

See the LORD's Salvation

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Preacher: Donald Smith

[0:00] Let us pray for the Lord's help with it before we turn to it together. Father, we thank you again for your words, that by the power of your Spirit you speak to us through it.

! Lord, we thank you that your words does not return to you empty, but through it you shall always accomplish that which you purpose. We pray that you would do that now amongst us, that you would achieve your purposes for your glory. In the name of Jesus we pray, amen.

In a previous life, by a previous life I mean before I had children, I used to enjoy going camping. You can trek out into the hills, pitch up in the middle of nowhere, fend off the midges, sleep in an uneven surface, dig your own toilet. What's not to love?

But for some reason I did love it, and I wouldn't exactly make things comfortable, not a night in a way. For me, kind of comfortable walking was more important than comfortable sleeping.

And so I would always travel as light as possible. But I'll never forget hearing about the experience of a friend who did the exact opposite. He wasn't into camping, he wasn't really a fan of the outdoors at all, but he had signed up to his bronze-level Duke of Edinburgh award.

[1:23] He knew he was going camping. He didn't, I think, realize there'd be quite so much walking involved. He packed his bag with everything on the checklist, and it's a long old checklist, right down to spare boot laces and light sticks.

But that didn't seem like quite enough for a comfortable evening. So he packed his pillow, a spare towel, in case the first one didn't dry up in the morning. He took a board game with him, good to be entertained.

A 12-pack of Coke. And then, it's the highlight, packed four ceramic plates. So the whole group could enjoy a nice civilized dinner.

He showed up with a bulging rucksack and a jam-packed hold-all slung over his shoulder. He was ready to set up camp, only to find a six-hour walk lay before him.

It's safe to say it wasn't long before the Coke was downed, and I think it wasn't too long before the rest of the group took pity on him and shared the loads. He didn't really know what he was doing.

[2:23] He couldn't really have overpacked more if he tried to. And yet, as much as he overdid it, right, even someone who went way overboard with their luggage, if you went digging through everything he had, and he had pretty much everything, you still wouldn't find the bones of a long-deceased ancestor.

And he might have taken pretty much everything else, but even he didn't go that far. Our last couple of passages in Exodus, we have seen kind of preparations being made for a future in a land far away from Egypt.

In chapter 12 and 13, God is telling the Israelites to kind of get out next year's calendar and start putting things in the diaries so that they would remember the day that the Lord delivered them from Pharaoh.

But all those festival days that we've been kind of learning about the last couple of chapters in Exodus, they were to be celebrating a land far away from where they were now.

They had some walking to do. What are you, packing the bag on a long expedition? Oh, we don't know much. We don't know if they had a dozen cans of Coke, but we do know one thing Moses packed.

[3:41] Just look there at verse 19 of chapter 13. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him. It's a bit odd, isn't it?

It's a strange thing to take. And it seems like an odd thing for Moses to want us to know. I'm sure Moses and the rest of the Israelites took a lot of things with him.

Why does he want us to know that? This morning we are coming, aren't we, to one of the Bible stories? As the Red Sea parts into the Israelites walk through on dry land, the waves come crashing back down over the chasing Egyptians.

It's an epic narrative. Not worthy of a Hollywood movie, isn't it? It's not yet done justice by a Hollywood movie, but it is an amazing story. But why is it here?

What does Moses want us to learn from it? It's good to be kind of gripped by the story. That's a good thing. But we want to go deeper than that. And to go deeper, we this morning, we are going to focus our attention on the details in this passage that seem a bit odd.

[4:56] But that don't need to be there for the story to make sense. And so I've obviously been put there by Moses because they are key to understanding not just what happened, but why it happened.

And the first of those details is a skeleton in a suitcase. Two points this morning. We'll look briefly to begin with at the end of chapter 13 before spending most of our time in chapter 14.

First point then, the unexpected path to the promised land. Taking the direct route from Egypt to the promised land, which for them then was Canaan, the direct route would have taken about three days.

It's a lengthy journey, but if you know anything about your Old Testament history, it's a lot shorter than the journey ended up being. Three days directly, but almost immediately, the Israelites seem to go off course.

