

## Heroes of the Faith

*Moses and the Sea* (Exodus 14:1-31)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on June 13, 2021

### Introduction

- ❖ This summer we've started a new series we're calling *Heroes of the Faith*. Each week we're going to pick a well-known Old Testament character and preach on the most well-known episode in their story. That high point where they really shine as a hero of the faith. We want to commend to you their brave choices and heroic actions. **But our bigger goal, in the end, is to demonstrate how these heroes only foreshadow a greater Hero to come.** We do want to imitate these biblical characters – but not just in their actions – but in their faith. To share in their hope of divine deliverance through God's Chosen Deliverer.
  - Last week, we began with Abraham and his willingness to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac. This week, we'll move on to Moses and the Exodus story. **There is so much we could talk about in the Exodus, but this morning we'll zero in on the famous parting of the waters and the crossing of the Red Sea recounted in Exodus 14.**
    - It's such a well-known story to so many of us, that it's easy for this miraculous event to lose its impact. So I think it'll benefit us to look at the crossing of the Red Sea from the perspective of the original ancient audience.
  
- ❖ **In our modern era of bridges, tunnels, and ferries, it's difficult to grasp the significance of a water crossing for those living in biblical times.** Think about how there is no mention of a single bridge in Scripture. So to cross a body of water was no simple feat. Bodies of water functioned as natural barriers that divided peoples. The borders of kingdoms and empires were defined by rivers, seas, and other bodies of water.
  - Within biblical cosmology, waters divide. Genesis 1 tells us the heavens were made by separating the waters from the waters. The waters above were separated from the waters below, so to ascend or descend from Heaven meant passing through waters.
  
- ❖ **Water even figuratively divided one era from the next.** Noah passed through flood waters into a new world. Joshua crossed the River Jordan into a new Promised Land. John baptized people in water into a new kingdom. So when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, that event was understood as the beginning of a new epoch in redemptive history. And it established a pattern of divine deliverance that we see repeated throughout Scripture.
  - **The crossing of the Red Sea became a paradigm for biblical salvation.** All the categories we need to grasp salvation were established in this inaugural event. **From that moment on, throughout Scripture, God would continually deliver an undeserving people by the might of his strong hand.** Fighting for a people who keep fighting against him. Saving a people who are too lost to save themselves.
  
- ❖ If you want to know how salvation works – how you can be delivered from a life of futility, a life under wrath, a life destined for condemnation – then this story of the Israelites crossing the waters of the Red Sea must become more than a story. **It must become the very paradigm by which you approach God to receive his promised deliverance through his Chosen Deliverer.** To help you in this, I want to highlight from our text four observations regarding divine deliverance. We're going to see how divine deliverance (1) dismays, (2) humbles, (3) initiates, and (4) anticipates.

## Divine Deliverance Dismays

- ❖ The first observation is that **divine deliverance dismays – by first leading you down a difficult path.** In other words, we can't assume that – because God is committed to saving his people – that he wouldn't want us (or allow us) to experience any difficulty in life. God is not like an anxious parent who can't bear to see his children suffer – who will immediately swoop to the rescue at the slightest sign of trouble.
  - **No, what we discover in Scripture – and within this paradigmatic event – is that God will often wait before he rescues and will allow us to experience the trouble.** In fact, many times he'll lead us into the trouble. Leading us into dismay by leading us down a difficult path. That's what we see happening in Exodus 14.
  
- ❖ Prior to our text, we're told in chapter 13:17 that, *"<sup>17</sup>When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. . . . <sup>18</sup>But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea."* **So God didn't take the Israelites along the most obvious and quickest path to the Promised Land.** That would've been the ancient trade route known as the *Via Maris* ("the way of the sea"), which would take them directly northeast from Egypt into Canaan. Instead, the Lord led his people, we're told, *"by the way of the wilderness"* toward the Red Sea heading southeast.
  - **For reasons that were not apparent at the time, the Lord took them the long way. And not just a long way but a strategically bad way.** This path into the wilderness towards the Red Sea was leading God's people into a death trap. No military strategist would choose this path. They would be trapped, hemmed in by the sea. I'm sure it didn't take long for the Israelites to realize this. Pharaoh immediately realized this. But what's surprising is that the Lord realized this – he planned this.
  
- ❖ Look at chapter 14:3. This is the Lord telling Moses what's going to happen. *"<sup>3</sup>For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, 'They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.' <sup>4</sup>And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them."* **So the Lord knows that Pharaoh will immediately recognize this strategic error, and out of the hardness of his heart, he will change his mind and pursue them.**
  - And that's what happens in v5. *"<sup>5</sup>When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, 'What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?' <sup>6</sup>So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, <sup>7</sup>and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them."*
  
- ❖ **This is how divine deliverance works. It leads us to dismay. It leads us to a state of helplessness.** If God had led them by way of the sea towards Philistine territory, then if they faced resistance, they could at least put up a fair fight. But by taking this path into the wilderness, being shut in by the sea, they were sitting ducks. They were helpless. All they could do was cry out to the Lord for deliverance.

