

The Great Escape

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I wonder what your earliest memory is of your childhood. For me, it was sitting on my mum's knee at home and having her read books to me. And the favourite book or the favourite kind of books that she read were pop-up picture storybooks.

And I loved them because, in a sense, they brought the story to life. The action quite literally jumped off the page. And I find they were just so vivid at explaining the story.

And so that's the kind of storybooks that I always wanted when I had the choice to be read. Now, as we look at the Bible book of Exodus, there's a sense in which Exodus, or the Red Sea Crossing that was in chapters 13 and 14, is, in vivid and graphic form, almost like a pop-up picture book story. Because Exodus, as we've been thinking, reveals God's salvation plan for the world. And we've called our series, The God Who Saves. But it does this, it reveals God's salvation plan in this vivid pop-up book-like fashion, where the events of the Exodus tell the story of God's plan in a dramatic and in a graphic way.

But the Exodus story doesn't just simply tell us how God saved the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. Because through it, God establishes a pattern to help us understand how he saves all of his people through Jesus Christ.

[1 : 3 0] And so we saw this last week when we looked at the Passover in Exodus chapter 12. And we see this again when we look at the Red Sea Crossing in Exodus chapter 13 and 14. And we said that Exodus means departure or exit.

It means a way out. And that's exactly what we've got here in the Red Sea Crossing. A way out from slavery to freedom, from death to life for the Israelites.

And so the Red Sea Crossing is a vivid picture of God's salvation. And that's really how the rest of the Bible describes the Exodus, and in particular the Red Sea Crossing.

It's a paradigm or a picture of how God saves. And so if you want to understand what this Bible word salvation means, then here is a good place to look.

Because we're not just told about God's salvation. We see it happening. The Israelites needed saving from their slavery, and the Lord saved them.

[2 : 3 2] And he did it through Moses, their mediator. And here's the thing. We're all born into the same situation as the Israelites. We need saving from our slavery to sin.

And only the Lord saves us. And he does it through another mediator, Jesus Christ. And so if we're going to grasp the meaning of this text, we need to read it as a paradigm of salvation, as a pattern of how God saves us from slavery to freedom, from death to life.

Essentially, it shows us what it means to become a Christian, of how we cross over from death to life. And so we're going to look at three things this afternoon.

First of all, why we need saving. Secondly, who saves us. And thirdly, how we are saved. First, why we need saving. We need saving because we're in slavery. Second, who saves us?

It's the Lord who saves us. And third, how are we saved? We're saved through the mediator, Moses and then Jesus Christ. So first of all, why we need saving. We need saving out of our slavery.

[3 : 3 9] So in the story, the Lord had brought the Israelites out of Egypt, redeeming them from their slavery through the Passover. And chapter 12, verse 37, we read over 600,000 of them marched out of Egypt.

And so next, into chapter 13, they had to consecrate all their firstborn. And then they had to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And these were reminders of how God had brought them out of Egypt.

Because all along, their salvation was God's doing. And this is emphasized all the way through chapter 13. So just glance down, chapter 13, verse 3.

Halfway through, we read, it was because the Lord brought you out with his mighty hand. Then verse 9, for the Lord brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand.

Then further down, verse 14, it says, with a mighty hand, the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Then verse 16, at the end, the Lord brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand.

[4 : 46] So God, the Lord, was doing the work of salvation for his people. And now God is leading them towards the Red Sea. So just jump down to chapter 13, verse 21, where we read, By day, the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of clouds to give them, to guide them on their way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.

Neither the pillar of clouds by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, left its place in front of the people. And into chapter 14, Then the Lord said to Moses, Tell the Israelites to turn back and camp near Pi-Harihoth, between Migdal and the sea.

They are to camp by the sea, directly opposite Baal-Zephon. Okay, so the Lord led his people and got them to camp by the sea. That was the Lord's doing.

But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. And so Pharaoh changes his mind about letting the slaves go. And we read that, chapter 14, verse 5 to 7.

Now, of course, Pharaoh was the superpower of the day. He had the best armed forces. And so he pursued the Israelites and he caught up with them. And the Israelites, of course, had no chance.

[6 : 02] They were faced on one side by the sea. Now, this is probably a stretch of water at the northern end of the Gulf of Suez. And they had the Egyptian soldiers on the other side, coming at them with horses and chariots.

