

THE SONG OF SALVATION

EXODUS 13:17-15:21

Welcome/Announcements/Small talk. Operation Christmas Child. IDOP.

Well, grab your Bibles and keep them open, we're continuing our series in the book of Exodus, this story of how God saves his people, how God gets them out of slavery and brings them into salvation. And the reason we're looking at this story is that so often as Christians we throw around these terms - we talk about being saved, we talk about redemption, we talk about salvation, and sometimes ppl both inside and outside the church don't even know what these terms mean, or have wrong ideas of what they mean, and here in Exodus we have *The Story* that gives meaning to these terms.

The Exodus is the central story in the Bible that demonstrates what being saved is all about. When the New Testament authors are writing about what it means to be a Christian they are regularly using terminology, language, stories that come from the central saving event in the history of God's people. They use Exodus language to talk about what Jesus has accomplished through his death and resurrection. So if you want to understand what it means to be saved, what it means to be a Christian, you have to understand the story of Exodus.

READ 14:1-31

I was talking to a friend this week who's wife is having their first baby in about a month. It got me remembering all the preparations that went into having our first daughter Ava. That first baby, you just don't quite know what to expect, you've never done this before. We were in Thailand at the time, and I remember packing a bag in advance for going to the hospital with all that we'd need. I scouted out the best and fastest route to the hospital. We had been taking birthing classes in the Bradley method so we had been rehearsing that stuff. And we had a birth plan with how we wanted things to go at the hospital. I remember the day that Eli went in to labor all of that went out the window. It was hot in Thailand of course, so we'd decided to go to a pool swimming that morning. Well, in the midst of bobbing around like an overinflated beach ball, my 42 week pregnant wife started feeling contractions. We quickly got out of the pool and changed and I drove her to the hospital on our scooter while Mike headed back to our place to pick up our stuff.

Well, labor was incredibly long. The Bradley Method was totally useless. As the afternoon wore on into evening there were the hardships of hunger, thirst, fatigue, swollen joints, tired muscles... and as I sat in the labor room it seemed like Eli was dealing with some of those same things too. Well, finally at about 4 in the morning this stubborn little baby arrived. But not without complication - Eli had lost a lot of blood, I actually thought she was going to die, and we ended up staying in the hospital for another three days. When we finally got to home with this beautiful little package, after all the preparation and effort and exhaustion that went into just having this baby, I remember breathing this deep sigh of relief... here we are, finally the hard part is over. Boy was I wrong! Having the baby was just the beginning. The hard road of parenting had just begun and is still going on right now.

I think it's fair to say that Israel experienced something like this in Exodus Chapter 14. You see, so far in Exodus the entire story, Moses' calling, his exile, his return, his encounters with Pharaoh, the plagues, have all been building and preparing and getting us ready for this climactic moment that we saw last week, when Pharaoh finally releases God's people. When he finally says, Go! And you can imagine the feeling the Israelites had as they streamed out of city of Ramses - they must have breathed a deep sigh of relief... Finally the hard part's over. But as we get into this section between chapters 13 and 18, on the road to Mt. Sinai, we're going to see that the hard road for God's people is just getting started.

So what do you do when life gets hard? You see, God has saved his people....but he's bring them on a journey. What Israel had expected was that in delivering them God would sort of just candy crane them out of Egypt and drop them into the land flowing with milk and honey. And they are shocked to find themselves on a pilgrim path that includes hardship and conflict. Conflict with their enemies, with their sin, and with themselves.

What do you do when life gets hard? We can have the expectation that the Christian life should be easy, that adding a little Jesus to our life should only make it better, and when we come up against hardship and conflict we're shocked. The math doesn't quite add up between what our expectation was and the realities of life - anxiety, depression, addiction, broken relationships, strain in the workplaces, strain in the home, stress, sickness, our own sin - when we open the junk drawer of life's troubles, when we come up against the realities of a broken and sin sick world, we don't know what to do.

What do you do when life gets hard? How do you live on the difficult pilgrim path?

Maybe you're here this morning and that's the very question you're asking. Being a Christian hasn't turned out the way you've expected and you're wondering if you should give up. Maybe you're on the verge of saying, "Christianity, yeah I tried that, didn't work for me." Maybe you are dealing this morning with depression or anxiety or sickness and wondering how this fits in with the plan of a good God who loves you. Or maybe you are entangled in the bonds of secret sin *wondering where the victory is that the Bible seems to say a Christian should have.*

Wherever you are at in the midst of your troubles, God has something to say to you this morning. Life is hard. Life at times can be really rough. So what do you do when life just feels tough? There are three encouragements things our passage this morning says. (FOLLOW, TRUST, SING)

1.) Follow.

Let's dive into the story. As the curtain opens we find God's people on the edge of the Egypt proper, in the borderlands on the verge of the wilderness. They've escaped the clutches of the greatest political and military power of the ancient world, but it seems that military strategy is not Israel's strength. In fact, as they flee Egypt Israel seems to follow the worst military strategy in history - they march more million people including women and children straight toward the sea. And they end up cornered with their enemy at their backs with no way of escape.