Not because they get lost, but because God leads them on an unexpected path. As they start to leave Egypt, the signpost in front of them, it's left towards the land flowing with milk and honey.

[6:11] It's right towards the dry desert and salty sea. Surely the answer is obvious. No doubt they expected to be turning left, but instead, off they go to wander through the wilderness.

What is going on? Well, before we learn what is going on, Moses wants us to know that he's got bones with him. It's right at this moment, just look at the end, sorry, the start of verse 18, immediately after we are told that God led the people round by the sea, this is the moment that Moses thinks it's important to know what he's got in the bag.

He could have told us this at any point in the last few chapters or at any point in the chapters to come, but it is here he decides that we need to know that he's got Joseph's bones with him.

Joseph's bones were not just an odd family heirloom. They were a symbol of God's yet-to-be-fulfilled! of God's covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a promise to give the descendants of Abraham a land to make them into a great nation, to bless all the nations through them.

That promise was not yet fulfilled, and Joseph's bones were a reminder of that. You can find this right at the end of Genesis with his last breath.

[7:38] Joseph, in Egypt, far from the promised land, surrounded by only a handful of brothers, expressed his absolute confidence in God's covenant promise, and instructed his descendants to take his bones back to Canaan when, right, when, not if, God came to bring his people home.

Right, the bones here at this point are a declaration to them then, to us now, that strange as the path here might seem as they turn off the course that goes directly to the promised land, strange as that path might seem, this is the path to the promised land.

Turning south to the Red Sea is not plan B, it is plan A happening God's way. And there are three, I think, wonderful truths we are reminded for just in these few verses.

We'll really, like I say, get to the heart of what's going on in our second point in chapter 14, but let me just stop off briefly here. Now, our own lives as Christians, as followers of Jesus, I think, can often feel, can't they, like they're a little bit off track.

We can often find ourselves on a path to the promised land, to our heavenly home that looks very different to the one we expected, to the one that we hoped we would be on.

[9:03] Because we hope, don't we, for a straightforward, plain sailing, three-day journey that takes us on the direct, non-stop route home without any delays, interruptions, or difficulties. But the reality is often very different, isn't it?

We find ourselves in a path we did not expect, facing struggles, trials, suffering, sorrow, that we hoped we never would.

I think, in these few verses, we see three wonderful gospel truths at the end of chapter 13 that remind us to hold onto in those moments. First of all, as we've just seen, God is always keeping his promises.

It might not be what we hoped for, but it is what he has planned. He's not led you astray, he's not lost you. He is simply leading you home by a route you did not expect.

God is always keeping his promises. Secondly, verse 17, he is always protecting you. One reason the Israelites turned south was because God knew there was a danger ahead that might cause them to go fleeing back to Egypt.

[10:20] Even when we feel on a long road, we can still trust that God is protecting us, that he is our shepherd, our defender, our guardian.

We sang of that in Psalm 23, didn't we? Perhaps where you are is because another path might have led you into a danger you did not even know about. The Israelites were likely kind of blissfully unaware that the Philistines lay ahead on the direct route.

They never saw what God was keeping them from. But just because they didn't see the danger doesn't mean he wasn't protecting them from it. And then thirdly, be assured of God's presence.

verse 21, the Lord did not send them on this path, he led them on this path. And he was always there with them. End of verse 22, did not depart from before the people.

We have an even greater assurance of that glorious truth when our faith and hope is in Christ. He guarantees us his spirit. And if you are a believer here this morning, that the spirit of Christ really and truly is with you every moment of every day.

[11:41] You might not feel it, you might not experience it, you might not remember it, but he is always there with you. Whatever circumstance we might find ourselves in, however unexpected the path we might be on is, the Lord is protecting you.

The Lord is present with you and the Lord is always keeping his promises to you. Three wonderful truths we can always hold on to.

But coming back now to this particular journey we have here in Exodus, I think a very legitimate question is, why? Well, why?

Why? Why are they on an unexpected path? It's great to be able to hold on to those things on the unexpected path, but why are they there in the first place? Well, that is the question that chapter 14 answers for us.