And they're trapped between the army and the sea, caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, staring at death in whatever direction they looked.

And so what do they do? Well, they blame Moses, chapter 14, verse 11. They said to Moses, was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt?

All they can see is death wherever they look. And they forget that the Lord had brought them to this place. After saving them through the plagues and from the plagues, and after saving them through the Passover and the sacrifice of the Lamb, God was the one who took them to where they ought to be.

And then they start talking nonsense. Verse 12, didn't we say to you in Egypt, leave us alone, let us serve the Egyptians. It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert.

[7 : 18] Now that definitely wasn't what they said when they were back in Egypt. Just see what they really said. Chapter 5, verse 21. And they said, may the Lord look on you and judge you.

You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us. Okay, so they never thought Egypt was a good deal, a great deal at all.

They wanted out of Egypt, and that is the reality. But they had what many have today, and that is a revisionist history.

That's what they call it, where history is revised in some way to make it seem other than it really was. And so they were deluded about their past, the Israelites, but they were also deluded about their present, because there's no way it would be better for them to be back in Egypt.

So God had brought them out, and yet they were talking as if they wanted to go back, to swap the freedom they had with the Lord and go back to slavery with Pharaoh in Egypt.

[8 : 28] And it was a lack of faith in God, despite everything that God had done for them. Did they really think that God had led them into something worse than before?

And yet, you know, we can sometimes think in the same way that they did. We might be tempted to think that God doesn't really know what is best for us.

Deluded into thinking that God's way is somehow restrictive, that his commands spoil life, rather than give us the freedom to flourish. And we forget that it is actually God who delivers us out of slavery, out of our slavery to sin.

And yet, we might not see the damage it causes, our sin to ourselves and to those around us, because we don't realize the extent of our captivity.

We've been deluded and been blinded to it. And we need a way out, an exodus. And that was the Israelites. So even if we'd call ourselves a Christian, we can still have the same attitude that they

had.

[9 : 38] And that is, having been liberated from slavery and being out and being free, we want to go back to the captivity.

And so they were living as if they weren't free. They wanted to live as if they were slaves again. And so there was a sense in which they were still talking, and acting like slaves.

And the point is that you can take people out of slavery, but you can't take the slavery out of the people. It's not so easy to do.

Because when God saves us and sets us free, he wants to bring us out of our slavery to sin. He doesn't want us to be trapped by its enslaving power. And yet the problem is that we so often don't want to leave certain sins behind because they give us comfort or peace or security.

And we like that old way of life because sometimes the new life that God calls us to can be harder. It can be tough to obey and do what God demands.

[10 : 44] It can be too difficult. And that's not to say, of course, that Christians no longer sin, but it is to say that Christians will seek to avoid sin and avoid its enslaving power in our lives because we've been set free from it.

Paul says in Romans chapter 8, verse 1 and 2, therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

So there's no condemnation, Paul says. We've been set free. And so if we try to justify our sin by thinking it isn't really a big deal or we're in control of it, it simply reveals how much we're actually enslaved to it.

But we shouldn't be sucked back into that life of slavery when we're free. Martin Lloyd-Jones, who was a Welsh minister, has a good illustration of this.

And I heard this from a Tim Keller sermon on the Gospel Coalition website. And so Martin Lloyd-Jones, in his commentary on Romans, he gives the example of slaves in the United States of America after the American Civil War.

[12 : 02] So slavery had been abolished and the slaves were given their freedom. But what happened? Well, those who'd been slaves for a long time find it really difficult to adjust to their new status as free people.

They'd been born as slaves. They'd been brought up as slaves. They'd lived as slaves. And so they'd got into the habit of thinking like slaves. And so many of the older slaves found it the hardest because they hadn't known any other kind of life.

Hard for them to realize they were free and no longer slaves. And so Lloyd-Jones says that when they saw their old slave master coming near them, they began to quake and tremble.

And yet they were free. No longer slaves. The law had been changed. Their status and their position was entirely different. And yet it took them a really long time to realize it.

And so he said, Lloyd-Jones, you can be a slave in your feelings when actually in respect of your position, you have been emancipated completely. And he says, so it is with the Christian.

