

# SET APART IN UNITY

**SERIES: ONE KINGDOM.  
INDIVISIBLE.**



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Exodus  
Second Message  
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## *Exodus*

We are living in a unique time of history---a global pandemic, incredible tension about racial inequality and injustice, and an election looming on the horizon. A new phrase that has been introduced into our vocabulary is “essential business.”

Early on our government classified certain operations as essential: health care, primary responders, food services, etc. That has caused some complaints from organizations which weren't deemed “essential.” The complaints came from Tesla's manufacturing plant, marijuana dispensaries, and yes, churches.

Some churches are pushing back to insist that our government deem them essential businesses.

I'm extremely eager to meet for worship in person. I can't wait to preach to real people instead of a camera. Shelter-in-place has been very challenging.

The point I want to make is that we don't need the government to tell us whether we are essential or not. If we know who we are---if we really understand what it means to be the kingdom of God--then what does it matter how our government classifies us? Why should we expect the kingdom of this world to recognize the kingdom of another world?

I know the point is that we want to be able to gather in person, but when we allow the kingdom of this world to define the kingdom of God, something very dangerous happens; we say that how the world views us is really the important thing. We become one more earthly institution fighting for our interests. But that isn't who we are.

This has always been a temptation for the people of God. It's always tempting to allow ourselves to be defined by the immediate and very present realities of our world, rather than looking to “Our Father in Heaven” to know who we are. In fact, this is the foundational idea that God's people learned thousands of years ago when he rescued them from slavery in Egypt.

Last week we saw how God created people to be unified in their purpose to bless the world. This morning, we'll see how God created a nation whom he called to be his kingdom on earth. As God formed this people, he wanted them to understand that they were distinct from the world around them. They were to be different. They were to be set apart in unity.

This is the second week of our series that we've called One Kingdom. Indivisible. We're preaching this series in collaboration with over 20 other churches across the Bay Area. In the midst of an incredibly divisive culture, we want to come together to proclaim that we are one in the kingdom of God and that our identity as followers of Jesus comes before any other identity we might have: political, socioeconomic, racial, or otherwise.

A few moments ago we heard from Brian Leong about his experience as a Chinese American. Maybe you resonated with his experience. Or maybe you didn't. When we come together to talk about unity, we are all going to have different backgrounds. For Brian, unity has to begin with a sense of healing. For others, it will involve reconciliation or repentance or something else entirely.

We need to say up front that there are many kinds of false unity. I've been so grateful to think through this series with other pastors from different perspectives. One of them shared with me that when I invite them to be unified, they are worried that I mean I just want them to agree with me and stop voicing their own thoughts.

That's not unity. It's a pretend unity based on a powerful person stifling the real opinions of others. That's not what we're looking for here. We want to find a real unity where everyone can speak their mind, and we disagree in the context of working it out together. We'll talk more about that in a few minutes.

This morning we're looking at one of the most formative stories for the people of God. When God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, he gave them a new identity as his kingdom. In many ways, the exodus is how the kingdom of God was born.

We're following the story of the kingdom of God because this is our story. The exodus is where our story was given shape. As we work through the story this morning, I'd like to invite you to do two things.

First, consider a way in which the story of the exodus mirrors your story. How do you resonate with the story of being rescued out of Egypt? Second, consider how this story might resonate for someone with a different background. Maybe you've heard some new stories these past few weeks. How does the exodus resonate with you, and how do you think this story might resonate with someone else?

## Suffering

Our story begins with oppression. God's people ended up in Egypt because of Joseph, but hundreds of years had passed.

**Exodus 1:8, and 13-14:**

**Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.**

**So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves 14 and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.**

The purpose of this series is to help us be grounded in our story as the people of God. It's important to remember that our story begins with oppression. That's true for all of us. The story of the kingdom of God—our story—begins with oppression from ruthless taskmasters in Egypt.

That's helpful because remembering that we were once oppressed gives us sympathy for oppression everywhere. It helps us to identify with the suffering of others, and it motivates us to work to end the oppression of others.

We are more sympathetic and understanding of situations that we have faced personally. For years my wife suffered from hip pain. At one point, her hip hurt her every day so that walking anywhere caused pain. I was very sympathetic to her. I understood that it must be terrible to live with that kind of pain.

Then I suffered a running injury—my back and my legs hurt. It seemed like the pain went everywhere. I

remember thinking, "Oh...this is what my wife had been experiencing." My experience gave me a new perspective.

Today, we all experience different things. Some of us experience very little persecution. Some of us face racism because of the color of our skin. Some of us face sexism. Some of us are judged differently because of our age or natural ability. We all have our own pain. So to know that our story began with oppression in Egypt connects with us in different ways.

God's people suffered in Egypt, but then something happened. God heard the cries of their suffering

**Exodus 3:7:**

**Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings."**

Our story may begin with oppression, but it does not go unnoticed. God hears. God sees. God knows when his people suffer.

