. Christ brings us out of sin to bring us to God.

In both cases, the goal is the same.

It's not merely deliverance. It's relationship.

It's not merely forgiveness. It's fellowship.

It's not merely escaping judgment. It's knowing God.

I want to digress a little from my notes. While I was thinking about this 'knowing God', it occurred to be that so often, it seems like the end point in our journey with God is just to know Him as Savior.

And it seems like once we do that, everything else is forgotten. And yet, it's only the beginning. The journey is to know God and have a relationship with Him. Just as we have a relationship with family, with friends, God wants a relationship with each one of us. That's what He wants. That's why He has saved us from sin so that we can have that relationship.

What do I do? What do you do to build that relationship with Him?

When we want to build a relationship with somebody, we spend time with that person. We get to know that person. Are we getting to build on that relationship? Getting a ticket to heaven is not the end of our journey here on earth.

It's the beginning. The beginning that we begin to say, "Now how can I build and get to know my Savior, my Redeemer, my God?" I think we need to be thinking about that more often and

intentionally put that in place in our walk, in our daily prayer time, on our disciplines to grow in our relationship with God. The God who carried Israel on eagles' wings is the same God who, through the cross and resurrection, opens His arms and says, "Come to Me."

Come to Me! From Exodus to Judgment Day, from Christ to Calvary, from Sinai to the empty tomb, the heart of God has remained the same. "I want My people near Me. I want to bring them to Myself."

Then we read, "When God brings us to Himself, He calls us His treasured possession." He gives us a new identity. He makes us a royal priesthood and a holy people, not because we've done anything to earn it, not because we deserve it, but because He has set His love upon us.

That is why the order in this passage matters so much.

- First, God carries. Then, God calls.
- First, God loves. Then, God commands.
- First, God says, "I brought you to Myself." Only then does He speak of covenant and obedience.

His love comes before their response. His grace comes before their obedience.

And the same is true for us. we don't obey in order to be loved. We obey because we have already been loved.

So, if today, you find yourself in a dark place, think of Sinai. Think of Egypt. Remember the eagles' wings. Remember the everlasting arms. And remember this – you are not alone. You are not forgotten. You are not beyond God's reach. The God who carries Israel is still carrying you. And when you feel as though you're falling, you're not falling into emptiness. You're falling into the everlasting arms of the God who says, "I brought you to Myself."

Sometimes, we ask the question: What changes? When God draws me to Himself, what changes in my life? It's not usually the circumstance that you're in. Israel still had a wilderness. The church, you and I, still have our trials. We still bury loved ones. We still face disappointments, struggle with uncertainty, and carry burdens.

The difference, though, is that we no longer face those things alone. The gift that God gives us is not a changed situation. The gift He gives us is an enhanced relationship with Him. God becomes our refuge in the storm, our companion in the wilderness, our strength in weakness, and our hope in darkness. The wilderness may remain as the wilderness, but now it becomes a place where we discover that God is with us right there. That is why "I brought you to Myself" is such a profound statement.

God's ultimate answer to our deepest need is not merely a solution, an escape, or an explanation. It is His presence. Not necessarily a presence that is always felt, but a presence that is always real. And perhaps, this is where this particular passage becomes personal to each one of us.

When God said to Israel, "I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself," what was He telling them? What was He asking them to do? He was asking them to look back over their journey and see His hand at work. At that time, they didn't always recognize it. when they stood trapped between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea, it did not feel as though God was carrying them.

When they were hungry, thirsty, frightened, and uncertain in the wilderness, it didn't feel as though God was carrying them. But now, standing at Sinai, God says, "Look back. do you see it now? I was

carrying you all along.” Perhaps that is what faith is all about. Faith is looking back at the faithfulness of God and allowing that knowledge to shape how we view the present.

Some of you may be in the wilderness today. You may be in a lonely place, a confusing place, a painful place, a place where it seems that your prayers are not being answered and the future feels uncertain. And if someone asked you: Can you see God at work? Your honest answer might be: Not clearly.

Let me ask you another question. Can you look back and see moments when God made a way where there seemed to be no way? Can you see the doors He opened, the burdens He carried, prayers He answered, strength He provided, and grace that sustained you when you thought you would not make it? Do you see those moments? Can you see that you’re here today because God has been faithful? And if you can see, beloved, His hand in the past, then you can trust His heart in the future.

Faith does not say: I understand everything. Faith doesn’t say: I can see where this road leads. Faith says: The God who carried me then is carrying me now. Circumstances may not prove it. My emotions may not feel it. My eyes may not see it. But God’s character assures me of it. The same God who carried Israel through the sea, through the wilderness, and all the way to Sinai has not changed. He is the same unchanging God.

And if He carried you yesterday, you can trust Him with you today. That is the confidence of faith. Not that I can see God’s hand in every moment, but that I know God’s heart. And because I know His heart, I can trust His hand. So, faith is not believing because I can see God’s hand. Faith is trusting because I know God’s heart. And that knowledge is enough to carry you through whatever you’re facing today.

So, perhaps the prayer that some of us need to make today is like the prayer of the apostles. “Lord, increase our faith. Lord, as I face this particular situation, this hard time, this difficult time, this sad time, this uncertain time, would You increase my faith? Not necessarily faith to understand everything. Not necessarily faith to see the path ahead. But faith to trust Your heart when I cannot see Your hand.” Faith to believe that the God who carried Israel will carry you.

I like the prayer of the father who came to Jesus and so honestly said, “I believe, but help my unbelief.”

I believe that sometimes that’s exactly where we are. We have this sense of: I believe God, and yet, in my own personal situation, there’s unbelief. I believe who God is. I believe He made the heavens and the earth, everything. The beauty of creation is His, I believe that. But in my situation, Lord, in my wilderness, help my unbelief. Help me to trust You more.

And faith that you need at this time is the faith that looks back at God’s faithfulness, looks back and trusts God’s character and His heart and then looks ahead because you believe in His promises.

So today, the invitation for us is to trust His heart. Wherever you are today, broken, hurting, grieving, just going through uncertain times, you feel like the moorings have been shattered underneath you, the ground has fallen away. Whatever. To be able to say: Lord, would You increase my faith to trust You through this situation. Help me to put one step ahead of the other, trusting that You haven’t let go of my hand and You never will.

God's heart, beloved, has always been – I brought you to Myself. And in that place of surety, your hope, that in that place He will never leave you and He will never forsake you. You yourselves know how I have borne you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.

I don't know how you would like to respond to God's word this morning. Whether in your heart you are saying, "Lord, that's me. That's my prayer. Increase my faith. My faith has taken a beating Lord, through what I've gone through in this last week, in this last month, in these last six months, in this last year, or even more. I need You to increase my faith. Help my unbelief."

Maybe that's you. And I was wondering whether the altar would be a place for you this morning to be able to come, kneel here and say, "Lord, would You give me faith to walk through the situation that I find myself in?"

Let us pray....

And so to each of you, I say rise up and go back with that knowledge that the eternal God has got you. As you go through this time, He will not leave you. He will not forsake you. He's got your hand and He will increase the faith that you need to go through this time. Lord, we ask this in and through the beautiful, beautiful name of Your Son, our own Savior, Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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