

God's Power To Save Is Seen Most When It Seems Most Impossible

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if you happen to have a Bible, keep a thumb in Exodus 14. And this morning we will be exploring that God's power is seen when it seems most impossible.

Last week I used the illustration of the chess grandmaster who makes moves that seems to make no sense until it's too late and the grandmaster's victory is inevitable. Our passage this morning, we're going to see how this move that God made now begins to make sense to everyone.

And so where before the Israelites didn't know what God was doing when he brought them to the sea, the Egyptians didn't know what God was doing. They thought that it was a mistake and the Israelites were left hanging. But this move that God made is now beginning to make sense to everyone and we see the panic among the Egyptians as they begin to realize that they have actually walked right into a trap. So in the game of chess, if you're not familiar, there's actually many traps that are set moves. And when I was in school, I didn't make it to the football team, but I was on the chess team and I remember being away on a competition and one of the set games started and less than a minute later, I'd get up from it and I'd walked over and my mum who'd come along with me was confused at why I got up mid-game. But I told her, well, actually the game's over. I used a basic opening trap and the person fell for it and within a few moves the game was over. And that's all it takes. If someone falls for this trap, victory is inevitable. And this is what it's like in Exodus. There's this point in chess. It's like crossing the Rubicon, if you've ever heard of that phrase, crossing the Rubicon. You're going to a point of no return.

There's this point in chess where you make a move, you begin to set a trap. And if the other person falls for it, then after a move or two, checkmate is inevitable. The person might not realize it. They might think they can still wiggle out, but it's over. The game is over. And a move or two is happening, and it's too late. There's no getting out of it. Moreover, when the person realizes that it's inevitable, more often than not, an experienced chess player will just surrender. They'll knock their king over, because there's no point playing. You're just going to lose pieces, and you're going to lose in the end. And so at this moment in Exodus, the Egyptians have taken the bait. They've fallen for the trap. God's move didn't make sense at first, but when they realize what God is doing, it's too late.

It is too late. Checkmate is inevitable. And with God, checkmate always is inevitable, not just because he's some sort of grandmaster, but because he is the mighty God and sovereign creator of all things. There's nothing on earth or in the heavens that he cannot control, because he made them, and he's sovereign over them. There's no contest with God, no struggle between light and darkness, and no sweat on the brow of Yahweh. And if this isn't clear in any given situation in our lives, it's not because it's not true. It's only because we don't see the chessboard like God sees it. To us, things in life, do they not just seem random and chaotic and accidental and uncontrollable? But to him, well, God started the game. Every move that God makes is his own move. He's not being reactive. God knows the end from the beginning.

[4 : 0 6] Now, before the Egyptians see the way through the water, God blocks them. So you'll see that right at the start of our passage. The angel who was going before them moved behind them. The pillar of cloud that was before them stood behind them. God blocks the people from the Israelites, and he blocks the Israelites from the people. How many times do you think that God stands in the way of something coming against his people? And how often do we just not know it? We don't have any idea, do we? The amount of times that God does that in our lives, he moves and blocks the way of something trying to get at us.

And so let's go through this passage. Let's go through with three points. The three points are going to be the power of God, the folly of sin, and the outcome of faith. And so firstly, let's look at the power of God. He steps between the Egyptian army and Israel. And something you were praying about this morning, Robert, about the Lord being like the sunshine. Well, in Psalm 84, it's this really interesting thing, because in our passage, the people of Egypt are in darkness, but the people of Israel are in light. And it's the pillar, it's God standing there between them, and he's bringing darkness to one side, and he's bringing light to the other. And in Psalm 84, it says this, the Lord God is a sun and a shield. Blessed is the one who trusts in you. Isn't that interesting? He's a sun and a shield.

Now, you know, if you know God, that he is a shield. You've probably heard that. The Lord is our shield. Think about how many times the Lord is shielding you from something, from the fiery arrows of the devil, from the attacks of darkness. The Lord God is shielding you more than you know it. He is your shield.

But this is a strange phrase, God is a sun. This is the only time in the Old Testament that God is directly called a sun. Nowhere else is he called a sun. And this is what we see, verse 20, that throughout the night the Lord, by means of the pillar, is both a shield and a sun to the people of Israel. Now think about this. What would this mean to the Egyptians who worshipped Ra? Ra was the great sun god. And yet who's got the light at this moment of time? What is Ra doing for the Egyptians right now? When they're left in darkness and Israel are basking in the light of the Lord?

