

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Exodus 14:1-31

March 14th, 2021

Joseph took his wife and her child and they went to Africa to escape the rage of a deadly King. There along the banks of the Nile Jesus listened to the song that the captive children used to sing. They were singin' -

My deliverer is comin', my deliverer is standin' by

My deliverer is comin', my deliverer is standin' by

Through a dry and thirsty land water from the Kenyon heights - pours itself out of lake Sangra's broken heart; there in the Sahara winds, Jesus heard the whole world cry for the healin' that would flow from His own scars - the world was singin' -

My deliverer is comin', my deliverer is standin' by

My deliverer is comin', my deliverer is standin' by

He will never break His promise; He has written it upon the sky

That song was performed by Rich Mullins, a contemporary Christian music artist, along with his Ragamuffin Band. Rich died in a vehicle accident on Interstate 39 near Lostant, Illinois in September 1997. This song's message merges nicely with today's sermon text, **Exodus 14:1-31**.

Having concluded our sermon series on the New Testament book of Romans last Sunday, today we begin a new sermon series, this time much shorter, and from the Old Testament. I've entitled this brief survey, *These are a Few of My Favorite Texts*. For 8-10 Sundays, we will be exploring Scripture from Old Testament books I haven't already preached through and rank among my favorite of the entire older testament.

So, that means we won't be exploring the great texts of Scripture in Genesis, Judges, 1 or 2nd Samuel, Proverbs, Daniel, Jonah, Habakkuk, or Malachi. Further, I have led studies on other Old Testament books in my ministry here in Aledo, and they'll not be explored in this survey; they are Deuteronomy, Ruth, Esther, and Job.

For the first sermon, I've chosen what may be the most famous event in the Old Testament - Israel's departure from Egypt as we find it in **Exodus Chapter 14**.

Exodus 14:31:

"Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ² "Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn and camp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon; you shall camp before it by the sea. ³ For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, 'They *are* bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in.' ⁴ Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will

pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I *am* the Lord.” And they did so.

5 Now it was told the king of Egypt that the people had fled, and the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was turned against the people; and they said, “Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” **6** So he made ready his chariot and took his people with him. **7** Also, he took 600 choice chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt with captains over every one of them. **8** And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel; and the children of Israel went out with boldness. **9** So the Egyptians pursued them, all the horses *and* chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and overtook them camping by the sea beside Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon.

10 And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord. **11** Then they said to Moses, “Because *there were* no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? **12** *Is* this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For *it would have been* better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness.”

13 And Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. **14** The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.”

15 And the Lord said to Moses, “Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. **16** But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry *ground* through the midst of the sea. **17** And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. **18** Then the Egyptians shall know that I *am* the Lord, when I have gained honor for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.”

19 And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. **20** So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness *to the one*, and it gave light by night *to the other*, so that the one did not come near the other all that night.

21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go *back* by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry *land*, and the waters were divided. **22** So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry *ground*, and the waters *were* a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. **23** And the Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.

24 Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the Lord looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians. **25** And He took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty; and the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians.”

26 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen.” **27** And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it. So the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. **28** Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, *and* all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained. **29** But the children of Israel had walked on dry *land* in the midst of the sea, and the waters *were* a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

30 So the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel ¹saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. **31** Thus Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt; so the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and His servant Moses.”

By way of review, the book of Exodus opens after the death of Joseph, son of the patriarch Jacob, with the children of Israel in captivity in Egypt.

Exodus 1:8 reveals a new king ruled in Egypt “who did not know Joseph.” The children of Israel were in bondage under hard labor building cities for Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Pharaoh noticed the Hebrew people were fertile and growing in large numbers as a people.

So, in an attempt to control the Hebrew population explosion, Pharaoh issued a decree to the nursing corps to save only infant girls at birth, not the infant boys. But, **Exodus 1:17** reveals the midwives “feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them.”

Enter Moses. He was born to Levite parents, Amram and Jochebed. His mother could not hide him from Pharaoh’s troops, so she put Moses in a little basket (an ‘ark’) in the reeds of the Nile river where he was found by the daughter of Pharaoh. She gave Moses to his mother, Jochebed, to raise. How providential of God!

Some years later, when Moses was shepherding a flock of sheep for his father-in-law Jethro, an angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a burning bush (**Exodus Chapter 3**). There God called Moses to deliver His people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt to the land He (God) had longed promised them. **Exodus 3:8** describes it as “a good and large land...a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Exodus Chapters 4 through 12 explore the back and forth struggle between Moses and Pharaoh in a series of 10 plagues that God brought upon Pharaoh and the Egyptian people. Following the 10th and final plague - the death of the firstborn in all the families of Egypt - Pharaoh relented and God’s people hastily prepared to depart Egypt - that’s **Exodus 12:31-36**.

This all took place 430 years to the day since Jacob and family first arrived in Egypt.