I can't overstate how important this is. God hears the suffering of his people. When we're in pain, it is so much worse when we think that no one notices or cares. Suffering is difficult, but suffering alone feels impossible.

We have seen this play out in our country over the past few weeks. That sense of not being heard is what lies behind the protests and the riots. In 1966 Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. said: "a riot is the language of the unheard."

Please don't me wrong. I am not condoning riots or approving of violent protest. That is never a solution. Violence against law enforcement is not in any way a solution to the problem of violence against African American men. But Dr. King can help us to understand, not condone, why people riot.

It's because people feel that no one sees their suffering. They are partly right. The particular pain of African Americans has for too long been denied.

The story of the kingdom of God begins with God hearing the suffering of his people. The voice of the one who suffers does not go unheard. God hears.

If God hears, then we should too. If we are One Kingdom, then when one of us suffers, we all suffer. Part

of being unified is that we listen to each other's pain. We need to have God's eyes and ears to see the suffering of our brothers and sisters. Listen to the pain of others.

One of the things you learn when you counsel people, whether it's marriage counseling or individual counseling, is that a lot of our sinful reactions in life are driven by pain. Pain often lies behind anger, greed, sexual temptation, hatred, anxiety, and much more. The same can be said for how we view the world.

A lot of how I think the world ought to work is driven by the particular ways the brokenness of this world has hurt me. The things that I want to see fixed are often the things that have hurt me the most.

Over the past few weeks, I've heard so many stories of pain. Countless stories of African American men being pulled over, even here in Palo Alto, for no reason. Stories of mothers training their sons on how to talk slowly and put your hands on the dashboard when that happens. Stories of weapons aimed at them, being frisked, and suffering violence.

What happens when I listen to the pain of others? My heart breaks for them. My heart breaks for the brokenness of the world. And I want to do something. You can't hear someone's deep pain without wanting for it to be fixed.

When God hears the pain of his people in Egypt, he does something. He rescues them.

## Rescue

God steps in and rescues his people. That isn't all that he does. He could have whisked them away, but he doesn't. In fact, when God begins to act, things get worse—their oppression increases.

But over the next several weeks, God embarks on a systematic object lesson designed to teach his people one very important truth: God is bigger than the Egyptian oppressors. God is bigger. He sent ten plagues strategically designed to demonstrate God's power over the various forces that were at work in the world of Egypt. Each of the plagues corresponded to an Egyptian god or something they held dear.

God was trying to get his people to see that their earthly suffering is not the only thing that was true. By the end of the story, the victims had become the victors.

## Exodus 12:35-36:

**The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. 36 And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.**

Not only did God rescue his people from Egypt, but he made it so that they plundered the Egyptians on their way out. This is what is so important for us to realize when we are in the midst of suffering or oppression or pain.

What we see with earthly eyes is not all there is. When we see things only from the perspective of the world, we don't see the full reality. If I'm waiting for my government to tell me that church is essential, then I'm only looking with earthly eyes. What about you? What things in your life are you tempted to see from an earthly perspective?

Several years ago, I went on a missions trip to Mexico with some people from our church. We preached the Gospel inside prisons. But as often happens on trips like this, the people we encountered ministered powerfully to me. We attended a church service inside the prison on a Sunday morning, and I had one of the most powerful experiences of worship in my life.

In the middle of that prison, I gathered with other followers of Jesus Christ and sang these words over and over again: "Yo soy libre, yo soy libre." Those words mean, "I am free, I am free."

You see, these people were doing what the people of God always do. They were recognizing that their situation didn't define them. What they saw with earthly eyes wasn't the whole truth. There was a spiritual reality, and a future promised to them that was greater than anything happening in the world.

We can do that too when we look at our world with kingdom eyes.

This encouragement needs a warning because this idea can sometimes be used to get out of the instruction I gave you earlier. Instead of listening to the pain of someone else, you tell them that they need to stop focusing on their situation and focus on God. But that's not looking with kingdom eyes. That's another kind of false unity that glosses over real pain.

Looking with kingdom eyes means that you see the hurt. You recognize the pain as real but you are also aware of God and his purposes. You are also aware that even when terrible things happen on earth, we worship a God who is not racist. He cares for African American men who fear the police, and he cares for honorable law enforcement professionals who fear unfair retaliation. Our God in heaven is bigger than all these situations.

Everything we do flows out of our knowledge that God is bigger and his kingdom—his perfect kingdom—will ultimately prevail. Right after God rescued his people from oppression, he gave them something to help them remember this. He gave them a precious gift: he told them who they were.

This is what we need to know day after day. If we don't know who we are, we are going to find ways to divide over every little thing. But when we know we are, we can be one in Christ.

## Identity

After God led his people out of Egypt, their first stop was at a mountain where he would tell them who they were.

### Exodus 19:4-6a:

**'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'**

This is what God did in the Exodus: he saved his people from Egypt, taking them out of the world, and making them distinct. He wanted them to understand that they were to be different. The powers of Egypt did not define them. God defined them. They were his "treasured possession" and were supposed to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

When a child is born, you give that child a name. A name is more than a word to refer to someone. Your name carries your identity within it.

