

The Covenant Confirmed

Series: Out of Egypt - Exodus

Date: 13 September 2026, 14th Sunday after Trinity

Location: St George's Battery Point

Texts: Exodus 24, Revelation 19.5-9, Matthew 22.1-14

'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'

What would meeting God be like? When you stop and think about the question, it's something we all want, and yet it's also difficult to wrap your head around.

Would there be thunder, lightning, the heavens parting, being enveloped by light?

And what would you and God do when you met him?

Today we're looking at Exodus 24 and the confirmation of the Covenant between God and the children of Israel. And for my money, this text has one of the most incredible encounters with God in the Bible, and one that speaks directly to us today, but blink and you'd miss it.

This may be your first time at St George's. If so, welcome! Or maybe you've forgotten where we're up to in the story of Exodus. So let's touch base on the context. Exodus has three main themes: Redemption, Covenant and Presence. The book tells the story of God redemption of his people Israel from slavery in Egypt. Chapters 19-24 are all about God renewing his Covenant with his people. And then the rest of the book focuses on the building of the Tabernacle, so God could be Present with his people.

Back in chapter 19 the people gathered around at the base of Mt Sinai. They promised that they would do all that God has said. Then God descended upon Mt Sinai in a thick cloud, with thunder and lightning and the blast of the trumpet. And Moses went up to meet with God in the thick darkness and receive the terms of the covenant. As we come to chapter 24, now it is time for Moses to go down and present the covenant to the people. So let's dive in.

Graded holiness 1-2

Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance, ²but Moses alone is to approach the LORD; the others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him.'

This is an invitation for Aaron and his sons, and 70 elders of Israel to join Moses in meeting God. But did you notice that there are levels or gradations of how close people can get to

God. This is one of the paradoxes we've seen throughout Exodus going back to Moses first meeting with God in the burning bush. God invites people to meet with him, but they cannot come to near because he is holy.

So first at the base of the mountain there are the people of Israel. Then coming up the mountain there are the 70 elders, and Aaron and his sons, the priests. And the text says, "You are to worship at a distance." Then, Moses alone is permitted to approach God.

This pattern will be repeated in the construction of the Tabernacle, which we will look at next week, and that takes up so much of the book. The outer court will be for the people. The inner court for the priests. The Holy of Holies only for the high priest and only once a year. The Tabernacle in this sense becomes a portable Sinai, the place where Israel can meet with God.

These verses and the design of the Tabernacle show one of the tensions in the book, indeed throughout the Bible, that God desires to be present with his people, but they cannot casually come near him because he is Holy.

Willing obedience 3,7

Ok, let's have a look at the next verse.

When Moses went and told the people all the LORD's words and laws, they responded with one voice, 'Everything the LORD has said we will do.'⁴ Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said.

Moses now presents people with the terms of the Covenant, all that God had said in chapters 20-23. And the people say, "Everything the Lord has said we will do." They said this before Moses went up. They say it now a second and then in verse 7 they say a third time, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey."

The experience of the presence of God moves the people to respond in obedience. It's so interesting how we see this pattern repeated in Jesus' own ministry. Think of when Jesus met Zacchaeus, the greedy tax collector, and said, "I am coming to your house today." It completely transformed Zacchaeus. What did he say?

'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.'¹

Jesus' presence moves Zacchaeus to repentance and obedience. It's just what Jesus says in John's Gospel. "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them."² That encounter with the loving

¹ Luke 19.8

² John 15.23

presence of the Redeeming God in Christ, moves us to love him in return, and so obey, and to find that God enters our lives and makes his home with us.

The Covenant Confirmed through Sacrifice 4-8

Let's come back to Exodus. In verses 4-8 we see the Covenant confirmed through Sacrifice. First, Moses builds an altar surrounded by 12 pillars representing the 12 tribes of Israel. Then, verse 5, "he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD."

The burnt offering was a sign of atonement. The whole animal was consumed by fire. The fellowship offering was a sign of fellowship, that is relationship. And so the meat barbecued on the altar was eaten by the community.

Then verse 6,

⁶ Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he splashed against the altar. ⁷ Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, 'We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.'

⁸ Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, 'This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.'

The blood sprinkled on the altar and on the people symbolises both the participation of God and the people in the sacrifice, and that through the sacrifice God and the people are bound together. The altar is sprinkled first, because God takes the initiative in the covenant to rescue his people. The people are sprinkled after they hear the terms of the covenant read, and commit themselves to obeying it. So the sacrifice confirms the covenant and shows us that through sacrifice atonement is made and relationship is established and enjoyed between God and the people.

The apostle Peter, opens his first letter by saying that we have been "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood."³ It's that covenant language again. God's purpose for us is that we would be his obedient children, and he has made us his own through sprinkling us with the blood of the one final and perfect sacrifice - Jesus.

Communion

Those words of Moses, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you", should spark in your mind a much more familiar New Testament fulfillment: Communion.

