

Crossing the Sea

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[0 : 0 0] and bless and guide us and accept our prayers in Jesus' name. Amen. I would like to turn back to Exodus chapter 14 for a few minutes this evening, this morning.

This evening not quite yet. But look at this passage and what I'm going to do, I'm not going to take a great deal of time going through the details.

It's a historical account, it's written as history, it's written as fact, it's not a fable, it's not a story, it's not make-believe. It's not just a pretty picture with a spiritual illustration, it's taken as fact and we take it and recognise it as fact.

It may be out of our ken, it might be out of our knowledge, it might be out of our comfort zone, but we recognise the day in which it was given, the time, the societies, the countries, the cultures were hugely different, we know that, we recognise that.

But what I want to do is recognise all these things and then take these truths and apply them to our lives and apply them to the teaching of the Bible and to the character of God and the person of God as he's revealed in this particular story, which is definitely a challenge to us and one that kind of naturally, we're a little bit, well, maybe you're not, but naturally I'm a little bit uncomfortable with these things because God is so far, often from me, in terms of His greatness and His glory and His rightness and His perfection and my inability to see these things and it's only as we see these things as believers through the prism of the cross and as we understand Him through the love of God in the cross and what He's done for us and why He had to do what He had to do, that we begin to see it a bit more clearly because we love to talk about the love of God, don't we, the love of Christ, but we know that it's in a particular context and we know that it's in a particular context then and also now for us as people and for the world in which we live.

[2 : 1 5] And this helps, I think, to shed a little bit of our need for Jesus Christ in the context of the Bible and the context of it being a progressive revelation of God and what He has come to do for us because ultimately what we have here in this story of the crossing of the Red Sea of God's chosen people being taken from slavery in Egypt into the land that God had promised them, that is a story of deliverance, okay, it's a story of deliverance.

They are being freed from slavery in a very real and very tangible and a practical way from the tyranny of slavery and that's what the story is about.

We mustn't forget that when we read this story, we think about maybe as a children's story or we wonder what relevance it has today or we wonder about the reality of good and evil. Then we recognise that this is the account of a people who were being released, freed by God, God's people from a tyranny of evil.

We've seen that. We've seen Pharaoh's power and Pharaoh's abusive power over this people. If you go right back to the beginning of Exodus, we're told that he made their lives bitter with hard work in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields and then we know he made it worse as time went on, that he made it impossible to do what they could do.

He plunged them into poverty and into slavery and into abuse and there was discrimination, there was oppression, all the kind of buzzwords that we know about and talk about today. More than that, there was even social engineering going on that he was wanting to make sure that all the male children born to these lights were killed at birth because they were afraid of this nation that was growing in their own country.

[4 : 09] So it was a tyrannical, evil, oppressive slavery that these Israelites were under. That tyranny we recognise had a spiritual genesis and a spiritual undertone.

It's not just a story of man's inhumanity to man, but it's a recognition that there's something bigger good. There's a bigger picture going on here that there's a kind of a spiritual battle where evil is trying to destroy God and God's people and God's seed, which is the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ. We recognise that.

Pharaoh himself was a divine kind of figure. He was worshipped. They believed in false God. So there was this opposition to all that was God and all that was good and all that was right.

And it was violent, unbelief and stubbornness. And there's this recognition in the Bible and in the passage and in the teaching throughout that whatever evil we see in the world, which we've prayed about some of it and recognise it outward, and maybe we find it easier to recognise it outwardly in the world, than we would ever recognise a personal or an individual badness or need.

But the Bible makes clear that evil is rooted in a spiritual problem, that spiritual rebellion against God. And that comes across in the story as we've seen it so far, that Pharaoh is constantly rebelling against God's advances, God's warnings, even God's invitations. And there's an unreasonable, unreasonable-ness about him.

[6 : 00] But his people very often recognise what's happening. That comes across even in this passage in verse 25, where the people recognise Egypt, and as Egypt said, let's get away from the Israelites, the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.

There's late recognition that there's more than just a cultural war going on here, that there's a spiritual battle happening. And that strong divine dimension is hugely significant.