Where is Ra now? People of Egypt are in the darkness and Israel has the light in the middle of the night. In the middle of the night. It's like daytime to Israel. Where is their sun god when they're left in the dark? When Israel's God, Yahweh, lights up the night for his people? You see the power and glory and victory of Yahweh. His favor and faithfulness to those who trust in him. John 8 says, Jesus says, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

[7 : 5 1] The implication is you don't follow him. You will walk in darkness and not have the light of life. But whoever follows Jesus will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Not only, though, is God a light shining on Israel, the light is shining on the sea, which is important. Remember the statement from earlier in the chapter? If you're taking notes at this point, or if you've got your Bible open, look at verse 13 and see how it says, see. So verse 13, Moses says, see the salvation of the Lord. And then look at verse 30 at the end of the chapter and 31, Israel saw. Israel saw. So Moses says, come on, folks, don't fear.

Have a little faith and see the salvation of the Lord. And then by the end of it, Israel saw. Seesaw. And so the light that God is shining is a spotlight so that someone can see something.

The light that God is shining is not just that Israel would be in the light, but that they would see something about God. They would see that what God is going to do. And so this light that is brought in the middle of the night is a spotlight on God's power to save. It's a spotlight on God's power to save. Is that not what always what the light of God is? It's a spotlight on God's power to save.

See the salvation that the Lord, which he will work for you today. And Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians. God doesn't hide his power in the dark, nor does he work his salvation where nobody can see it. He will raise up his salvation like a banner for all to see. Is that not what the cross is?

[9 : 51] When he is lifted up. When he is lifted up for all people to see. God doesn't hide his salvation.

And if you believe in God, if you believe in God, you believe in his son, Jesus. And if you do, you know what I mean. Because 2 Corinthians 4, 6 says, for God who said, let light shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And if you know God and you know Jesus, then you know that this light has shone in your heart to see the salvation that was placed on a cross. And if you haven't seen the light of salvation, perhaps you have yet to have faith in Christ. But his power was not left in the dark. The spotlight is on his power to save. And if this was obvious in Exodus, how much more is the spotlight on the cross of Christ and his resurrection? But make no mistake, make no mistake, our final salvation will not be hidden from anyone. Every eye will see. In this blinding light, like never seen before, every eye will see. And so Moses stretches out his hand over the sea. And all night the Lord drove back the sea with a strong east wind to turn it into dry land. The waters were divided and they walked through with a wall on their right and then on their left. And there's a time to stand still and there's a time to get going. And I don't know in this moment what time lapsed. I know at the end of chapter 13 they were traveling day and night. I wonder if there was a good few hours at this moment for them to rest while God did his work on the sea. And so God, by the clouds, stood between them and the Egyptians so they wouldn't go near each other. They can get a rest and just see what God was going to do. Get a front row seat and watch the power of God. I don't know what the ancient equivalent to popcorn would have been. Now we can chat later if you want to ask about details.

Red Sea, Reed Sea, different locations, sandbars, land bridges, whether the wall of water means a wall standing tall, vertical, frozen, whatever it means, it's protection on either side.

But here's what we do know. The point is that God took them from a point of impossibility in order to show his power and glory over Pharaoh. There would be no doubt at all to anyone in that situation that this was God and none other. You see, he harnesses the wind and uses it at his pleasure like a tool in his toolbox. He can control any part of creation he wishes to do anything he wills because he made it and he's sovereign over it. This is like Genesis 8.1. God made a wind blow over the earth and the water subsided. Psalm 147. He makes the wind blow and the waters flow.

Psalm 148. Fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word. Or Jonah chapter 1. The Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea. The fact that God used the weather isn't supposed to diminish his power. Some people will try and do this. Some people will look and say it was nature. You're like, well, who's in control of nature? And the fact that God uses nature isn't supposed to diminish his power like God can only use nature. It's to show that God is sovereign over nature. It's to show that these things, these magnificently powerful forces that we humans are at the mercy of are to God like little tools in his toolbox that he can just pick up and use at his pleasure.

[14 : 00] That's what it's to show. All these things in nature that the Egyptians attributed to God's. The Lord is saying, no, I'm in control of any of these things and I can pick them up and use them at my will. Some people like to match all the Exodus events to natural weather phenomena. But either way, you cut it. Without God, Israel would never have made it out of Egypt alive.

And it's not just Israel. And it's not just for their salvation, but judgment against Egypt. Think about this. Throughout the plagues, all their land and livelihood have been devastated.

Their gods have been embarrassed. Their firstborn have died. And now their army will drown in the Red Sea, which is just desserts for their murderous plots to drown the Israelite babies in the Nile.

This is what they get. And so when the Egyptians, with their terrifying chariots, which by the way, were like tanks of their day, this was cutting edge technology. When they and their terrifying chariots ride furiously after the Israelites into this corridor of the sea, God uses their technology against them.