Our second point this morning, where we see the utter destruction of God's enemies. The story here is amazing, isn't it? And as we dig a little deeper into it, we don't want to gloss over it.

[12:54] the Egyptians find themselves encircled, they are still within Egyptian territory, and they are surrounded by the army of Pharaoh. And the army of Pharaoh is vast.

You get it kind of repeated again, the language of the horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army. There is an innumerable host of them. So it's often said that chariots were kind of the ancient equivalents of tanks.

Remember here in Exodus, we are in ancient, ancient history. This would be like showing up in World War I with a challenger II. You're already massively outgunning the opposition and, I only actually clocked on to this the first time this week, there's a lot more than 600 of them.

Verse 7, there were 600 chosen chariots and all the other chariots in Egypt with officers over all of them. It's the entirety of Egypt's elite fighting unit and every other regiment in the country.

It is line upon line upon line upon line of enemy forces circled all around. And they are circled around a defenseless opposition, like Israel have nothing.

[14:07] They're not secure behind the walls of a city. They are standing there in the wilderness. they might have no physical defenses, but they have everything they need because with them, present with them always is the Lord himself.

The Battle of Dunkirk is probably the best known, incredible against the odds rescue mission in recent history. It pales into comparison with this. The Israelites similarly, they had enemies on all sides with a sea behind them.

But for them it was a far greater army closing in, far more people trapped, and no help whatsoever coming from behind. But through Moses, God drives back the sea, not to kind of reveal a previously obscured causeway just under the surface, but literally to raise the walls of water right and left. And if you think that's far-fetched, let me just say your God is too small. He drives the water into two walls so that the people of Israel could walk through to the other side, out of the land of slavery, escaping death and into freedom on the other side.

But as soon as the Egyptians close in behind, God releases the walls of water back again. He clogs up the chariot's wheels, he hurls them into the sea so that not one of them remains.

[15:37] The most amazing rescue, the most incredible and comprehensive defeat, right? Not one of them remains. That vast army gone. But why?

Why did that happen? What does Moses want us to see here? Now why are the details there? That is the question we want to be asking.

Like the bones at the end of chapter 13, right? There are parts of this amazing passage you could kind of take out and not notice anything's missing from the story. Those are the parts we want to zoom in on because Moses has obviously inserted them there into the kind of epic drama because he thinks they're really important for us to be aware of.

So if you look there at chapter 14, right, you could, I think you could start at verse 5, you could read through to verse 9, and then you could skip on to verse 19, and you wouldn't know anything was missing.

The story would make sense, we'd see all the same drama, but to understand the drama, we want to zoom in on those extra verses. And when we look there, I think we see the answer to the why question.

[16:55] Why did God lead the Israelites into the wilderness? Why didn't they take the direct route to the promised land? Two reasons we see here. It was for the glory of God's name and for the salvation of God's people.

Let's just see that the first of those, the glory of God's name. Verse 4, what does the Lord say as he tells the Israelites to turn back on themselves, to go and encamp by the sea?

Verse 4, 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.

See it again there, verse 17 and verse 18, the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord when I have gained glory over Pharaoh. Why have the Israelites taken a detour?

Reason number one, the number one reason for everything, for the glory of God. That is why this happens.

[18:02] That is why God makes things happen the way they do. So if you notice that as we read through it, it is God that's making it happen, right? Verse 2, he is the one who tells the Israelites to turn back. Verse 4, he is the one who hardens Pharaoh's hearts.

And right throughout, he is behind all. He comes between the Egyptians and the Israelites in a pillar of cloud. He drives back the sea. He threw the Egyptians into the sea. He saved Israel.

He is orchestrating everything here and he is doing it for his glory. God's glory.

He is God's He is going to make you uneasy. Is God just kind of an egomaniac in it for himself? Ready to put his people in danger?

Ready to drown an army just for his glory? Are we really okay with it? If you want an answer to the second part of that question, was it really okay, was it good for God to display his glory by drowning an entire army?

[19:06] Let me shamelessly say, come back next week. For the first part though, does it make God an egomaniac to do things for his own glory?

