

You Shall Know I AM:

The Great Deliverance (Exodus 13:17-14:31)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on October 28, 2018

Introduction

- ❖ **It's interesting how some of the biggest, most pivotal events in world history centered on a crossing of a body of water.** When Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon, it changed the course of human history. All the achievements of the Roman Empire and its vast reach and cultural impact all the way to today – can be traced back to that brazen river crossing.
 - The Rubicon was just a humble river that functioned as the border between ancient Gaul and Rome. But the crossing was so significant because Caesar was knowingly violating Roman law. A provincial governor leading troops into Rome was considered a declaration of war. So here's Caesar, the governor of Gaul, leading the entire 13th Legion over the Rubicon, instigating a civil war that he decidedly won. He became the first emperor of the Roman Empire, securing Rome's prominence in world history and its lasting impact on Western civilization. My daughter is learning Latin this year because **Caesar crossed the Rubicon**.
 - We could make the same argument about Washington crossing the Delaware River on his way to win the Battle of Trenton. We're not speaking British English today because **Washington crossed the Delaware**.

- ❖ Friends, this morning we're going to look at another famous crossing of a body of water that changed the course of human history. I would argue that **Israel's crossing of the Red Sea** is one of those pivotal moments in world history. Not only did it mark the birth of Israel as a nation state – whose very existence impacts the current events of our day – but that crossing of the Red Sea has a reach that extends well beyond our present age into eternity itself.
 - **The crossing of the Red Sea is a paradigm for biblical salvation.** That means it sets the stage for subsequent acts of salvation in the Old and New Testament. **It offers the necessary categories for understanding and appreciating what God continues to do** – rescuing an undeserving people by the might of his strong hand; fighting for a people who keep grumbling and fighting against him; saving a people who are too helpless and lost to save themselves.

- ❖ **So if you're a student of history, if you want to understand the way the world is today, if you want to know where history is taking us (beyond even this age and into the next) – then you need to be well familiar with this pivotal event.** If you've learned about Caesar and the Rubicon and Washington and the Delaware but you haven't really studied Moses and the Red Sea – then there is a huge hole in your understanding of world history. You've overlooked a significant, cultural-shaping, eternity-altering event.
 - So this morning I want to fill in that hole for you. We're going to look at Exodus 13 starting in v17 and then cover the entire chapter 14. And as I just mentioned, this one event is a paradigm of biblical salvation. **So as we go through the text, I want to show you four observations regarding the Lord's salvation.** 1) The Lord saves by leading us to the end of our rope. 2) The Lord saves in a way that humbles his own people. 3) The Lord saves in a way that vindicates his own glory. 4) The Lord saves by means of a greater exodus.

The Lord Saves by Leading us to the End of our Rope

- ❖ The first observation I want to make is how the Lord saves by leading us to the end of our rope. In other words, very often God doesn't come running at the first sign of trouble. He doesn't act like a helicopter parent, hovering over his kids, swooping in to the rescue at the slightest scrape or bruised knee. **Many times God will patiently wait and let us experience pain – or like he did for Israel, he might even lead us into a difficult situation – so that we get to the end of our rope.** We hit rock bottom and there's nowhere else to look but up.
 - This is what we see the Lord doing in chapter 13:17. Let me read it, *"¹⁷When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, 'Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.' ¹⁸But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle."*
- ❖ So we're told that as God led his people out of Egypt, he didn't take them along the most obvious path – the well-established coastal road heading northeast from Egypt into Canaan. It was an ancient trade route known as the *Via Maris* ("the way of the sea"), and it was the shortest and most direct path to the Promised Land. But instead he leads them *"by the way of the wilderness"* towards the Red Sea.
 - Just as an aside, I realize there's debate as to which body of water they actually crossed because literally it says "the sea of reeds". English translations typically say Red Sea because that's still the majority view – that they crossed the northwestern branch of the Red Sea, known today as the Gulf of Suez.
- ❖ I think there's biblical evidence to support that, but **the main point is that the way the Lord was leading them didn't make a whole lot of sense strategically.** Now God does give a reason for this move in v17. He says he doesn't want them to lose heart and change their minds when they run right into the mighty Philistine nation. So he leads them the long way. They head south by way of the wilderness.
 - But you could argue that this path was leading them into a death trap. **From the standpoint of military strategy, this is a bad move.** Israel is going to be shut in by the sea. They're going to be sitting ducks. Pharaoh recognizes this. The Israelites recognize this. And the thing is – the LORD also recognizes this. He planned this.
- ❖ Look at chapter 14:3. Here the LORD tells Moses exactly what Pharaoh is going to think and do. *"³For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, 'They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.' ⁴And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them."*
 - Do you see what this means? This means the LORD knew that going towards the Red Sea was a strategically bad move. He knew Pharaoh would catch that so-called "mistake" and pursue them. **He knew his people would be trapped – hemmed in by the sea and utterly helpless.**