³ 1 Peter 1.2

“This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins,” Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel.⁴

Jesus' death is our sacrifice of atonement, that establishes relationship between us and God. Just like the people were sprinkled with the blood, so we drink the wine as a sign of receiving his atoning death. And we read in 1 Corinthians that drinking the cup is a participation in the blood of Christ. The Greek word is *koinonia*, from which we get *communion*, hence the name, Holy Communion. It's why we have a confession before Holy Communion - as a moment confess where we've sinned, and to ask for the Holy Spirit's power to live as obedient children. And the book of Hebrews tells us that not only does Jesus' blood sprinkled on us cleanses us from sin, Jesus now brings us not to Mt Sinai, but Mt Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, to the presence of God himself.⁵

Eating with God 9-11

The fellowship offering finished with a meal shared by all those who had participated in the sacrifice. What do we read in the text happens next? Verse 9

⁹ Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up ¹⁰ and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli, as bright blue as the sky. ¹¹ But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.

Extraordinary moment. It is not just Moses who gets to meet God. It's also Aaron and his sons and the 70 elders of Israel. They saw God, and they ate and drank.

There's a paradox here. Later in Exodus God says no one can see his face and live, not even Moses himself.⁶ The text reads, “God did not raise his hand against these leaders of Israel.” And presumably this is because their eyes were raised no higher than his feet. Lapis Lazuli is a blue stone that was widely used in Ancient Near Eastern temples to represent the heavenly home of the gods. So it seems God is here giving these 70 elders a glimpse into his heavenly temple. In Isaiah 66.1 we read, “Heaven is my home, the earth is my footstool.”

⁴ Matthew 26.28

⁵ Hebrews 12.18-24

⁶ Exodus 33.20

It's a moment where the veil between heaven and earth parts, and Moses and the elders catch a glimpse of God, and have a taste of the joy and celebration, the feast of being in his presence. But then, it's time to go back down to earth.

Having met and eaten with God, the Lord now sends the elders back down the mountain. Moses entrusts the people to Aaron and Hur, while he goes back up the mountain to meet with God. The glory of the LORD descends upon Mt Sinai, and from down below "the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire." After 6 days God calls Moses to enter the cloud, and he is up there 40 days, this time receiving instructions on how to build the Tabernacle, the way God would be present with his people. More on that next week. But, spoiler alert, things are not going to go well under Aaron and Hur's leadership while Moses is gone.

Eating with God

We began by asking the question - what does it look like to meet with God?

In this text, the high point of that meeting, after the thunder and lightning, and hear the words of covenant and the sacrifice, the high point is a meal. Moses, Aaron and the elders eating with God.

We know how powerful sharing a meal can be with people. A meal can take someone from being a stranger and make them a friend. Our great celebrations are marked with meals. It's what we do at weddings isn't it. We have to eat and drink and be merry. It's so often how we can share our joy together.

This text is one of those windows in the Bible that show us what it is like to meet with God. It's having a meal. It's like being at the best party ever.

It's a theme that runs through Scripture. When Abraham meets God in Genesis 18, he makes God a meal. In Isaiah we read this extraordinary promise from God:

On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare
a feast of rich food for all peoples,
a banquet of aged wine –
the best of meats and the finest of wines.

⁷On this mountain he will destroy
the shroud that enfolds all peoples,
the sheet that covers all nations;

⁸he will swallow up death for ever.

The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears

from all faces;
 he will remove his people's disgrace
 from all the earth.

The LORD has spoken.⁷

Not only is this the promise of celebration, it's the promise of the end of death itself, the great enemy that cuts short even the best of our celebrations.

There is no coincidence that the apostle John records that Jesus first showed his glory by turning water into wine at a wedding banquet.⁸ This God does when he comes into your life - he brings joy and celebration. When we read the Gospels we see Jesus sharing meals with people all the time. And it's not just with the good, respectable people that Jesus eats. It's with prostitutes and tax-collectors and sinners, some might say "deplorables", so much so that the Pharisees have a go at him saying, "he welcomes sinners and eats with them!"

And the point of Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet that we heard read, is that everyone is invited, but it is possible to reject the invitation. God wants you to be there at the feast, with him. Will you accept his invitation?

A wedding banquet is just what we see in that vision of the end when Christ returns and we enjoy being in the presence of God forever.

⁶Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

'Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

⁷Let us rejoice and be glad

and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

and his bride has made herself ready.

⁸Fine linen, bright and clean,

was given her to wear.'

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)

⁹Then the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'

⁷ Isaiah 25.6-8

⁸ John 2.1-11

Who is this Lamb? Jesus' cousin John the Baptist tells us, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"⁹ The bride is the Church, all those who have said yes to the invitation.

What the 70 elders only tasted, this is what God invites you to join in in the full. And each time you come for communion, that too is a foretaste and a promise of the wedding feast of the Lamb. It's a little moment where the veil between heaven and earth is drawn back, and we're brought to feast at the Lord's table, to commune with him.

So will you come and taste God's invitation to you? It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done. You're welcome. Oh yes, he has some new shining clothes for you to wear, a wedding suit, fit for the party. You'll have to leave the shabby clothes of your old life behind. But he has prepared the banquet. He's opened his doors. He's got the clothes ready, and he invites you to come and share in the wedding feast of the Lamb.

Even our best celebrations disappoint and come to an end. To be in God's presence will be the perfect party that never ends. Do you long for that? Don't miss out on Jesus' invitation. And let his feast transform your life.

⁹ John 1.29