The answer is very simply, no. I think we are uneasy with people pursuing their own glory for two reasons, I think. First of all, we assume that if someone is doing things for their own glory, they therefore can't be doing it for other people's sake.

And so we think, often rightly, that is selfish. But what we have seen already back in verse 17 of chapter 13, what we'll see again in our last sub point in a moment, is that what God does for his glory, he also does for our good.

God has one action, two purposes. He can simultaneously do something for his glory and for our good.

He is not selfish, he is selfless. Because in doing something for his own glory, we don't lose out, we gain. God reeling his glory is a good thing for us.

[20:21] The second reason we can be uneasy with this idea of God doing it for his own glory is because we know how ultimately unworthy people are of the praise they so often receive.

It's inevitable, isn't it? You see it with countless celebrities, that they're venerated, they're esteemed, they're almost worshipped for years, and then something hidden comes into the light.

We get a glimpse beneath the surface, into the heart, and it is ugly. And that is true of every person. We know that is true of ourselves as well. I think people are often uneasy when they get compliments, when people praise them, because they know, under the surface, it is not all goods. So that I think we have almost an inbuilt suspicion of anyone who claims to be praiseworthy. ugly. But we need not have any such suspicion about God.

[21:24] There is nothing ugly hidden under the surface. He is worthy, worthy of our praise because he is altogether good. His character is utterly without any spot or blemish.

There is no shortcoming in his being. when he displays his glory, when he does something to make his glory known, he is right to do so because he is beautiful, he is glorious, he is wonderful to behold.

For God to not make his glory known, it would be like walking into the Louvre in Paris and finding every piece of artwork covered in dust sheets.

You wouldn't say, would you, good at the museum to be kind of humble about their masterpieces. Thank you for hiding all these beautiful artworks. Thank you for making sure no one else gets to enjoy them.

You wouldn't be saying that at all, would you? No, you'd be begging them to show you, to not keep it to themselves, to show you what is in their possession so that you could enjoy the beauty of what they have.

[22:38] that is God showing his glory. Not selfishly making more of himself than he should, but graciously revealing himself so that we would have the privilege of beholding who he is.

And who he is, is glorious, beautiful, majestic, wonderful to behold. That is why God says to his people to turn back, that is why he hardens Pharaoh's heart, that is why he parts the sea, so that everyone would see his glory, would see his power, would see his goodness, would see his justice, would see his care for the oppressed.

So what should we do in response to this passage? First of all, most importantly, worship God. Behold him for who he is, for who he has revealed himself to be.

Praise him. The all-powerful God who overwhelms the mightiest army, the one who brings a just judgment on an evil enemy, who casts into the sea those who sought to cast his people into the river, the one who is mighty to save, the one who can bend the laws of creation so that the wind and sea would obey his commands, but the one who shields and protects his people, who defends the vulnerable, see his glory and worship him.

Why does it happen? First of all, for the glory of God, for the glory of his name. Secondly, though, this all happens for the salvation of God's people.

[24:22] What God does for his glory, he also does for our goods. we've seen throughout Exodus that God's people have suffered from their slavery to the serpent gang.

Throughout this book, Pharaoh is standing as the representative of God's great enemy, Satan himself. But God has released the people's chains of bondage.

Pharaoh has finally, reluctantly let them go. They are physically moving out of Egypt. But what did we see in that passage, in that second little section that maybe doesn't need to be there for the story to be told?

They are physically moving out of Egypt, but look at where their hearts still are. Just read there from verse 10 with me again. When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly.

And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, right? That's interesting, isn't it? They cried to the Lord, and they speak to Moses. Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that

you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?

[25:34] What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not what we said to you in Egypt? Leave us in the wilderness.

For the Israelites, as they watch what is happening, as the vast army of Pharaoh encircles them and gets into line, they see only two options.

Death in the wilderness, service of Pharaoh. They fear the Egyptians more than they fear God.

They think the power of the Egyptians is greater than the power of God.

They wished not that they were in the promised land, but that they were back in Egypt serving Pharaoh. Because above it all, they were afraid that here they could not escape death.

And so they wished they were back in slavery. And so the Israelites needed saved, didn't they?