- ❖ This is God's way. It's paradigmatic of the way in which he saves. **His way of salvation leads people towards a test of faith.** If he led them by way of the sea and if they were confronted by the Philistines, it would be tough but at least they could put up a fight. At least there was something they could do, and there was a chance they could come out on top.
 - But by leading them into the wilderness and hemming them in by the Red Sea, God left his people without options. There's nothing they can do. They're sitting ducks. **Their only recourse is to trust God to come through for them.**

- ❖ That's how the LORD saves. He leads you down a path that's hard and through a gate that's narrow (cf. Mt. 7:14). **In fact, the gate is so narrow, that in order to get through you're forced to strip away all the things you rely on to get by in life.** So by the end of the path, you're stripped bare. You're standing there naked like a helpless babe. All you can do is lift your hands and cry out for help, trusting that your Heavenly Father will come and rescue.
 - That's the way in which the Israelites were led. They were led to the end of their rope. They were led into a situation where they had no other options, no other recourse, but to throw up their hands and cry out to God for help.

- ❖ Friends, it's no different in our case. **Perhaps you feel like the Lord is leading you down a hard path – along a way that doesn't make much sense.** You feel hemmed in. You're being stripped off of all the things you tend to rely on. Maybe it's your health that has been stripped from you, and you can't rely on your natural strength anymore. Maybe certain relationships have been taken away, and you can't rely on those people anymore. Maybe it's something related to your career or studies. Whatever it is, you're at the end of your rope. You don't know what else to do or who else to turn to. You're out of options.
 - **I hope you're starting to see that you're in the same situation as the Israelites, standing on the west bank of the Red Sea.** They look one way and it's a raging sea blocking their path. They look the other way and it's a raging army coming to destroy them. All they can do now is look up and trust in God to come through. And it's all that you can do too. **God has led you along this way by design.** The way is hard and the gate is narrow, but you can be sure it leads to life.

The Lord Saves in a Way that Humbles His Own People

- ❖ So our first point is that, along the way of salvation, God has a design – he has reasons – to leads us to the end of our rope, to a state of helplessness. He wants us to finally look up and rely on him – to put our trust in him alone. But before we do that we need to be humbled. This is our second observation: The Lord saves in a way that humbles his own people.
 - **I see, in a number of places in our text, God trying to humble Israel, especially by reminding them that the salvation he will accomplish for them is totally unmerited.** They have not done anything to deserve deliverance. They have not proven themselves worthy of rescue. In fact, they've done the exact opposite. And yet here we are – about to witness the greatest Old Testament display God's sovereign grace in the deliverance of an undeserving people.

- ❖ We see this point emphasized in chapter 13:19. **There we're told that Moses took the bones of Joseph with them during the exodus.** Genesis ends with the story of Joseph and how the Lord led him to the end of his rope in Egypt, along a way that made no sense at the time. But in time, it was revealed that Joseph being in Egypt was a means to rescue the descendants of Abraham from extinction during a great famine. By Genesis 50:24-25, Joseph has the sons of Israel solemnly swear to bring his bones out and bury them in the Promised Land on that future day when God visits and graciously delivers them from Egypt.
 - **The point is that, here in our text, deliverance is a sure thing but not due to the faithfulness of the Israelites – but the faithfulness of God to the promises that he makes.** He promised to Abraham that this land in Canaan would be for you and your descendants. **That's why it's not called the Reward Land. It's the Promised Land.**

