

Today we talk about one of the most significant events in the history of God's people, their wedding in the desert. In his great mercy, God rescued the nation of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. He protected them from Pharaoh's army. He led them through the wilderness, places with no food or water, providing for their needs by miraculous means. He told them, *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery"* (Exodus 20:1). He made them his own and showed them his love and faithfulness. He brought them to Mount Sinai to make a formal agreement or covenant with them. And with no hesitation and great excitement they said "yes!"

**"Gifts from the Hand of a Generous God."**

*"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.' Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he splashed against the altar. 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.' 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.' Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement of lapis lazuli (Lapiss lazuly), as bright blue as the sky. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank."*

You've seen it on the screen. Maybe you've experienced it yourself. What excitement there is when a man and woman have dated, courted, and learned enough about each other to pop the question! Sometimes they go to the place where they first met, or the place of their first date, or maybe some scenic place like a mountain top or at the foot of a mountain. Usually the man asks the woman, "Will you marry me?" And in that question the man is offering to the woman his faithfulness and love for the rest of his life, having proven himself trustworthy, caring, loving, providing, even selfless. And with that knowledge the woman often excitedly says, "yes." Then comes the big day, their wedding. Before God and witnesses they commit to love one another and become one flesh, husband and wife.

God's people said, "yes!" *"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.'"* The LORD had proven his faithfulness to the children of Israel. He had rescued them, provided for them. He chose them, called himself their God. What mercy! What grace! At Mt. Sinai he gave them his words and laws for them to follow as his people. He promised grace and every blessing to them for following his commands. And in that moment, without hesitation, they said, "Yes!" How could they not? There is no other God. No one could love them as much as the LORD.

The LORD forged a relationship with them and taught them how to live in it. He gave them his *words* which we call the moral law, the ten commandments. He spelled out what God's will is for mankind and how we are to truly love and live in our relationship with the LORD and with fellow mankind. He also spelled out for them the *laws* which directed their worship (ceremonial laws) in the promised land and governed secular affairs in the promised land (civil laws).

His *words* and *laws* served as a curb. Just as a curb keeps a driver on the road, so God's law would have punishments to keep people from actions that would harm others or lead them away from God. They served as a mirror. They showed the ugly truth about where they had failed in their faithfulness and sinned. This would remind them of their need for repentance and turning back to the Lord. These laws served the forgiven sinner as a guide. It would show them what God's will is for their lives and how to truly live and love one another. God gave them as a hedge to keep them separate from the pagan and idolatrous nations around them so that they would not be led astray to unfaithfulness and stay together in the promised land until the Savior came. God gave his law as a shadow – all the sacrifices in the ceremonial law – all the blood being shed – pointing to the Savior to come – the Savior they desperately needed.

It was time for the ceremony. *"Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he splashed against the altar."*

The big day had come. Preparations were made. The *altar* represented the Lord and his presence. The *twelve stones* represented the twelve tribes – all Israel. They showed total dedication to the LORD as they sacrificed *burnt*

*offerings*, the whole bull burned up to the LORD. The Lord had committed to them. They committed to him wholeheartedly.

They sacrificed *fellowship offerings* signifying the peace that existed between God and them because of the grace and mercy of the Lord. A fellowship meal would follow with some of the meat that was placed on the altar – a reception beyond their wildest imaginations.

Moses used the blood in an important way. Half of it he sprinkled and splashed on the altar. The life of the animal was in the blood. And the writer to the Hebrews wrote about this in Hebrews 9, *“In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness”* (Hebrews 9:22). Blood was shed and poured out for their sins, for their transgressions. Sin separates, so there could be no peace between the Lord and these people except for the blood being shed to cover over their sins.

Was God sure about all this? Sometimes when two people are getting married, there is that relative or friend that says, “I don’t see it.” They criticize the relationship that the two aren’t a good match, or they doubt that it will last. “Does she know what she’s doing?” “Is he sure about this, doesn’t he know about her past?” Would you say that about the LORD? Why did he choose them? They grumbled against the leaders he sent. They disobeyed simple commands the LORD had given. Did God know about the golden calf, their rebelliousness and stiff-neckedness?

Would people say the same about you? “I don’t see it.” “Doesn’t he know what they’ve done, what kind of people they are?” “One moment they are goody two-shoes and self-righteous looking down on others. The next moment they are hypocrites selfishly sinning just like the rest of the world rejecting God’s good commands.” They’d be right, wouldn’t they? God did not choose you because of how good you are or might become. He didn’t choose you because you are better. He chose you because of his great mercy and grace. And blood had to be shed for your forgiveness.

Except it wasn’t the blood of animals. No, those animal sacrifices in the Old Testament were only shadows of the one great sacrifice needed, the blood of the sinless Son of God, Jesus Christ. Jesus shed his blood to make peace between you and God. He paid the penalty of our sin and sinfulness. Is God serious about his commands and laws? Yes. Look at what Jesus had to suffer for our transgressions. The Law is never a means of salvation for us. As a mirror it shows us our great desperation and need of a Savior. The Gospel is the good news that God did not abandon us in our unfaithfulness. God is faithful to his promises, and he sent a Savior to pay our debt, die the death we deserved for our unfaithfulness, and cleanse us of all sin. *“And the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7). Jesus died and rose again to make peace with God and prove to us that we have it. We aren’t saved because of our commitment to turn away from sin and follow God’s ways. We commit to turn away from sin and follow God’s ways because God has saved us and set us free, empowers us with his grace to follow him. God is sure about his love for us. *We love because he first loved us.* (1 John 4:19).

*“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.” Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli, as bright blue as the sky. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.”* It’s one thing to have water sprinkled on you, but to have blood sprinkled on you! Moses sprinkled them with blood. The message was clear – they were purified by the blood. They were given this covenant by the LORD. They were his and to live for him. The marriage license was signed.

And the reception followed. God in his mercy did not strike these sinful men down when they came up the mountain with food from the fellowship offering. The LORD allowed them to see him in a way that was not too powerful or glorious for them or to strike them down, but in a way that showed them they were at peace with God and his people.

God does not sprinkle you with the blood of bulls. The blood of His Son shed on the cross has purified you from all guilt. He has washed you clean in the waters of your baptism. God does not pour out blood on an altar anymore. The sacrifice is complete. Jesus gives you his own body and blood with the bread and the wine of the Lord’s Supper for your forgiveness and peace. And not by your merit, but by the merit of Jesus Christ alone and through faith in him, God promises you eternal life, and the wedding supper of the lamb, where we will eat and drink with God in heaven for all eternity.

This is a wedding reception to look forward to – a gift from God. The Lord has made us his own. By his grace and mercy and his faithfulness he has made us recipients of all God’s gifts and heaven itself. We commit to live for him because he has made us his own by Grace. He’s sure of it. All of these gifts are **Gifts from the Hand of a Generous God**. Amen.