And it's not surprising that before long before Pharaoh has a change of heart. He realizes that his entire free labor force isn't just going for a three day jaunt in the desert and coming back, so he decides to go after them and bring them back by force. Look at v. 6, "*So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them.*"

Egypt was famous for its chariots. One historian says that the chariot was the weapon of war that allowed Egypt to become the most powerful military force on earth. And so Pharaoh summons the core attribute of his power and here they are bearing down on Israel with all their might. v. 9 - "*The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea.*"

God's people find themselves squeezed between a rock and a hard place. They are enclosed by the sea on one side, and an enemy bearing down hard on the other. In any world this would have been incredibly daunting, but especially in the ancient world.. To the ancients

the sea was enigmatic, powerful force, a force in many ways just as powerful and unpredictable as an enraged dictator.

Even today the sea is an uncontrollable force. I grew up along the coast and rode BC Ferries to Vancouver Island through many winter storm seasons. The ocean is powerful. Even though we've been to space and sent rovers to Mars, the deepest trenches of the ocean remain the least understood and explored places on earth.

So you can imagine in the ancient world how intimidating the sea would have been. And for a society whose worldview had much more crossover between the physical and spiritual worlds than our post-enlightenment modernism, the sea was this physical representation of chaos. In fact, throughout the Bible, the image of the sea has to do with chaotic forces opposed to God and his purposes. So Israel finds themselves stuck between their former master laying claim over them and the chaos of life.

You ever feel that way? Do ever feel like you are been pressed in, hemmed in on every side by sin and brokenness? By the chaotic realities out here of a world broken by sin, and the inner realities of sin and temptation? All of us understand what this feels like on some level. If you're a stay at home mom you understand the feeling of chaos. You can feel hemmed in on the one side by the sheer stress of managing your kids, sticking to the food budget, keeping the house clean, making sure there is food on the table for dinner, and at the same time feel oppressed on the other by the old master of your own sin - anger, impatience, envy, selfishness. Or maybe you feel the chaos of work on the one side and oppressive force of addiction on the other. You feel the stress and busyness of work and look for escape in the old slave masters of alcohol, or pornography or just plain checking out. We all have some sense of what this feels like.

And inevitable the result is fear. Look at v. 10 - "*When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly.*" You might not be shaking in your boots, you might not be quaking at your situation - but I guarantee you the fear you are experiencing might sound like this - if I really follow God, if I really trust him and give him my all, this is the way life is going to be. You're afraid that God isn't looking out for your best.

You know how I know that? That's what Israel felt. Look at what they say 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? Isn't this what we said to you in*

Egypt? Leave us alone.... It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."

They are saying, if this is what salvation looks like, we don't want it. If this is what life looks like with God as our master we'll go back to our old master - thank you very much. Do you recognize that sentiment? It's reflected in the person who says "I tried Christianity, but it didn't work for me." "This whole Jesus thing just isn't working out the way I expected."

But notice who the Israelites blame in all this. They complain to Moses for bringing them out into the wilderness, but who should they be blaming? Who is it that has led them here?

Go back all the way to Ch. 13 and verse 17. Look at what it says:

"When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near.... But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea."

Yahweh, the LORD, the God who rescued his people out of Egypt, who brought them out under the blood of the Lamb, and who has promised to bring them to the Promised Land, instead of leading his people down the short road along the Mediterranean, the quickest journey toward Canaan, turned them south toward the wilderness and leads them directly to the edge of the sea. Into the hardest situation. I mean, this is astounding.

And what it says to us is that whatever hardship you are facing this morning, however you are feeling hemmed in, whether life is hard because of your own sin, or because of others sin against you, or just a combination things in the junk drawer called trouble, ultimately the reason behind all the reasons for where you are is a God who has led you there.

Lately, especially my two older girls, have been getting better at navigating while we're driving. You know, they actually pay attention to where we are going and the route that we take. And especially my oldest, who is like oldests can be, regularly asks me from the back of the car with a very anxious voice, "Dad, do you know where you're going?"

And sometimes we look at our lives and we ask God that question - God, do you know where you're going? Well, he does, and he has a purpose in what he's doing. Let me suggest to you two from our text - one implicit and one explicit.

The first is this - God loves you too much to let you take the quick and easy route to the Promised Land. You see, look at Israel - they've escaped slavery but they still have the scars on their backs and the fears in their hearts. God has gotten them out of Egypt, but it's obvious that he still needs to get Egypt out of them. God has gotten them out of slavery, but he still needs to get slavery out of them.

God has saved you, but as we see through Israel, in his love God allows his people to face hardship and conflict head on, with your enemies, with your own sin, with the brokenness of life. God is layer by layer peeling back the slavery that remains in you and preparing you for the Promised Land. That's first.

But there's a second reason for what God is doing. Look at v. 4, "*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 Yahweh.*" God will not settle for being less than The Glorious One in your life. He wants the glory.

God has led you hard against the chaos of the sea, facing the unrelenting enemy of sin, for your good and for his glory. God always leads by way of the desert. This is his way with his people. So embrace what he's doing. Follow him there. God is wanting to do something in you that you can't do yourself. He wants to teach you to trust him. So you need to follow him, and secondly you need to trust him.