It's hugely significant here, and as we go on, and as we take it to the cross, and as we move from the cross to Revelation and to the teaching of Jesus, that ultimately evil will not succeed.

It's not a dualistic battle that the Bible speaks about, or good is battling with evil, and maybe one day good will win, another day evil will win. The reality of God's teaching, and the reality of God's word, the reality of the cross, where death is defeated by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that despite all the odds, despite what it looks like to us, that evil will not prevail, and that God in His perfection, and in His justice, and in His goodness, and in His grace, will not allow evil to reign.

It spoils. Now, there's much within that that is mysterious in terms of timing, in terms of what God allows, but He is a just God, and He is a loving God, and He is the God who says, evil will not prevail.

[7 : 38] Personal evil will not prevail against me. Corporate evil, culture evil, will find its judgment in God. Now, often we don't like these truths, but it doesn't stop them being true.

We don't like being faced with the realities of things that we would rather stick our head in the sand and avoid, in many ways, but the whole gospel, the whole word of God is all about reminding us of our need for a Savior.

That's why we worship in Jesus' name, and the deliverance that is pictured here, also as a spiritual, speaks of a greater deliverance that we have known as Christians, and that we continue to need every day in our lives.

Not just a one-off thing, but it's a reality that we continue to need. In many ways, the Bible does ask us to come to terms with serious issues, big issues, important issues.

Now, we would, I think that's why people don't like coming to church, very often, because it's always so important.

[8 : 54] What was talking about important things? Just talking about fun things, but it seems to be important things that are weighty matters that are dealt with in church, and that's significant. Murdo, I think there's someone at the door that light just flashed.

It's weighty, important matters, and it's difficult sometimes to ignore these matters, but it's significant to look at them and deal with them and find answers to them in Jesus Christ.

It's the core message of the New Testament Gospel, and as we lift our eyes a little bit beyond this story, we find that it does speak about a big picture, and the big picture of this story is something that's important in our lives, and the big picture of worship is one of the reasons we come together, because it lifts us up just beyond our living for another day and doing the same thing every day.

It's a day which lifts us up and takes us into somewhere that is significant and important. What about this deliverance? It's a crossing of the Red Sea. It's a miraculous intervention by God against all the odds.

It's God dealing with those who would kill and crush and destroy his people, and he's bringing them safely to the other side.

[10 : 15] There's two major areas I would like to parallel that with in our own experience with the New Testament eyes, and the first is that it's always a paradigm of Christ's deliverance in the New Testament for his people.

It's a paradigm of Christ's deliverance in the New Testament. If you read the New Testament, particularly in Hebrews, you will find that the New Testament, the Christ, or Moses, is parallel to Christ, but Christ is greater than Moses.

He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses is faithful in all God's house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honour than Moses, and much of Hebrews goes through that, paralleling this Old Testament deliverance with the greater New Testament deliverance of Jesus Christ.

He's the mediator of a New Covenant, a better relationship, and it's a reminder that this Old Testament event was only moving towards what Jesus came to do for his Old Testament event was primarily a physical experience, a physical deliverance, a physical redemption from slavery into a promised land, but we recognise that it's pointing for us to a deliverance, a deeper deliverance from sin and from the slavery of sin and from the reality of being separated from God, and all that that means into a relationship with God, a relationship of love and grace and forgiveness and hope and a future.

Remember the story in Exodus 9 of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, and he's Moses and he is Elijah on either side of him, and we're told they're discussing, they're talking about, we see they're talking about his Exodus.

[12 : 09] That's what they're talking about, his departure, his transit. It's the same word that's used here for the Exodus, and it's like they're saying, well, yeah, we look back and we remember that, and Moses remembered that Exodus, but Jesus was pointing forward to a greater deliverance, a greater transformation, a greater Exodus, where his people are going to be set free and redeemed.

And that is a hugely significant reality for us. The crossing of the Red Sea speaks of a deliverance, and for us, a deliverance already won for us by Christ's miraculous death on the cross.

He is victorious, and we have come to trust in him, that our sins can be forgiven, that we have life through him, that we have a transformed heart from the inside, and we have a relationship with the living God.