- ❖ Later on in **Deuteronomy 7:7-8**, Moses reminds the Israelites that they weren't rescued because they're such a great people. *"⁷It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."* **In other words, the Exodus happened – not because of anything owing to God's people – but because of God's love and faithfulness to his promises to their ancestors.**
 - If we keep reading, we see just how underserving the people are. Look in chapter 14:10. The Israelites see the Egyptian army off in the distance. They fear greatly and they grumble against Moses. They say in v11, *"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? ¹²Is 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."*

- ❖ Listen to that. **They have absolutely no confidence that God is going to come through for them.** They're convinced they're about to die, and they wish the LORD and his servant Moses had just left them alone to serve the Egyptians. It would've been better, they say.
 - These people are not a great example of faith. Clearly God is not rewarding their faithfulness. He's not responding *to* their faith. He's responding *in spite of* their lack of faith. They're about to surrender. Only the LORD is ready to fight.

- ❖ But that's the point. When the Lord saves, he's going to do it himself. He's not asking them to help with this battle with Egypt. **He's not asking them to gird up their loins and get into the fight. No, he tells them to stand there and watch and just be silent.**
 - Look at v13, *"¹³And 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. ¹⁴The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.'"*

- ❖ Now you might think that's easy. You just have to stand there and watch? That's super easy. Actually it's not. **It's actually very hard to stand still in a battle.** Your instinct is to flee or to fight. To stand still might be the most difficult thing to do.
 - And it's the most humbling. **To be told, "You just stand still and stop talking and just watch." That's humbling. That's a shot at our pride.** A lot of us guys, once we become homeowners, we're all into doing-it-yourself. We don't need to call a plumber. We don't need an electrician. We've got YouTube. I'm going to do it myself.
 - But then we make a mess of things, and our wives have the good sense to call an actual plumber. And as that professional is getting his hands dirty, we're hovering over him, trying to talk a big game, explaining what we tried to do but it didn't work. And again our wives are the ones with the good sense to tell us, "Just stand there, stop talking, and watch." You have only to be silent.
- ❖ It's humbling. But that's the way of the Lord. **That's how he saves – in a way that doesn't make much of you but rather exposes you.** Exposes your weakness, your helplessness, your inability to save yourself. God is going to do all the work. You have only to be silent.
 - That's the good news of Christianity. **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. Now some are going to say that salvation by grace sounds too easy, too good to be true. **But it's not easy to stand still, be silent, and watch God do all the work of salvation.** Swallowing your pride and admitting you're a helpless babe – is no easy thing. But until you do, you cannot be saved.

The Lord Saves in a Way that Vindicates His Own Glory

- ❖ So the Lord saves us by leading us to the end of our rope, to a point of desperation and a place of humiliation – in order to expose our weakness and display his strength. This leads to the third observation regarding the way God saves: The Lord saves in a way that vindicates his own glory.
 - We've seen this time and time again in Exodus. **God does what he does so that you shall know that he is the LORD.** He is Yahweh, the Great I AM. His glory is of great concern to him.
- ❖ 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.** Clearly so. It's been 400 years. Up to this point, people assumed the God of Israel had either abandoned his people or he's too weak to rescue them.
 - **Up to this point, God's name has meant very little.** Until the plagues started, his name did not strike fear in anyone. His glory was disregarded and demeaned. But now, as he works out his great salvation, his glory is vindicated.