And clogs up these wheels. It's wonderful. It jams up the wheels. And this comes to a point of realization that they've walked into a trap. And the Egyptians begin to say what Moses said way back in verse 14 to Israel. Moses said to Israel, fear not, Yahweh will fight for you. And now the Egyptians are like, ooh, Yahweh is fighting for them. You bet he is. And if you want some interesting equivalents in modern day, ask Janice about the tanks in Operation Shalom Hagalil in 1982. Fascinating stuff. The way God fights and uses technology and just embarrasses the enemy. The point is, Israel has made it to the other side. And at God's command, the waters return from whence they came. God has gotten the glory and His power has shown when it seemed impossible. But the folly of sin, as spectacular as this would have been to see the sea parting. I want to ask you a question. If you were an Israelite, or if it happened today, would you walk through it? You might think, what a spectacular thing that God does this amazing thing.

[16 : 43] And God says, oh, you can go and walk through it. I'd be like, oh, maybe, maybe not. Because even as an Israelite, would they not be nervous about going through? Would you not think with every single step, what if the water returns now? What if the water returns now? Every step.

Every single step. And here's a very important point that we must get for anyone. You know, these folk who just think that Christianity is about blind belief, because if they saw it, they would believe. Not true.

Just because they could physically see—this is the Israelites—just because they could physically see this magnificent show of God's power to part the sea doesn't mean they didn't need to walk by faith.

They did. Just because God makes a way doesn't mean we don't need to have faith. faith is always required. Now, already they should have known that God is with them.

They still have the pillar moving with them. They still have Moses going through a man of faith. And they still have the sure word of God that they would make it to the promised land. So, yeah, okay, the Israelites need faith. They would have been nervous. Even seeing this magnificent power of God, they need faith to walk through with every step. But an Egyptian, what are you playing at? Why on earth would an Egyptian go into that? Something impossible has happened, and it wasn't your God that made it happen. It was the God of the Israelites. He made a way through the sea. Yet what made them think it was a good idea to go in after them?

[18 : 31] And as I was pondering on this question, I thought to myself, a sinful heart will go after its desire without a care for its destruction. At first I thought, without thinking of its destruction. No, but we do. We do think about it. We just don't care about it.

Sin goes after its desire without caring about destruction. And that's the Egyptians.

The Egyptians, what gave them, what made them think it was a good idea? The foolishness of sin made them think it was a good idea to do this, because it doesn't make any sense.

Sin doesn't make any sense. It's like the monkey trap. I don't know if you've ever heard of this concept of the monkey trap, where you get a jar or some sort of container, you cut a hole, and you put a bit of fruit in there that the monkey likes. And the monkey will put his hand in and grab the fruit. And as long as it's got its hand around the fruit, it can't pull its hand out.

And so you can walk up and capture this monkey, because the monkey is so stubborn that it won't let go of the fruit. The monkey trap. And that's Pharaoh. The stubbornness of sin just won't let go of the fruit, even though it will be captured. Pharaoh stubbornly won't let go of this hard-hearted desire that he has to go after and destroy the Israelites. It's foolish. Don't think that sin will ever make sense. Sin does not make sense. And people wonder when their life is in tatters, how it could have happened. Yet people laugh when you tell them the Word of God against sin, some wisdom against the foolishness of sin. The fool says in his heart that there is no God.

[20 : 40] It's foolish. It's the folly of sin. Now, not all foolishness is sin, but all sin is foolish. Now, if only there were signposts, if there were only big things, big signs at the edge of this sea, saying, here are the times that the sea will come back in. Just note the times. If you're going to go in, just be sure of these times. Or what about if there was a nice road that their wheels wouldn't get clogged up? If only there was something solid to travel on and big signs saying, don't come in during this time in case the water comes back, perhaps they wouldn't have perished. You know, it's easy to underestimate the foolishness of stubborn human hearts, because every year, every single year to this day, down in the Holy Island, people do the very same thing.

They ignore the big warning signs on this lovely road and their lovely cars every year in Britain, down at Lindisfarne, and they get their car stuck in the middle of the causeway when the water comes back in. They completely disregard the warnings, and they underestimate the North Sea.

Now, the causeway, the road, sits at 3.5 meters when the tide is out, but when the tide comes in, the tide is 4.5 meters, and so you can do the math. It's a meter above the road, and you can kiss your car goodbye. The engine's flooded, and the car is a write-off, and the insurance companies, well, I think you know insurance companies enough that you know they won't pay out. But not only that, at high tide, the water can be 5.5 meters. It's two meters above the road, and you get people sitting on the roof of their car waiting for some sort of former rescue. It's crazy. The only reason why there's not been any fatalities is because there's a pretty good coast guard team. But every year, people are so foolish in their stubbornness to think they can make it against the sea.