- ❖ **That's the first step in biblical salvation. God will often lead you down a difficult path that ends in dismay.** You feel like you've run out of options. And like the Israelites, you're tempted to give up. To throw in the towel.
  - Listen to what they say to Moses in v11 as they see the Egyptians and their chariots approaching, *"<sup>11</sup>They said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? <sup>12</sup>Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."*
    - **They had no confidence that God is going to come through for them.** They're convinced they will die and wish Moses had left them alone to serve the Egyptians. Slavery is better than dying in the wilderness.
  
- ❖ Let's be honest. **How many of us have felt a similar sense of hopelessness?** You feel like God has led you down a difficult path. You tried your best to follow him. To leave behind your old life where you were enslaved to so many things. You tried to live according to his Word. Thinking you would lead a life of victory and success.
  - But so far your experience of following God is marked by difficulties and trouble, conflicts and failures. You feel hemmed in and helpless. **Maybe even wondering if it would've been better had you not followed God in the first place.** Maybe reverting back to your old way of life – your old enslavements – is better than this.
  
- ❖ But don't you see? **You're exactly where God wants you at this moment. Like the Israelites, you're on the west bank of the Red Sea.** Looking one way, there's a raging sea blocking your path. Looking the other way, there's a raging army coming to destroy you. You're hemmed in. There's no where else to look but up. That's the point. Before you can experience his deliverance, you must be led down a difficult path of dismay. Where your only recourse is to throw up your hands, look up to the heavens, and cry out for help.

### **Divine Deliverance Humbles**

- ❖ That's where God wants you. Now this leads directly to our second observation. **Just as it dismays you, divine deliverance humbles you – by asking you to stand still and be silent.** That becomes apparent in our passage. The Lord delivers in such a way as to humble you, especially by reminding you that his salvation is unmerited. That not only can you *not* deliver yourself – you can't do anything to deserve being delivered by him. **Divine deliverance is a humbling experience where you are brought to a point of helplessness, and you confess your desperate need for him to do all the work.**
  
- ❖ Recall how the Israelites were paralyzed in fear, trembling on the west bank of the Sea. They have no fight left in them. They assume they're going to perish here in the wilderness. **The Israelites are no heroes.** God's deliverance is clearly not in response to their heroic actions. **He's not cooperating with them to accomplish a great salvation. No, he's working in spite of them.** They've already surrendered. Only the Lord is ready to fight.

- ❖ But that's how divine deliverance works. **When the Lord saves, he's going to do it himself.** He's not asking Israel to help in this battle against the Egyptians. He doesn't expect them to gird up their loins and get into the fight. **No, he expects them to stand there and be silent. To stand still and watch.**
  - Listen to v13, *“<sup>13</sup>And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. <sup>14</sup>The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.”* When God saves, you have nothing to fear. Just stand firm. Stand still and see the salvation the Lord will work for you. He will fight for you. You have only to be silent.
  
- ❖ **Now this pattern is repeated, in similar fashion, in many of the epic battles of Scripture.** We're going to cover some of them in this series. At the battle of Jericho, the Israelites were not technically asked to stand still or stay silent, but they weren't asked to do the heavy lifting in engaging the enemy. They were told to walk around the city and blow trumpets (Josh 6). Or when Gideon met the Midianites with his 300 men, victory was won again by blowing trumpets and smashing jars in their hands (Judg 7). We're told that that caused every Midianite to turn the sword against his own comrade. It was over just like that.
  - **The message in each case is that victory clearly came by the strong arm of the Lord.** Walls don't come down at the sound of trumpets. Armies aren't defeated by smashing a few jars. You could've just asked them to stand still and watch. The outcome is the same. In the end, the Lord fights and you watch.
  
- ❖ Now you might be thinking that's too easy. **If divine deliverance is obtained that easily, then it must not be valuable.** Anything easily obtainable is usually considered cheap and of little worth. That's why participation ribbons or trophies usually end up on the bottom shelf or in the trash. **If it's so easily obtainable, if it doesn't require you to exert the necessary effort to come out on top, then how valuable is it really?**
  - So you can see the concern when dealing with divine deliverance. If it's too easily obtainable, then wouldn't that suggest that salvation is cheap and of little worth? But this is where I want to push back on the idea that standing still and watching is an easy thing to do. **I'd argue that it's extremely hard to stand still in battle.** Your instinct is to flee or fight. To stand there and watch might be the hardest thing to do.
    - **And it's the most humbling thing to do.** To be told, “You just stand still, shut up, and watch.” That's humbling. You'll have to swallow your pride. You'll have to admit your inability and helplessness. That's not easy for prideful people like us. No one enjoys having their helplessness exposed.
  