2.) TRUST

Look at what Moses says to the people. Verse 13 - "*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. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.*"

The place God wants to bring you in all of this is the end of yourself. There are four simple words he wants you to say - actually five because one is a conjunction - I. Can't. Do. This. Because you can't. You can't rescue yourself. You need to trust God.

No matter how hard you try to overcome the chaos of the sea or the power of the enemy - you can't. No matter how disciplined you get or how much tooth enamel you lose from the grit of self-effort, unless you trust and rely on God for deliverance you will die. Until you recognize the hopelessness of your situation and place all your hope in God, trusting him with reckless abandon, you are going to die or you will be dragged back to Egypt. Trust him.

You it's funny because this is so counterintuitive. B/c in our minds we think the essence of freedom, that true freedom, requires independence. That real freedom is only found in rescuing ourselves. But facing the fact that you aren't strong enough, that you can't do it on your own, in the way God has made the world is the very heart/essence of freedom.

How this leads to transparent community - interlude.

And why do we need to trust him? Because look at what he does - he saves. v. 15-30
with interludes.

God rescues his people. They crossed over. The old life is gone and the new life has begun. Going through the waters God's people had been through a sort of death and resurrection experience. We'll see just as many trials along the way in the wilderness, but there is a distinct break here with their old slave master.

In 1 Cor. 10 Paul uses the Exodus story to describe what we experience at baptism. Baptism is symbolic of this death and resurrection experience, it is the covenant sign that we have broken with the old way of life under the old slave master and have crossed over into something new. *Take time to encourage those who haven't been baptized to consider it.*

So we need to follow God where he leads, trust him because he saves, and lastly we need to sing. What am I talking about? Look at Chapter 15. We're not going to read the whole thing this morning, but Chapter 15 is a song recounting all that God has done in Ch. 14. There are several places across the narrative portions of Scripture that do this - they recount the facts of what God has done in poetic form. They celebrate his works. And this is one of them. And what these songs do is really take the reader, take us, from an earthly perspective to a cosmic perspective. They view the event from God's view. And that's what's happening here. And at the heart of the poetic picture we get is a God who conquers on behalf of his people. Who wins victory over the chaos of the sea and the enemy of his people.

And this is the story of the whole Bible. Think for a moment - is there any other place you see God gathering the waters so that dry land appears? Gen. 1. Gen. 1 says that *"the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the spirit of God was hovering over the waters."* There was nothingness, disorder, chaos... and what did God do - he brought form and order out of chaos. v. 9 - *"And God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.'"*

From the very beginning God is conquering the waters.

And as we turn forward in the Bible we get to Isaiah, and Isaiah remembers what God did at the Red Sea in Ch. 51 - v. 9-10 -

And this is a beautiful picture of what God has done, but who is this Rahab? Who is this dragon? Bear with me while I nerd out for a moment. Rahab was the Egyptian god of the deeps. She was a monster who ruled over the sea, and brought darkness and chaos.

So when we see the story of creation and the story of The Exodus we are seeing a historic record of facts, but we are also see something even more cosmic. We are seeing the reality of God's victory in a cosmic battle over every god, over every force in all of creation that is opposed to him. Are you tracking with me? The Exodus is about God's victory on behalf of his people over Egypt, but there is an even more Cosmic Story that it is pointing to. God is saving his people by defeating every power opposed to him.

And at the heart that story is Jesus. What happens in Exodus finds it's comic fulfillment in Jesus. After Jesus is born his family flees the order of Herod to kill all the male Hebrew children. They go down to Egypt only to return to God's place. Jesus, as he begins his ministry, goes through the waters of baptism and right away the Spirit leads him out to the wilderness for forty days. And then Jesus goes around encountering the forces of chaos. He heals the sick, he delivers the oppressed. Everywhere he goes he is beating back the darkness. Not only is he forgiving sin, he is healing people from all its effects.

Then this crazy thing happens. Jesus is on a mountain with Peter, James and John, and suddenly Moses and Elijah appear with him and Jesus is talking to them. And as Luke records it, he says that Jesus talked with them about his departure - he talked with them about his death which was coming. But what's interesting is that the greek word used for departure is actually the word for Exodus. Jesus talked with them about his exodus. Jesus was pointing to what he would accomplish through his death and resurrection - the saving of God's people and his victory over every enemy that is opposed to him.

Do you see that there is something far more Cosmic is being pointed to in Ex. 14-15 than you imagined? Turn forward with me to Revelation Ch. 18. Egypt - Babylon representative of God's enemies. Rev. 18:21 - do you see the Exodus tones here?
Rev. 21:1-4.

What do you do when life is hard. You follow, you trust, and lastly you sing. You do what Israel is doing here. You remember the works of God. What God has done and will do.

Prince of Egypt:
There can be miracles
When you believe
Though hope is frail
It's hard to kill

Who knows what miracles
You can achieve
When you believe
Somehow you will
You will when you believe

Not a song of our faith/believe, but the objective work of Jesus in and through the cross.

Song repeated by Miriam - sings first line over. This is the song meant to be sung over and over.
The song of salvation.

This is what we are doing in having communion.