

**Lesslie Newbigin: “The way we understand human life depends on what conception we have of the human story. What is the real story of which my life story is a part?”**

The Scriptures invite us into a story that if we enter into it, gives us a profoundly life-defining identity that empowers us to live life well in line with our design.

We’ve been exploring this story this fall in a series called, “The Renewal of All Things,” — a bird’s eye view of some of the key points in the story of the Scriptures: Creation / Rebellion / Redemption / Restoration.

Today, we’re going to look at a time in the story of Israel just after God rescued them from slavery in Egypt. For some 400 years, **Egypt defined them and treated them as disposable slaves** used in the building of their empire. We’re going to see how **God defines them by his grace, blesses them with a new identity for his mission in the world.** And we’re going to see how this story finds its climax in the person of Jesus, and how he defines us by his grace, blesses us with a new identity for his mission in the world.

**“God Calls a People for His Mission” ~ Exodus 19:1-8; 1 Peter 2:8-9**

### **I. Remember the Past: A Life Rescued by Grace, 19:4**

1. **Israel had been enslaved by a ruthless dictator** — Pharaoh of Egypt

2. **Israel had been rescued by their covenant God** — YHWH

(1) 19:4, “I brought you to myself.”

- Ex. 20:2, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

(2) **Important:** OT believers were saved by grace, not by works!

3. **Jesus rescues us from the slavery to sin and brings us to God.**

- Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”
- C. Wright: “Whatever is going to come next in the story...will be founded on that historical grace of God.”

### **II. Anticipate the Future: A Life Blessed for the World, 19:5**

1. **God called them be a treasured possession....**

(1) **A privileged people:** “my treasured possession” (19:5) // “my firstborn son” (4:22)

(2) **Objection:** Isn’t God playing favorites here? **Answer:** Israel wasn’t chosen b/c they were special. They were special b/c God had chosen them.

- Deuteronomy 7:7-9, “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations...”

- And God chose them for a very special purpose

## 2. ...for the sake of the world

### (1) Remember these are Abraham's descendants.

- Exodus 2:23, "...the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue for slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham...."
- Genesis 12:2-3, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing....and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."
- God so loved the world that he called Abraham and made him these promises to bring about worldwide salvation.

### (2) God so loved the world that he chose Israel.

- 19:5, "...among all peoples, for all the earth is mine."
- God has not forgotten his promise to Abraham to bring salvation to the ends of the earth, but is taking a major step towards fulfilling these promises.
- Israel, like their father Abraham, is blessed in order to be a blessing to the nations of the world.

### (3) The bookends: a past rescued by grace toward a future of worldwide blessing.

## III. Embrace the Present: A Life Informed by Mission, 19: 6

### 1. A Priestly Calling: "a kingdom of priests" (or a priestly kingdom)

(1) **A priest's job: an intermediary** - someone who represents people to God and God to the people.

(2) **Israel as a whole was to serve in this way** before the nations of the ancient world as they called them to faith in the Creator God.

### 2. A Holy Calling: "a holy nation"

(1) **Confusion over the term "holy"** : "holier-than-thou" / "Holy cow, Batman!"

(2) **Definition: something that is set apart for a purpose**

- Leviticus 20:24, 26, "I am the Lord your God, who has separated you from the nations.... You are to be holy to me because, I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own."

### 3. Israel's Charter: The Ten Words — a new way of being human

- (1) **"You shall have no other gods before me."** To center our lives upon anything other than our creator leads to slavery.
- (2) **"You shall not make for yourself a carved image...to bow down to them or serve them."** God is beyond any limitations we could place upon him. Jesus is the image of the invisible God.
- (3) **"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain."** Israel was called to honor God by the way they lived.

- (4) **“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”** Given to liberated slaves who defined by their work. Weekly rhythm of 1 day in 7 for rest (mandated to not work for 48 days per year).
- (5) **“Honor your father and mother.”** Families are the basic building block of society.
- (6) **“You shall not murder.”** Humans bear the image of God, and life is a gift from God that we are called to protect and honor.
- (7) **“You shall not commit adultery.”** Called to protect the sacred bond of marriage between a man and a woman. Revolutionary act of protecting women in a world where they were nothing more than property.
- (8) **“You shall not steal.”** Called to respect the personal property of others.
- (9) **“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”** People who prize and value the truth. People who protect the dignity and reputation of others.
- (10) **“You shall not covet.”** People who are content and grateful with the Lord’s provision in their lives.”