- ❖ Listen to the Lord in Exodus 14:4, “*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 the LORD.*” He says something very similar in vv17-18. “*17And 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. 18And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.*”
- ❖ **I feel like the Lord, in a sense, 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 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 sovereignly ordaining these events and even the reactions of his enemies. God hardened their hearts.
- ❖ But we've already seen how other passages in Exodus stress the other side – the human agent's responsibility in hardening his own heart. So all of Pharaoh's decisions were free decisions – in that he freely chose to do whatever he wanted to do – but all his free decisions were all pieces of God's overall sovereign plan.
 - **Like a master chess player, God was essentially forcing his opponent to move himself into checkmate.** From the start of the game, God knew every move and he knew he was going to get glory over Pharaoh and all his host. So God 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)
 - That just goes to show how powerful God is – how glorious he is! **The Lord is the master chess player, and everyone else is just playing checkers.** Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Caesar – all the mightiest kings in the Bible, in human history, are all playing checkers.
- ❖ This is the way 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 underserving people, judging them by showing them justice.**
 - The Israelites and Egyptians were sinners alike. They all deserved to drown in that sea. But the Lord, in his sovereign freedom, put the pillar of cloud between the two camps. Then he called Moses to stretch out his hand over the sea. Vv21-22 say, “*the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. 22And 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.*”
- ❖ 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 grace of God.** And after the Israelites made it through, those walls of waters were released by the justice of God, overwhelming the Egyptians.

- And then read with me in vv30-31. *"³⁰Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹Israel 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."*
- ❖ Notice the order here. **God didn't wait for Israel to have faith and trust in him before he would deliver them.** If he waited for that, they would've never been saved. They would've died their on the west bank of the Red Sea.
 - This is where God's glory shines. He didn't wait. He took the initiative. Look at v31. First, the people saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians. They saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. And 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 our eyes are opened to see, then we trust and worship him.
- ❖ That's the order. **When God saves that way, it demonstrates the sovereign 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 his justice as he sees fit. That's what sets him apart as holy and glorious. If anyone in Egypt or Israel questioned his glory before, there was no doubt now that Yahweh is God, the God of all Creation, the Great Redeemer, the Great I AM.

The Lord Saves by Means of a Greater Exodus

- ❖ But what about us today? Do we recognize the greatness and glory of the LORD God? This is where we bring it home. What does the Exodus means to us? **This is where preachers typically start asking listeners to think about the "Pharaohs" and "Red Seas" in their lives.** Who or what has you feeling trapped? Who or what has you hemmed in? Do you trust God to part the waters in your life? Will you, by faith, walk out into the sea?
 - I know that's how most sermons on the crossing of the Red Sea will end. But I think those are the wrong questions to be asking. Let me try to explain by explaining our last observation: The Lord saves by means of a greater exodus.
- ❖ **The point is that it's not helpful to speak of your own exodus experience.** When I said earlier that the Exodus is a paradigm of biblical salvation, I didn't mean you should apply it as a paradigm for handling your own troubles and hardships. 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 rights 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 to tell a Christian today that – not matter what obstacles you face – that God will part the waters if you believe hard enough. It's simply not true.

- ❖ When I say the Exodus is a paradigm of salvation, what I mean is that this pivotal event in the OT ultimately sets the stage for a greater exodus that took place in the pages of the NT. Jesus is the one who tells us that Exodus and the other books of Moses (along the Psalms and the Prophets) all speak of him (cf. Lk. 24:44). They point to him.
 - **In Luke 9, Jesus is on the Mount of Transfiguration, and he's actually speaking to Moses about his own exodus.** It's legit for Jesus to speak about his own exodus experience. Because everything that took place in our passage was setting the stage for his exodus. Just like the way of the wilderness, the path to Calvary seems like a strategically bad move. And just like Pharaoh with his hard heart, Satan probably thought he caught God in a mistake and so he pursued with abandon.
 - But the cross was no mistake. It's the way God saves. He led his Son to the end of his rope. Jesus was led to the waters of judgment. And there he humbled himself and there he vindicated his Father's glory. **He passed through the walls of death and 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, by going through our own exodus experience – but by identification, by identifying ourselves with Christ Jesus and his exodus.
 - **In 1 Corinthians 10, the Apostle Paul draws this connection between the Exodus and Christian baptism.** Just like the Exodus, baptism is about a new start that comes from by passing through water. It's about leaving behind a life of bondage to sin. **And it's because in Christian baptism we identify so closely with Christ.** We were buried with him in baptism; raised with him in newness of life.

- ❖ That's why – when we as 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 baptized believer, then 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 – fear the Lord and have faith, as you follow him through the wilderness we call life.