- ❖ It's especially difficult for those who are highly educated and accomplished. Those who have made a name for themselves among their peers, within their company, or in their profession. **For those who highly excel in your studies or careers – for you to be told that you can't do anything or contribute anything to your salvation – to be told to just stand still and be silent sounds very condescending.** You're treating me like a child. It's insulting.

- ❖ But it's Jesus himself who said in **Matthew 18:3-4** that, “*unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*”? I have a six-month old at home, so this imagery is very real for me. My baby is utterly helpless right now. We have to do practically everything for her. She can't feed herself. She can't change herself. She can't even sit up by herself for long without face planting into the ground.
  - Friends, let's not think more highly of ourselves. **If you're not ready to become like a small child – to stand still and be silent – then you're not ready for the kingdom of heaven.** That's a humbling thought. But that's the way of the Lord. **That's how he delivers – not by making much of you but by exposing you.** Exposing your helplessness – your inability to save yourself. God is going to do all the work. You have only to be silent.
- ❖ But that's the good news of Christianity. **That you cannot save yourself by anything you do.** You are saved by grace through faith and not by works so that no one can boast. Some may say that salvation by grace alone sounds too easy. **But it's not easy to stand still, be silent, and watch God do all the work of your salvation.** Swallowing your pride and admitting you're a helpless babe – is no easy thing. But until you do, you cannot be saved.

### **Divine Deliverance Initiates**

- ❖ So we've seen so far that divine deliverance humbles by leading you down a hard path. And it humbles by treating you like a small child who watches mom or dad do all the work. Which then relates to our third observation – that God has to take the initiative in our salvation. **In other words, divine deliverance initiates – by saving you before you learn to trust.**
- ❖ Look with me starting in v19. We're told that the angel of God – who had been leading Israel up to this point with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night – made the first move and stood between the host of Israel and the pursuing host of Egypt. So throughout the entire night, the Lord hindered the Egyptians from coming near to Israel.
  - And throughout the entire night, “*<sup>21</sup>Moses stretched out his hand over the Sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. <sup>22</sup>And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.*” (vv21-22)
- ❖ That wall of water on the right and on the left of the Israelites was not just held up by a strong east wind. **But by the sovereign grace of God.** And after the Israelites made it through, we're told that the Egyptians pursued after them, going into the mist of the sea. But God frustrated their plans, clogged their chariot wheels, and threw them into a panic.
  - And then in v26, the Lord tells Moses to stretch out his hands once more. **And those walls of waters were released by the justice of God, overwhelming the Egyptians until not one of them remained.**

- ❖ And then read in vv30-31. *"<sup>30</sup>Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. <sup>31</sup>Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses."*
  - Take note of the order. **God didn't wait for Israel to have faith – to learn how to trust him – before delivering them.** If he was waiting for that, they would've never been saved. They would've died right there on the west bank of the Sea.
    - But God didn't wait. He took the initiative. Look at v31. First, the people saw the great power the Lord used against the Egyptians. They saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. *Then*, they feared and believed. This is the way God saves. He takes the initiative. **He saves us when we cannot save ourselves, and when he opens our eyes to see, then we trust and worship him.**
  
- ❖ That's the order. **When God saves that way, it demonstrates the freedom of his grace.** He's not beholden to anyone. He doesn't belong to any one nation. So he gets to dispense his grace and justice as he sees fit. That's what sets him apart as holy and glorious. And that's the intended message that the Lord wanted to send to Israel, to Egypt, and to all of us today.
  - **If there is a consistent theme in the book of Exodus, it's that God does what he does so that all may know that I AM the LORD.** That I AM the God of all Creation and the Great Deliverer. You have to remember that, up to this point, the people of God have been subjugated for over 400 years under the might of the Egyptian Empire. **No one in those days would've thought much about the God of Israel. Everyone would've assumed the gods of Egypt were stronger, more sovereign.**
    - It was assumed that the God of Israel must have abandoned his people or he's too weak to rescue them. **Up to this point, God's name meant very little.** So he was concerned for his name.
  
- ❖ Listen to what the LORD says in v4, *"And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD."* He says something similar in vv17-18. *"<sup>17</sup>And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. <sup>18</sup>And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."*
  
- ❖ **It's like the Lord is toying with Pharaoh.** He leads Israel into a vulnerable position, hemmed in by the sea, knowing what it will look like to Pharaoh. Pharaoh will think he has the Israelites right where he wants them, and he'll pursue with reckless abandon.
  - **And let's not ignore the fact that three times the text says that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh or the hearts of the Egyptians as a whole (14:4, 8, 17).** So there's a clear emphasis here in chapter 14 that God is in the driver's seat. He's taken initiative. **He's sovereignly ordaining these events and even the reactions of his enemies.** God hardened their hearts.