#### 4. **Israel’s Character: “a light to the nations” that will draw attention to their God.**

- Instead, she became a cesspool of corruption, violence, and oppression. Israel herself, like the nations, and like all of humanity, became part of the problem and stood in desperate need of salvation.

### The Gospel

#### Gal. 4:4, “When the fulness of time had come, God sent forth his Son....”

**Jesus of Nazareth was not only an Israelite, but the True Israelite**, who lived according to God’s design, who loved God and others well, and who showed us what it meant to be truly human.

**But he did more than that.** The story of the Scripture speaks in ways like this, *“The is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). The calling of Jesus was to be not only the truly human one, but also the one who would bear the punishment for human sin. God “condemned sin his flesh” (Rom. 8:3).

- 1 Peter 3:18, “For Christ also suffered for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God....”

**When we believe in Jesus, not only are we restored back to fellowship with God our Creator, but we’re brought back into relationship with our true selves.** In other words, the blessing given to Abraham, “You are blessed in order to be a blessing,” now becomes ours as we apprentice with Jesus in a new way of being human.

- Matt. 5:14, 16, “You are the light of the world.... Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” Jesus, who is the light of the world, wants to now shine his light through us.

**\*\*\*Objection:** “But that’s exactly my objection to Christianity...Christians!”

1. **You’re right.** Christians, like the nation of Israel, are often a poor reflection of what it means to be truly human. The story they tell with their lives is often inexcusable (think of “predator priests” & “pastors”).
2. **Jesus forbids the very things that have been done in his name:** violence towards enemies (Mt. 5:43-44); arrogance towards others (Mt. 7:1-2); coercion (Mt. 22:21; 28:18-20; 2 Cor. 10:3-4); hypocrisy, oppression of the poor, abuse of power (Mt. 23); even hatred & murder (Mt. 5:21-22; 26:51-52).
3. **Os Guinness**, “The link between a belief and its outcome is important to examine. Some bad behavior...is an accurate reflection of a belief, while other bad behavior is such a contradiction of its belief that it is often no reflection at all.”

**But, when Christians do follow the teachings of Jesus, when they seek to follow in his footsteps of what it means to be truly human, then the results are tantalizingly attractive.**

- cf. Matthew Parris, "As an Atheist, I Truly Believe Africa Needs God"

*"...traveling in Malawi refreshed another belief, too: one I've been trying to banish all my life, but an observation I've been unable to avoid since my African childhood. It confounds my ideological beliefs, stubbornly refuses to fit my world view, and has embarrassed my growing belief that there is no God.*

*"Now a confirmed atheist, I've become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa: sharply distinct from the work of secular NGOs, government projects and international aid efforts. These alone will not do. Education and training alone will not do. In Africa Christianity changes people's hearts. It brings a spiritual transformation. The rebirth is real. The change is good.*

*"I used to avoid this truth by applauding - as you can - the practical work of mission churches in Africa. It's a pity, I would say, that salvation is part of the package, but Christians black and white, working in Africa, do heal the sick, do teach people to read and write; and only the severest kind of secularist could see a mission hospital or school and say the world would be better without it.*

Then he recounts memories of his interactions with Christians....

*"...**The Christians were always different.** Far from having cowed or confined its converts, their faith appeared to have liberated and relaxed them. There was a liveliness, a curiosity, an engagement with the world - a directness in their dealings with others - that seemed to be missing in traditional African life. They stood tall."*

**Some behavior is an accurate reflection of faith in Christ,  
while other behavior is an actual contradiction of faith in Christ.**

**What if people in BCS could look at the followers of Christ and say,** "I don't know many Christians, but the ones I do know are always different, in a good way. BCS needs what they have. BCS needs God, b/c these Christians are the most kind and generous people I know, and we need to be the kind of humans they are."

**What if our neighbors could say,** "I don't know what I think about God, but this I do know: I'd want my daughter to marry a Christian. They are the most trustworthy and faithful people I know."

**What if your co-worker could say,** "You know, I'm not sure what I think about Jesus yet, but there is one consistently undeniable argument in favor of the Christian faith—Christians."

That's what Jesus wants to do in your life and in mine, and in the community of Fatih called Mercy Hill Church.

## **Conclusion**

1 Peter 2:9-10, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

**Mercy Hill Church, may you be a people who remember that you have been rescued by grace,  
who anticipate the future realizing we have been blessed to be a blessing, and  
who embrace the present mission that God in Jesus has entrusted to us.**