[13 : 08] We're free, but we can still behave like a slave. And that's why the Exodus shows us what God's salvation is like and how it works itself out in our lives.

Because God's salvation is a past, a present, and a future thing. We've been saved from the penalty of sin, which is in the past. We are being saved right now from the power of sin, which is in the present.

And we will be saved from the very presence of sin, which is in the future. And so because the salvation is being worked out in our lives, we still need to battle against the enslaving power of sin. There's no more condemnation for us if we believe in Jesus Christ. We're free. And so we need to live as free people. That's the first thing.

We need saving from our slavery. Secondly, who saves us? It's the Lord who saves us. So when you read the story, you recognize there's no way the Israelites could save themselves.

[14 : 15] The emphasis in the Exodus story is simply the Lord God saves his people. And his salvation couldn't be any more explicit than what we read in verse 13 and 14 of chapter 14.

So the people have complained, and this is Moses' answer. Moses answered the people, Do not be afraid. Stand firm, and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today.

The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you. You need only to be still. The Israelites could not do anything.

And they didn't need to do anything because their salvation was entirely a work of God. And that's why Moses gives these three commands here. Do not be afraid.

Stand firm. Be still. Do not be afraid. He says that to people who were terrified, who were hopeless, and who were helpless. But Moses said, Do not be afraid.

[15:19] Do you know that? That is the most frequent command in the Bible. Do not be afraid. Or in other translations, fear not. Why is it repeated over and over again?

It's because we have a God who saves, and that's his job, and so there's no need to be afraid. And he says, Stand firm. As the Israelites faced Pharaoh's army, they wanted to give up and to go back to Egypt.

The army seemed too strong, and they felt very weak. And so Moses tells them, Stand firm. Why? Because they would see the salvation of the Lord that very day.

And so they needed to stand firm and watch God save them. Moses said, The Lord will fight for you. You need only to be still.

They couldn't fight, and they wanted to flee. But Moses commanded, You need only be still. And you can't explain grace any more clearer than this.

[16:26] Their salvation had absolutely nothing to do with them and everything to do with God. It was his work, not theirs.

The Lord would fight for them and save them. And so isn't this just a wonderfully vivid picture of the grace of God that is at the heart of the Christian faith? It comes to us in pop-up picture book fashion.

Let's look at verse 19 through to 22. The angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel.

Throughout the night, the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other, so neither went near the other all night long. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land.

The waters were divided and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground with a wall of water on their right and on their left. And so the quiz question is, what did the Israelites do to cross over, to save themselves from their slavery in Egypt?

[17:40] They did nothing. The Lord did it all for them. The crossing was nothing less than a mighty miracle of God. The Israelites did not lift a single finger, simply trust that God would save them.

And so they crossed over by putting their faith in God. And that's how Hebrews chapter 11, that great chapter in the New Testament on faith, puts it. It says this, by faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land.

But when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned. So they crossed over by faith. Now, sure, they all had faith. That's what Hebrews says.

And so I guess there would have been Israelites who were really confident in God's power to save them. And I guess they thought it was kind of cool that they could walk through on dry land and see these massive walls of water either side of them.

And maybe they walked through with a swagger, with a spring in their step. Because they knew that God had this. But I'm guessing they weren't all like that.

[18:51] Probably most weren't like that. Some were far more cautious, I'm sure. A bit less gung-ho. And worried as they walked through and they saw these massive walls of water either side.

Worried that they would die. And yet here's the thing, they were all saved for faith. Their salvation wasn't dependent on their strength or their faith or even the weakness of their faith.

Their salvation was dependent entirely on God, the Lord. And so they had to trust Him entirely, not in their ability to get themselves across because the Lord fought for them.

they needed only to be still and to watch and wait for their salvation to unfold before their very eyes.

And this is clear at the end of our reading, chapter 14, verse 29 to 31. But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

[19:59] That day, the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in Him and in Moses,

His servant.

And so can you see the order here? Because we need to get the order right. God didn't wait for His people to trust in Him before He saved them. No, He saved them.

And the people saw God's salvation. They saw His grace in opening up the sea for them and so they walked through by faith. Their salvation was completely a work of God.

And so was ours. They contributed nothing to their salvation. And neither do we. Our salvation is never about what we do.