- ❖ But elsewhere in Exodus, it stresses how Pharaoh is responsible for hardening his own heart, so there's no suggestion that Pharaoh was operating against his will. All of Pharaoh's decisions were free decisions, but all his free decisions were pieces within God's overall sovereign plan. **Like a master chess player, God was essentially forcing his opponents to move themselves into checkmate.**
  - From the start of the game, God knew every move and knew how he was going to get glory over his enemies. So he ordained and orchestrated every move so that Pharaoh and the Egyptians would freely move themselves into checkmate. *"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will."* (Prov. 21:1)
  
- ❖ This is how God saves. **He exalts his sovereign grace by setting apart an undeserving people, saving them by showing them mercy. And then he sets apart another undeserving people, judging them by showing them justice.**
  - The Israelites and Egyptians were sinners alike. They all deserved to drown in that sea. It's only by God's sovereign grace – only because of his divine initiative and his covenant faithfulness to his promises to save – that Israel experiences deliverance.
    - And let's not forget, Church, that the same truth applies to us. **We all deserve to be drowned in the sea of God's holy wrath.** The reason we're not is not because of our faith or faithfulness. It's because of God's covenant faithfulness. It's only until he graciously opened our eyes to see his deliverance accomplished that we learned to fear and trust in him.

### **Divine Deliverance Anticipates**

- ❖ Now that begs the question: What act of deliverance has the Lord accomplished for us? He obviously didn't lead us through the Red Sea. So what event are we referring to? Identifying this accomplished deliverance leads us to our fourth observation. **Divine deliverance anticipates – by pointing you to a greater exodus to come.**
  
- ❖ **This is why I get worried when Christians try to apply Exodus 14 in their lives by speaking of their own exodus experiences.** When I said the crossing of the Red Sea is a paradigm of biblical salvation, I don't mean you should apply it as a paradigm for handling your personal troubles. I don't think it helps to think in terms of your own exodus experience or your personal "Red Seas". **It's dangerous to apply our passage as a way to give you hope that, if you just believe, you'll get through whatever difficulty you're facing.**
  - Because we have no idea if God is going to part those waters. It's well within his right to let those troubles overwhelm you. **It wouldn't be the first time he let the waters overtake someone that he loves.** So it would be cruel and untrue to tell a Christian that – no matter what obstacles you face – that God will part the waters if you believe hard enough. It's simply not true.

- ❖ **That's why it's not helpful to speak of your own exodus experience.** Crossing the Red Sea is a paradigm of salvation in the sense that this pivotal event in the OT ultimately sets the stage for a greater exodus that took place in the pages of the NT.
  - In Luke 9, Jesus is on the Mount of Transfiguration, and it says **Luke 9:30-31** that, *"two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, <sup>31</sup>who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem."* In the footnotes of the ESV, it says that the Greek for the word "departure" is literally exodus. **Jesus is speaking to Moses and Elijah about the exodus he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.** That means Jesus is the only one who should be speaking of his own exodus experience. Because the exodus in our passage was ultimately setting the stage for his greater exodus.
  
- ❖ **Just like the way of the wilderness, the path to Calvary seemed like a strategically bad move.** And just like Pharaoh with his hardened heart, Satan probably thought he caught God in a mistake and so he pursued with reckless abandon.
  - But the cross was no mistake. It's the way God saves. He led his Son down a most difficult path. Right up to the waters of judgment. And there he humbled himself. **He passed through the walls of death – but came out the other side victorious in resurrection life.**
  
- ❖ **The whole point is that the Exodus at the Red Sea is pointing to the Exodus at Calvary – where deliverance was accomplished on an infinitely greater scale.** And you and I share in this story of deliverance – not by imitation, not by going through our own exodus experience – but by identification, by identifying ourselves with Christ Jesus and his exodus.
  
- ❖ That's why – when Christians face hardship – we shouldn't be thinking, "I must be going through an exodus experience. This must be my Red Sea moment." **No, if you're a Christian, you've already had your exodus experience. You experienced it in Christ – on his Cross, in his Tomb, and through his Resurrection.** You were included in those saving events, so that means you've already made it safe to the other side.
  - I don't know what the outcome of your present hardship will be. I don't know if God will part the waters of your present troubles. **But if you're in Christ, then I know that you're already on the safe and secure side of the Sea.** All that remains for you to do is what the Israelites did – to fear the Lord and to learn to trust him, as you follow him through the wilderness we call life.