God's plan, which is revealed here, is fulfilled in Jesus. Everything points toward Jesus. Everything speaks about his deliverance, and he calls us not from a physical slavery, he calls us from a spiritual enslavement to sin and to separation from him, and to selfishness and to pride, and into the freedom of being in a relationship with him.

So this story does point forward to that. It's not a story which gives us license to say that God will be our personal troubleshooter, and will take us from every micro-event of suffering in our lives.

[13 : 57] It's not that kind of picture. It's not a picture that's talking about geopolitical reality. It's not a liberation theology that we have here.

It's not a social political event talking about freedom of nations, however significant that might be, how important democracy is to us and has its roots in Christian reality.

But rather it's primarily a personal spiritual illustration from truth of the reality of our need for redemption of deliverance from being redeemed, bought back by the living God.

Even in this historical reality, it is pointing forward to Jesus Christ, coming under his rule, his lordship, why we sing about Jesus being our Lord and our God.

And I think there's often within it also specific parallels to our Christian lives today. What I want to do is remind us that these Old Testament stories are real.

[15 : 09] They don't fit into God's revelation and God's picture throughout the whole Bible, but they remain real and relevant and significant to us and the principles that they give us in our lives.

So many of us, I think, live in our Christian lives with a closed Bible, and particularly maybe with a closed Old Testament. But we see that it is all part of God's fuller and more revealing picture as time goes on.

So we see here that there is a spiritual battleground between Pharaoh and between God's people that is real and absolute and meaningful.

And that remains the same. That there is still a spiritual battleground in which we live. There is still spiritual evil and there is still the living God.

And there is a reality there for us to think beyond our lives and think beyond ourselves and consider morality and consider where morality comes from and consider the reality of evil and consider the reality of good and consider what Jesus Christ is saying about his place and about his lordship and about his being the only answer to the evil that we see in this world which will one day be brought to an end and also the evil that we recognise in our own hearts which we can't change.

[16 : 38] Much though we would love to, we can't change what we are. We can tinker with it and we can try, but in God's eyes, he says you can't know that perfection and that beauty and that goodness that I need to be in relationship with you.

You need to come to me and I am the one who has lived the life you cannot live and will die as died the death that you and I deserve.

There is that spiritual battleground in the world in which we live. We also need in our lives therefore the Lord to fight for us.

The people themselves recognise that in verses 13 and 14. Moses says to them, you know, don't be afraid, stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see you will never see again.

The Lord will fight for you. You only need to be still. And there is a sense in which that is our spiritual understanding and our spiritual reality as believers also.

[17 : 38] The Israelites were helpless in the situation. Wall of water in front of them, a wall of enemy opposition behind them. There was nothing that they could do. And he asks them just to be still, just to trust, to stand firm and to wait for God's deliverance in their life.

That interestingly isn't a kind of standing still of inactivity. Standing still of trust because he then goes on to say, you know, tell the Israelites to move on.

It's not a trust of inactivity. It's a trust of foundation. And we are to be the same in our Christian lives that it's not enough for us to be trying to live our Christian lives in our own strength or to make ourselves right with God by our own actions.

He's provided the way that he is fought for us on the cross. He's defeated death and sin and the grave. And he asks us to stand firm in that, to wait on him, to trust in him and to believe in him and then to move forward in his strength.

It's a great reality in John's Gospel. John kind of uses this imagery again from the Old Testament. So much of the New Testament is founded in this Old Testament imagery.

[19 : 07] John 5 and 24 where Jesus says, I tell you the truth whoever hears my word and believes in him who sent me as eternal life and he will not be condemned.

He has crossed over from death to life. So there's that imagery of crossing over to the other side which is taken straight from here and that is the same for us to recognise that same truth and that same reality in our own lives of crossing from death to life as we trust and rely on him.

And yet the interesting reality for us is that we very often don't want Christ in our lives. In verse 12, it's amazing just to say, can I assume human psychology that we have so often, the people saying, didn't we say you need to leave us alone, let us serve the Egyptians, it would be better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die here in the desert.

And it's like they've completely forgotten that they cried out to the Lord for deliverance, that they were looking to him and all of a sudden they're blaming God again and they say, when did you take us out for this? This is a disaster. We don't want you. Just leave us alone.