That brings us back to today’s text **Exodus Chapter 14** and the crossing of the Red Sea. This should be familiar to most; some of you have read this in recent weeks as part of your reading through the Bible in a year. Just as many know of this incident from the annual Easter weekend television broadcast of the 1956 movie “The Ten Commandments” starring Charlton Heston.

Verses 1-9 describe Pharaoh’s pursuit of Israel. Though Pharaoh said Moses and the Hebrew people could leave Egypt, the text shows he regretted that decision - this is **Exodus 14:5** - “Now it was told the king of Egypt that the people had fled, and the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was turned against the people; and they said, “Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” “It dawned on Pharaoh and his officers

that, by allowing their Hebrew slaves to escape, they had threatened, if not destroyed, Egypt's whole economy, so the logical thing was to go after the Hebrews and bring them back." (Wiersbe, 66)

Pharaoh's pursuit resulted in Israel's panic - v. 10-12 - "And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord. Then they said to Moses, "Because *there were* no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? *Is* this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For *it would have been* better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness."

As long as the Hebrews kept their eyes on the fiery pillar and followed the Lord, they were walking by faith and no enemy could touch them. But when they took their eyes off the Lord and looked back and saw the Egyptians getting nearer, they became frightened. The New Testament equivalent teaching comes from the Apostle Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth - **2 Corinthians 5:7** - "For we walk by faith, not by sight."

Moses was a man of faith who knew that Pharaoh's army was no threat to God, and if no threat to God, it was also no threat to God's people. Verses 13 & 14 show Moses giving three commands to the Hebrew people. "Do not be afraid...stand firm....be still.

Theologians call "do not be afraid" a negative imperative - a negative command - that is the strongest possible form of expressing negation in the Hebrew language. So, when Moses told the Hebrews not to be afraid he was not comforting them - he was rebuking them. He was telling them they had no right to be afraid because they had no reason to fear. All they needed to do was stand their ground, patiently waiting to see what God would do.

Author Phil Ryken applies this to our salvation from sin. "Satan is pursuing us (like Pharaoh pursued the Israelites); but instead of running away, all we need to do is stand and see the salvation of our God. Christianity is not about something we can do to become better people; it is about what Christ has done through the cross and the empty tomb. Jesus Christ has accomplished everything necessary for our salvation. He is the one who has atoned for sin, who has turned aside God's wrath, who offers perfect righteousness as the gift of faith, and who has gained entrance into resurrection life. When people ask, 'What must we do to be saved?' the answer is that we don't have to do anything. Jesus has done it! We just need to look to Him for our salvation."

With our faith rooted in Jesus, we need to stand our ground. We are in a spiritual battle, and in that battle the Bible gives us the same marching orders that Moses gave to Israel. 'Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.'" (**Ephesians 6:13**) (Ryken, 387-388)

The second half of **Exodus Chapter 14** describes the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea by the people of God.

The Israelites had left Egypt and were camped by the sea. In verses 19 & 20, the Angel of God takes up a position behind the camp of Israelites between them and the Egyptians. So, too, did the pillar of cloud, which served to confuse and darken where the Egyptians were located, and gave light to the Israelites where they camped. As such, God was with His people, in both the presence of the Angel of God, and in the pillar of cloud.

With verse 21, Moses took his staff and stretched out his arm. And God provided east winds to hold back the waters all night and dry out the ground for the Hebrews to walk across. The drama builds with verses 22 & 23 - "So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry *ground*, and the waters *were* a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen."

The Lord looked down on the scene, and saw Pharaoh's chariots bogged down and stuck in the mud. Verse 25 reveals God removed the wheels of the chariots. And, even Pharaoh's men realized God's hand was in what they were experiencing. Moses again raised the staff with his arm, and God brought the waters of the Red Sea down upon the Egyptian soldiers and their chariots. There were no Egyptian survivors.

Clearly what took place was miraculous! The story is told of a liberal minister preaching in an old, Bible-believing, country church. At a certain point in his sermon, the minister referred to the crossing of the Red Sea. "Praise the Lord," someone shouted. "Takin' all them children through the deep waters. What a mighty miracle!"

However the minister did not believe in miracles. So he said, rather condescendingly, "It was not a miracle. They were in marsh-land, the tide was ebbing, and the children of Israel picked their way across in 6 inches of water." "Praise the Lord!" the man shouted again. "Drownin' all them Egyptians in 6 inches of water. What a mighty miracle!"

Some may think it harsh for God to drown an entire army, but it was right and just. Pharaoh and his soldiers were cruel men bent on destroying God's people. *Was it not right for God to punish evil men for killing innocent children?* It was especially appropriate for them to die by drowning because they had once tried to drown the children of Israel in the Nile. These men deserved to be punished for their sins.

If you are a Christian, you have experienced an even greater escape than that of the Hebrews in Exodus. You have been saved from your bondage to sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus came to earth, and in so doing He made Himself of no reputation, coming in the likeness of men. He fulfilled the law to satisfy a holy God; our sins were laid on Him, He took our punishment, delivering us from eternal hell for everlasting life!

“Do not be afraid!” “Stand firm!” “Be still.”