Maybe some of you have heard of the recent birth of a child to Elon Musk and his partner Grimes. They chose a unique name for this child. According to Musk, you pronounce the name "X-Ash-A-12". The mother

suggests a different pronunciation, and that's something they have to work out between them.

Musk and his partner chose a unique name because they wanted some kind of a particular future for this new life.

When God saved his people from Egypt, that was the birth of his kingdom. And as we do with any birth, God gave this new life an identity. They would be his treasure. There were to be a kingdom of priests. But they were also to be a holy nation. But what does that mean? Who are we?

The root idea behind "holy" is to be different. To be set apart. To be unique and distinct. This is what we need to understand about the identity of the kingdom of God. We are to be distinct.

That same emphasis carries forward into the New Testament. The Greek word for church, "*ekklesia*" means "the called out ones."

One of the main aspects of the kingdom of God is that it is distinct from the world. But once again we are so tempted to allow ourselves to be defined by the identities the world gives us.

We are Republican or Democrat or CNN or Fox News. We are rich or poor or white or black or Asian or Latinx. We are white collar, blue collar, educated, service industry, tech industry. We are Americans or immigrants or undocumented. We take those identities, and we own them because this is who the world tells us we are.

Those distinctions are incredibly important—each of those changes your experience in this world dramatically. But we cannot be lulled into thinking that our experience in this world is all there is. We cannot allow these identities to supersede our identity as God's kingdom.

Our tagline for this series is "Kingdom Allegiance Before Political Alliance." Our Kingdom Allegiance is the identity God has given us. Be distinct from the world.

Eugene Cho, a pastor in Oregon, recently wrote a book called "*Thou Shalt Not Be a Jerk: A Christian's Guide to Engaging Politics*." His first chapter is entitled "Thou Shalt Not Go To Bed With Political Parties."

There is no political party or political position or political candidate who maps one to one with the

values of the kingdom of God. That's not just because each person is sinful. It's because we're talking about different kingdoms. America is an earthly country. A finite institution created by sinful men. It may be a very good institution. Maybe it's the best national system ever. Or maybe it's not. It doesn't really matter. It's a different kind of kingdom than the kingdom of God.

In the last few weeks, a lot of people have gotten behind the movement of Black Lives Matter. I've heard some Christians criticize that by asking, "How can you support everything that movement stands for?" But that's exactly the point. We can't support everything that any movement stands for because our primary identity is with God.

As members of the kingdom of God, we can work together with different groups in those areas where our values align, and we don't work together where there is conflict. I'm not defined by the movement I support or the person I vote for or the word on my voter registration card. Christians are going to find points of alignment with a wide variety of earthly institutions. And that's okay.

Real unity doesn't mean we are aligned on everything. That's false unity. People think that unity means conformity. One of the pastors working on this series put it to me this way, "When you talk about unity, it makes me afraid that you want to whitewash the differences, force me into conformity, and deny my reality."

Some else said, "Unity often means that I have no voice, and I suppress what I really think."

That's not what we're talking about here. That's not unity, that's coercion. It's oppression. It's a false unity built by someone who cares more that everyone smiles nicely for the camera than in having the real, honest conversations that we need to have.

Here's what needs to be said clearly: unity does not mean that we all agree. If I am going to authentically call us to unity rooted in the kingdom of God, then I have to be okay with disagreement. In fact, I have to expect it. If I look around and find conformity, then it means one of two things - I'm alone in a room, or not everyone is speaking their mind.

Real unity involves the hard work of listening to each other and allowing other voices to be heard, even when they bring a different perspective. It's our shared identity given by God as a people set apart that allows us to do this. This is the journey we are on—not to achieve conformity, but true biblical unity.

## Conclusion

Peninsula Bible Church is a registered 401(c)3 with the state of California. We have an employer identification number issued by the United States Government. We hold title to the property at 3505 Middlefield Road according to the records of Santa Clara County. PBC is very much an earthly institution.

But Peninsula Bible Church is also a community of people who have professed or are exploring faith in Jesus Christ. We are a spiritual reality which transcends our 401(c)3 status, our EIN, and any property records in the world.

We can't throw off our earthly categories. We have to file taxes and process payroll and maintain our property status. But we cannot let earthly categories be the ones which define us. This is the lesson God taught his people during the exile. They were not victims of Egyptian masters. They were a treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.

At the beginning of this message, I invited you to consider how you personally resonate with the story of the exodus. I hope you discovered something. I also asked you to consider how someone from a different experience might resonate with this story. Each of those is important. This is your story, and it is also our story.

Next week we'll see how this new nation fared and examine another chapter in the story of the kingdom of God: the exile. We'll see how they failed to live up to the calling God gave them and how God transformed their character by allowing them to be oppressed once again.

We are set apart for unity. That's our identity. Listen to the pain of others and connect with them as fellow brothers and sisters.