They needed saved from death. They needed saved from the tyranny of the serpent king, and they needed saved from themselves.

[26:59] Because their own hearts longed for the cursed land from which God had come to redeem them. Salvation is what they needed. Salvation is what they see.

Verse 13, Moses said to the people, fear not, stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. See the salvation of the Lord.

That is what they were to do. And that is, I think, what we are to do. To look at this passage, the Israelites crossing the Red Sea 3,000 years ago and see our salvation.

Where do we see it? Paul uses the language in 1 Corinthians of this generation being baptized into Moses. In him, the Israelites crossed from slavery to the serpent king to service of the living gods.

And as they are baptized into Moses, they go through death. These waters that they are going into and coming out of, what happens is when the Egyptians enter into them apart from Moses.

[28:16] They die. They're destroyed. You can probably see where this is going. We read earlier from Colossians 2, but we don't follow Moses, do we?

But we do, many of us here, follow Jesus. A different rescuer, but a very similar story. What salvation do we see in Exodus 14?

We see a people once living under slavery to the serpent king, who thought their only choice was slavery to sin or death, with hearts that were comfortable living enslaved to sin.

A rescuer is raised up to who leads God's people out of slavery, but then the rescuer is taken to a place where it looks like defeat is certain, where the serpent king finally thinks he has his enemy cornered, where there seems to be no escape from a position where death seems inescapable, where evil seems to have triumphed.

And yet the chosen rescuer leads his people from there into death and out the other side, and in doing so destroys the enemy that this people were once enslaved to and used to live in fear of.

[29:36] is it Exodus or is it Calvary? Well, it's hard to tell because they are both the same story.

And so we are to see this salvation and so see our salvation. Not only to rest assured that the enemy we were once enslaved to has been destroyed, that sin and death are gone, not only to rejoice in being set free to serve God, but we see this salvation, this mighty work of God, which he did before their eyes, which he has preserved for our ears.

So there are hearts which once feared the enemy so much that we felt security in his slavery, that those hearts, by seeing this salvation, would now fear God.

would see his power, would believe in him and in his chosen rescuer. Just look there, verse 30.

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians. And Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord and they believed in the Lord.

[31:04] And in his servant Moses. We'll see in the chapters to come that their belief, their faith, has plenty of room to grow, but it is there.

The Hebrews tells us that by faith they cross the Red Sea, because they see the Lord's salvation, they see his power, and so they believe in him and in his Savior.

that is what they were to do, that is what we are to do. See here, our salvation, it is what we read in Colossians 2 earlier.

In the Lord Jesus we have been set free, set free once and for all from sin and death. In him we have been buried and raised again, saved through death into life, and on the cross seemingly cornered by death and the devil.

There he disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them. Because we are baptized into Jesus, we too are saved, so long as we believe in the Lord and in the one that he has sent to save us, not saved because of who we were, but saved so that we would be who we now are in him.

[32:28] Set free to serve God and to make his glory known. For that is what it's all about. Even our salvation is to that end, to the praise of God's glorious grace.

But having been saved in Christ, we are part of the masterpiece and the museum of God's glory. Look at what he has done in this salvation.

Look at what he has done in our salvation. Look at how beautiful it is. And so praise God because of who he is, because of who we have seen him to be, here in the wilderness and through the Red Sea, but even more so on the cross and through the grave.

He has saved us, and in doing so he has shown us his beauty. So above all else, let us stand in awe.

Let us sing his praise. Let us bow before him in worship, believing in him, fearing him, serving him, for that is what he has saved us to do.

[33:41] Let us pray that we would do that now and every day until he leads us home to the heavenly home which he has promised and where he will one day bring us. Let us pray for that together.

Father, we thank you and praise you that you are the Lord who has saved us, that you have taken us from our slavery to sin, that you have freed us from the fear of death and given us life in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you that as we believe in him that we are saved by him, that we are saved in him. Lord, help us to see your salvation and so see your glory, to see your majesty, to see your power, to see your goodness, to see your justice.

And so as we believe in you, to come and worship you, to serve you and not the master we once lived for, that we might do all things for your glory.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.