It is always about what God does for us. We are saved by grace just like they were. And isn't that what sets Christianity apart from every other world religion?

[21 : 12] Every other belief system says, do this, do that, try hard, obey the rules, maybe if you've done enough, you've been good enough, you've tried hard enough, then you'll get there.

In the end, you'll get your salvation, whatever that is in whatever the particular religion is. Basically, it's up to you. It's up to you to do it yourself.

It's all in your hands. Whether you make it or not is down to you. Only Christianity is about salvation by grace. Because it tells us you can't do it yourself no matter how hard you try.

And so if you're here this afternoon and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian and you're wondering, well, what do you need to do to become a Christian? Well, the answer is nothing.

You only receive by faith the salvation that God offers to you in Jesus Christ. God didn't say to the Israelites, if you can prove you've got enough faith, I'll get you through this sea.

[22 : 22] If you can show how good you are and stop moaning and whinging and complaining, then, well, yeah, maybe I'll listen and I'll just take you through. Then I'll save you. No. God fights for them.

He defeats their enemies in order to save them. And so Exodus is telling us about the God who saves. Not only that, but about how he saves.

And it's a story the whole Bible tells us. And so the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 5 says this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

And so we, like the Israelites, respond to God's grace, respond to what God has already done in Jesus Christ to save us. We respond to that by putting our faith in him.

Because like the Israelites, we contribute nothing to our salvation. When I was a minister in Edinburgh through in the East, we had a membership process in our church where I would go along to someone's house with another elder and we would have an interview about membership and what it means to be a Christian and what it means to be part of the church.

[23 : 38] And one of the questions that we would always ask in the membership interview was this one. And it was really to see if somebody had a clear grasp of Christianity. And this is the question, if you were to die suddenly, are you sure you would go to heaven?

If you were to die suddenly, are you sure you would go to heaven? And I would say something like, just please explain in a few sentences. And I remember how one woman responded by saying, and this was her answer, I hope so because I'm trying really hard.

Now that is the wrong answer because when somebody isn't sure, when somebody says, well, I'm still trying, then they failed to grasp the grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so it gave us the opportunity with the woman just to discuss further how becoming a Christian is responding in faith to all that God has already done for us in Jesus Christ.

It was a chance to see we don't trust in our own efforts. We can only be saved by trusting in what God has done for us in Jesus because it was a decisive act and it has been accomplished.

[24 : 57] And so how does this work? Well, let's move on to our third point. First, why we need saving. Second, who saves us. And then thirdly, how we are saved. We're saved through the mediator.

Now, you see here in these verses, chapter 14, 13 to 28, Moses is the mediator. He's the one who is standing between the Israelites and God.

So just before the crossing of the sea, the people cried out to the Lord and then he complained to Moses. But Moses responds by telling them that God would deliver them.

And we've seen that. And then God responds to Moses, verse 15 of chapter 14 and says, the Lord said to Moses, why are you crying out to me?

Tell the Israelites to move on. Now, God says something interesting to Moses here. Moses has just given this speech of his life in verse 13 and 14, but straight after, what does the Lord say to Moses?

[25 : 58] He says, why are you crying out to me? Moses wasn't the one doing the crying. It's the people. And so it seems strange because it's Moses who is rebuked instead of them.

And so some commentators suggest it's because Moses is their representative. Moses was so closely identified with Israel, he was one of them, he was their leader, but he was one of them, that Moses gets rebuked instead of them.

He takes the flak because he is one of them. So Moses gets what they deserved, which is to be rebuked for their complaining. But because Moses is the mediator, he is the one who is standing between Israel and God.

And so he represents the people to God and he represents God to the people. So as the mediator, Moses gets rebuked for their complaining.

And as the mediator, of course, Moses gets used by God to accomplish God's saving work.

Actually, Moses' role as the mediator is seen by the way he goes between God and the people in these two chapters.

[27 : 16] So, well, just briefly, look, chapter 13, verse 1, the Lord said to Moses, then verse 3, then Moses said to the people. Then chapter 14, verse 1, then the Lord said to Moses, then chapter 14, verse 13, Moses answered the people.

And then verse 15 of chapter 14, then the Lord said to Moses, and then verse 21, then Moses stretched out his hand and it goes back and forth and back and forth.

the Lord says to Moses, Moses goes and relays what the Lord has said to the people and then it comes back and back again. And so the Lord delivered his people through the Red Sea through Moses.