It wasn't so fortunate for the Egyptians. The sea came back. Not an ordinary tide, like at Lindisfarne, but a raging rush that could not be outrun. And they were swept into the sea, covered the Egyptian army. In contrast to the Israelites, where not one was left behind, the Egyptian army, not one survived, not one remained. Isn't that something? It's the folly of sin, total destruction. Here's a thing about sin that we forget. Sin will not leave any room for you to survive if it has its way.

Not one will remain. Sin will completely decimate your entire life if it has its way. And judgment will flow over you completely, and without a solid rock to stand on, you will not stand. That doesn't mean there's no solid rock there. It just means you've not stood on the solid rock. Psalm 107.17 says, John Piper says, In the Bible, the word foolishness exists mainly to bring light to how stupid sin is.

[24 : 12] The full-blown sinner is not just evil, he's an idiot. He's irrational. You might say, calling something sin means it displeases God. Calling it foolish means it's going to displease you in the end. Sin shoots God. Folly shoots yourself. Sin opposes God. Folly opposes yourself.

But since opposing God is suicide, then all sin is foolish. And that is where the foolishness of sin will get you. The foolishness of sin will get you at the bottom of the Red Sea every single time.

It will never, sin will never get you to the other side. But what about the outcome of faith? Final point. Yahweh saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and they saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great power that Yahweh used against the Egyptians. And so the people feared Yahweh, and they believed in Yahweh and in his servant Moses.

Back in verse 10, they feared greatly the Egyptians who were marching after them, but now they fear Yahweh. Where they didn't believe in God's word before, or Moses, they now trust God and trust Moses. And this is a really important point if they are going to make it through the wilderness. They need to get this. For what is ahead of the Israelites, they must remember and keep this in mind. For after seeing this, what then can God not do?

Is there any legitimate room to doubt that God will guide and provide, protect, and fight? Is there any reason that Israel can doubt God's promise to take them to the promised land? No, there's not. This spectacular rescue is even written at the front of their law, as a reminder, right at the front of their law. I am Yahweh who did this thing, therefore you do this thing. God always acts before he expects us to act, and he expects us to act.

[26 : 27] Because he acted first. God saves and then gives the law. God first loved us so that we can love.

And so whether it's the Israelites on the other side of the sea, as they enter the wilderness, or whether it's the Israelites who first read this book, as they enter the promised land, or in light of all that Jesus did, what should the response be? The response should be faith. Faith is the end of this. Even in the sight of God's great power, faith is always required. Obedience, in the Bible, obedience isn't meant to be divorced from trust. Never. That's legalism.

It's trusting in him to guide and provide, to protect and fight. Trusting in him when there's an army on one side and a sea on the other. Trusting in God for our daily bread, or to live by every word of God.

Trusting in the power of Jesus to make a way through the sea, and trusting in his word to get us there. 1 Corinthians 10 tells us that these things took place as an example for us, and they were written down for our instruction. When you see, for instance, in Luke 8, 25, the disciples saying of Jesus, who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water and they obey him?

Who does that remind you of? What does that tell you about who Jesus is? Except Yahweh in the flesh. When we read in Matthew that Jesus, when he was transfigured, shone like the sun. Does that not remind you of Psalm 84, the Lord is a son?

[28 : 20] When in Luke 9, 31, it says that Moses and Elijah appeared with him in glory and spoke about his exodus that was about to take place in Jerusalem. That's exactly what it says.

That's supposed to tell us who Jesus is and what he has come to do. This exodus that we read about in the Old Testament is a type, and it points toward what God does in salvation time and time again. And even more, it's drawn out in the Gospels in the New Testament with respect to Jesus. In other words, the exodus helps us understand who Jesus is and what he is doing and what it means to follow him. Remember, and I'll try and take my time because this is going to be a dense recap. Moses was first to go through the waters in Exodus 1 as a baby in the Nile.

Moses was first to go through the waters, and he was placed in an ark. The only two times the word ark's used is with Noah and Moses. And so, like that of Moses, the waters of the Nile are like the great flood. And like Moses, like Noah, Moses was saved through the waters by an ark, and he was drawn out of the water. That is literally what his name means. This was a death and resurrection to new birth. That's what it was. So, for Noah, it was a death and resurrection to new birth. For Moses, he went through the waters first in death and resurrection to new birth. And so, the Israelites would follow Moses into the waters of death and come out the other side, a new resurrection and new birth. So, remember that. So, Moses went through first that experience of death and resurrection, and then Israel will later follow in that experience of death and resurrection because Moses is a type of Christ. Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection. He went through the waters first so that we will go through the waters with him. And what are the waters? Is it not death?

