



June 18th

THE NEW SHOFAR

*Our Lord's conception of discipleship is not that we work for God,
but that God works through us.*

God leads us from slavery to a life of freedom and blessing

It is important to understand that in Chapter 19 of Exodus we are beginning a new section in the Book. Its significance is that God is preparing to make a covenant with this group of people He has led out of slavery in Egypt. The imagery used assists us in understanding what is happening: the people have moved from a life as slaves in Egypt, have overcome the massive army of Egypt, crossed the Red Sea and managed to march three months through the wilderness- fed and watered all the way by Almighty God himself.

Everything in this chapter highlights that it is God who is initiating and carrying out these things. There is no suggestion of the people having earned this honour. It is about God.

Never forget the great deeds of God

The people are urged to remember all God has done for them, to reflect on the mighty power of God as their Sovereign goes about implementing the divine plan: salvation for all. They can be comfortable in obeying God because they have experienced in their own lives all that God can do. No enemy, not even the mighty army of the Egyptians can stop what God has put in place. What God promises will happen. Those who believe in God and obey the divine commands will experience unending blessings. They will know God.

God told Moses to remind the people of these works of deliverance telling them that as a result of what He is doing, they will be His people and are to become a kingdom of priests to the nations through following God's commands. The people responded by committing themselves to God in every aspect of their lives. Every part of them belonged to God.

The covenant with Moses

The Israelites were to become guardians of God's covenant. That meant living out the commandments so that they will become living lights to the nations. It will be in them, in the way they live that they will be able to speak to the Gentile peoples, showing them the love and mercy of the Living God. They can highlight the emptiness of their own gods. God refers to this vocation as becoming priests for the nations of the earth. They are to bring the nations before God. The world depends on their faithfulness.

God called Israel to live as "lights" in the midst of the nations who were living in darkness. They were ignorant of the truth of creation and the creator and know nothing of the promises of salvation and divine blessings. The special light Israel was to shine on them was the light of knowing God, coming to understand the meaning and purpose for their lives on earth and their destiny in eternal life. From them would come the Light of the world, Jesus Christ, God and the Saviour of all.

***Again Jesus spoke to them,
saying, "I am the light of the world. W
hoever follows me will not walk in dark
ness, but will have the light of life."***

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them

As his Father had compassion on the lost peoples of the world, so Jesus shows the same compassion for those who do not know his Father's love. It breaks his heart to think that people are left to make their way through life without knowing the will of God and without having the comfort and blessing of divine gifts empowering them for that journey.

It is vital to understand that all God is doing in and through his Son, is done so that humankind may be restored to life in Eden. Jesus calls that life **the Kingdom of God**. In that Kingdom there will be a very different kind of life because God lives within us, through us, empowering us that we may be all he calls us to be.

- ³⁴ *God trains my hands for war,
so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.*
³⁵ *You have given me the shield of your salvation,
and your right hand has supported me;
your help has made me great.*
³⁶ *You gave me a wide place for my steps under me,
and my feet did not slip.*
³⁷ *I pursued my enemies and overtook them;
and did not turn back until they were consumed.*
³⁸ *I struck them down, so that they were not able to
rise;
they fell under my feet.*
³⁹ *For you girded me with strength for the battle;
you made my assailants sink under me.*
⁴⁰ *You made my enemies turn their backs to me,
and those who hated me I destroyed.*
⁴¹ *They cried for help, but there was no one to save
them;
they cried to Yahweh, but he did not answer them.*
⁴² *I beat them fine, like dust before the wind;
I cast them out like the mire of the streets.*
⁴³ *You delivered me from strife with the peoples;
you made me head of the nations;
people whom I had not known served me.*
⁴⁴ *As soon as they heard of me they obeyed me;
foreigners came cringing to me.*
⁴⁵ *Foreigners lost heart,
and came trembling out of their strongholds.*

We find this kind of reassurance in **Psalm 18**. God is not “up there” in heaven watching what unfolds here on earth. He is with his people, offering to them all they need as they collaborate with him by following Jesus. Nothing can stand in their way. Victory is already theirs. How can they know that? Because it is what God promised, what Christ guaranteed.

A ministry of endless possibility

It is with this divine assurance that the disciples went out and proclaimed the news of **Immanuel** – God with us. It was God with us in the incarnate Christ that the sick were healed, the dead raised to life, lepers cleansed and the Devil defeated. These were the signs that they were priests of God, lights to the nations.

Compassion in the Gospel of Matthew is not simply feeling sympathy and empathy, but it is acting concretely in the name of

Christ to be with and minister to the afflicted, afflictions that are not just physical but extend to spiritual and psychological, into every dark place in our human existence. Because Jesus is the only person explicitly named as showing compassion in the Gospel of Matthew, it has a divine and messianic significance. Yet this messianic ministry of compassion is now shared with all those who seek to follow him as disciples. His ministry is our ministry, and the cornerstone of what he did among us – the Father – is our cornerstone as well. Because of Jesus, nothing can separate us from God...*neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation.* Victory is assured.