Moses is their mediator, their representative. Now, of course, we don't stop reading the Bible there because we know there's another mediator between people and God, a better mediator.

And Moses is the one who points us towards him. Moses is a foreshadow of a greater mediator to come. One who was so identified with us that he became one of us.

[28 : 28] God with us. Jesus Christ. But he wasn't just close to God like Moses. He is God. And so Jesus stands between us and God, identifying with us because he was human, but also representing us before God because he's divine.

He's the perfect mediator, fully man and fully God. And that's why in Hebrews chapter 3, the writer speaks of Jesus as being greater than Moses.

Jesus is the new and better Moses, the true and better Moses. Moses led his people out of their slavery in Egypt and onto the promised land.

And so Jesus leads his people out of their slavery to sin and onto the ultimate promised land of the new heaven and new earth. And that's why the New Testament repeatedly explains the saving work of Jesus Christ through the echo of the Exodus story.

The Exodus is a picture of what Jesus came to do. Remember how the infant Jesus had fled to Egypt with his parents? And in Matthew, the gospel writer reports this by quoting Hosea, which says, Out of Egypt I called my son.

[29 : 53] So just as God called Israel his firstborn son out of Egypt, so God called Jesus his son out of Egypt. And then there's the transfiguration where Jesus' departure is mentioned.

And it's interesting in Luke chapter 9, Jesus' departure obviously is referring to his death. But the actual Greek word used for departure is Exodus.

Because Jesus' exodus from this life is what accomplishes our salvation. And that's why the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 speaks of being baptized into Moses, which is a strange expression.

he says that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

And so what Paul's doing is he's drawing a parallel between the Red Sea crossing and the symbolism of baptism. So just as the Israelites died to their old way of life in Egypt and passed through the sea to a new life with Moses, so believers in Jesus Christ undergo their own exodus through their union with Christ in his death and resurrection.

[31 : 13] That's how we are redeemed from death to life. And so Jesus, our mediator, lived the life we should have lived and died the death we deserve to die.

And so Jesus was thrown into the sea of God's wrath against our sin as he died on the cross. And then he came out victorious on the other side through his resurrection.

And that's why when our faith is in Jesus Christ we no longer need to fear death or judgment. because just as the Lord fought for his people to deliver them from Egypt so Jesus has fought for us.

He took on our enemies of sin and death and the devil and he defeated them at the cross. He did it to deliver us from our slavery to sin which leads to death which leads to hell.

Jesus fought for us and when our faith is in him we share his victory. And so we're meant to see the exodus as a crossing over from slavery to freedom from death to life.

[32 : 28] One that points to our crossing over becoming a Christian being taken out of darkness and given and given and given new life and light.

Jesus said in John chapter 5 I tell you the truth whoever hears my words and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned he has crossed over from death to life.

Jesus is saying that it's only by believing that we're no longer under condemnation but cross over from death to life.

And that's what it means to be a Christian. So if you think well what would an Israelite say if they had to share their story of the exodus? And there's a great bit in a book that I love by Alec Mateer called Loving the Old Testament and he's asked the question how would an Israelite tell their testimony testimony after they come through the Red Sea and were making it on their way to the promised land and this is what he says we were in a foreign land in bondage under the sentence of death but our mediator the one who stands between us and God came to us with the promise of deliverance we trusted in the promises of God took shelter under the blood of the Lamb and he led us out now we are on our way to the promised land we're not there yet of course but we have the law to guide us and through blood sacrifice we also have his presence in our midst so he will stay with us until we get to our true country our everlasting home and then he concluded now think about it a Christian today could say the same thing almost word for word and so as we close if you are a Christian you'll know that God has saved you by his grace through Jesus Christ his presence is with you by his spirit and he is leading you to your everlasting home if so then don't look back to the old life of slavery thinking that is better it never is enjoy your new life of freedom but if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian then it's like you're stuck on the shores of the Red Sea trapped facing death facing destruction and unable to do anything yourself because the only way to cross over from death to life is to turn from your sin and trust in Jesus and so have you made the crossover yet have you crossed over from slavery to freedom from death to life if not trust in

[35 : 22] God and cross over to eternal life