And so, this picture of Exodus is supposed to show us what is ahead for us because Christ has already gone through it. We shall go through it. Just as Christ has gone first through death and resurrection, so too shall we follow him. And this is how Paul can say in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul says this about the Exodus, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. How were they baptized into Moses?

Well, because he went ahead first and he led them through it. And so, now they are devoted to him and go through it with him. And then Paul says in Romans 6 that God's people now are baptized into Christ Jesus, baptized into his death, buried with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

[31 : 49] Okay, let's take a breather. Here's the point that as humans, in respect to our slavery to sin and our destiny and death, like the Israelites, this is the impossible problem. The Israelites had slavery of the Egyptians and the Red Sea representing death. And for us, it's pointing towards sin and death.

It's an impossible problem. We cannot fix this any more than Israelites could get themselves to the other side. We can no more save ourselves from sin and death than the Israelites can save themselves from the Egyptians and the sea. There is, however, one who can, and his name is Yahweh. His name we know as Jesus. By the power of Yahweh, anyone can be saved. God's power is seen most when it is most impossible.

Finally, let me look at this last line. Last line might surprise you. They believed in Yahweh and in his servant Moses. And you might think that's strange because you might think that the whole of Exodus was pointing towards the people fearing God more than Pharaoh. The people finally believe in God full stop. But we have this bit on the end that they believe in Moses too.

And to get the sense of this, we must remember that Moses was sent by God. Moses was sent by God when he came to his own people, but his own people rejected him. Does that sound familiar?

John chapter 11. Practically all of God's dealings with the people and with Pharaoh, practically all of God's power and miracles were wrought through the hands of Moses.

[33 : 47] Acts 2.22. A man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst. Ring any bells? Moses came to do the will of God. John chapter 5, verse 30. I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me. What is Moses prefiguring here? What's required of the Israelites is faith? Not just in God, but to trust in Moses as the servant sent by God. To trust in the sent one. Faith in the sent one. And so here's the familiar ring between our passage.

Right, let me read that last line of our passage and see if there's anything in the New Testament that corresponds to it. They believed in Yahweh and in his servant Moses. And you'll remember John chapter 14, where Jesus said, believe in God, also believe in me. Moses points to Christ. When we read of these things, we're not supposed to think of ourselves as Moses or put ourselves into Moses' place or think, how can we be more like Moses? We're supposed to think, this is Christ. This is Christ.

How can we follow Christ like they followed Moses? How can we believe in Christ, the sent one, like they believed in Moses, the sent one? Fear not, said Moses, stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord. And taking into consideration all that God had already done through Moses, despite how things looked, the people are called to trust God by trusting in Moses.

How much more should we believe in Jesus, who wasn't a servant sent by God, but he was God's own son sent? And understand the greater exodus that he is bringing about. And if you're not yet in that place of trusting Jesus with a trust that allows you to walk through the waters, then I bid you to do so.

There's no other way through the waters than through Jesus. He said, I am the way. I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. There is no one else who can free you from Egypt and take you through the Red Sea. There's no one else with the power to save you from the impossible problem of sin and death. And every single person in this room feels it and needs it.

[36 : 16] Every day I'm reminded that I need this. And so I'm not standing thinking, I'm Moses. I'm just another Israelite who needs to see the power of God and trust in the sent one.

There's no one else who can do this. And if you do trust him, then go through the waters of baptism to be baptized into Christ, being buried with him in death and resurrection and new birth to live in newness of life. Hebrews 11 says this, by faith, the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land.

But the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same thing, were drowned. How is it different for them? Because without faith, you're not making it to the other side.

Without faith, you're not getting through the Red Sea. Without faith, the water's going to come crashing in on you very quickly. Without faith, you're never making it to the other side.

Without faith, the sea will swallow you up. Without faith, you cannot know God or see his goodness and love. Without faith, you will not follow the sun. And he is light and life. And without him is only darkness and death. And so for all of us, let us trust in Jesus for our final rescue and salvation.

[37 : 41] Let us trust in Jesus daily, finally, to rid us of all that enslaves us and brings us fear. And let us trust in this great power of Jesus to save us and bring us into his rest and his promise for his glory. Amen. Let me pray, and then we're going to sing a song together.

Our great God, we thank you for your word which has endured and remained. we thank you for your power which is displayed not in a corner or in darkness.

We thank you for your Son who was sent and raised up on a cross for all to see. Help us to trust in him now and give him glory as we sing. Amen.