I think that fundamental thinking is at the core of our very hearts, is that so often in our lives that we say, even as Christians we say, just God, just leave me alone.

[20 : 32] Leave me alone. You've taken me here. You've brought me to this place where I've faith in you, but it's rubbish. It's rubbish. It'd be far better to be back where I was where I didn't believe and I was just going along with the crowd and everyone was great and life was fantastic.

Just leave me alone. This way is too hard. It's too difficult. I'm not interested in your promises. Leave me alone.

And I think often in our lives with His Word, with His truth, with His... with our experiences of Him in our lives, we say, look, just leave me alone.

And it so often reflects what we're like in our lives, but God will not do that. He will not, as believers, leave us alone because He loves us and because He is taking us through and wants to reveal His power and His grace in our lives because evil is something that spoils and He will not let us be spoiled.

And the story speaks of the enemies of God being overwhelmed here and it's a hugely solemn and serious reality. But it speaks of the destruction of evil and the destruction of those who have chosen to rebel and continue to rebel despite many, many opportunities to come back to God and the ultimately justice in God's eyes will be done and His perfect justice is something that we struggle with but it's His perfect justice and He is God and His perfect just and loving.

[22 : 23] The Red Sea and the judgment does speak of the chaos and the brutality of evil and the cost of turning against the living God and it does speak of separation ultimately from life and from God.

Very often, particularly in Jewish imagery, the sea was an image for wildness and something untamed often spoke of the judgment of God in fact and separation is why the New Testament, a revolutionary picture talks about heaven as being a place with no more sea, no more separation, no more division between God and His people.

And that is a reality that we come to terms with and we believe and we pray about for ourselves and for those who we are in contact with and those whom we love that we tell them about the reality of life, reality of our hearts, reality of sin and death and the reality of God's salvation and His grace and His love.

But the response of the story ought to be our response also at the end of the verse, the end of the chapter says, when the Israelites saw the great power of the Lord displayed against the church, people feared the Lord and put their trust in Him and in Moses His servant.

That's what we're asked to do in an ongoing way to trust God, to trust what He says about Himself, to trust His diagnosis of this world in which we live, to trust what He says about our own hearts, to trust His love and His commitment to us in sending Jesus Christ, to trust that that has brought us life and forgiveness and hope and a future, to trust that He loves us even when it doesn't seem that to be the case, to trust in Him for the future as we get older, to trust in Him rather than to reject Him, recognising the monumental folly of rejecting the living God.

[24 : 33] And may it be that we see this constant daily need for deliverance, I think often we think that, you know, it was a great story for when I became a Christian, but you know, you have no idea the kind of hassles that I'm going through in my life or how dry a duller border feels a Christian or how much routine it is, and I wish you'd give me something fresher and newer and something to inspire me.

But may it be that we see and know and understand that it's an ongoing daily deliverance, we need daily trust, daily renewal of relationship, daily relying on Him in prayer and to know His grace and His love and His transforming power and the beauty of that and the wholeness of forgiveness and what that means that He makes us whole and new every day.

So let's take a difficult and a challenging passage and recognise it's pointing forward to this great revelation of God and Jesus. What's God like? Look at Jesus, look at His life, look at His claims, look at His death, look at His resurrection, look at His lordship, and look around at the people whose lives He has changed today in our 21st century.

Trust Him to be the deliverer in your life and in mine. Let's bow our heads and pray briefly. Lord God, we ask and pray that you would teach us from your word that your Holy Spirit would apply your truth to us, that it would be exciting and challenging and refreshing and renewing and that it would be real for us as we consider why we're here and as we consider who created us and as we think about where our morality comes from and may it not be that we just dismiss these things, that we just live as if there is only today to live for it, or that it's all happened by a marvellous coincidence and that there is no reason for anything in this world in which we live.

Help us to find reason and structure and direction and morality and grace and above all deliverance and life and hope and forgiveness in Jesus Christ and the future with Him so that even though we die yet, shall we live.

[26 : 55] May our hope and our inspiration and may we be able to sing praise in response to that hope and inspiration for Jesus and for Jesus' name. We ask these things. Amen.