

Moses and the Salvation of God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 April 2024

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 0 0] Bible as we continue to think this evening about Moses and the salvation of God that we see here. But let's begin with a warning that I've heard in a couple of different contexts this week, perhaps you've reflected on it, the danger of consuming the news. So since the 1990s, we've been living with a 24-hour news cycle. And psychologists have been sort of tracking and studying the impact that consuming the news can have on us as people. Two major findings, which I think are significant. One can tend to hijack our attention. So whether we find ourselves doom scrolling, whether we find ourselves instinctively checking our device every few minutes to see what might have changed, we can easily find ourselves distracted from the people and events that are happening right where we are, right in the room. So it can hijack our attention.

And secondly, they recognize it can heighten our anxiety. Too much time looking at bad news increases, the stress hormone that's released in our bodies. And we can find ourselves being utterly overwhelmed by bad news coming from every corner of our planet, so much of which, almost all of which, we cannot control. And so you find these warnings, you know, to avoid consuming the news, or we might find the news actually begin to consume us. Well, bearing that in mind, I want to think about Exodus 13 and 14 to say from a Christian point of view, one way to respond to that is to make sure that we are hearing God's good news. That what grabs our attention is the gospel, God's salvation through Jesus.

That we would allow that truth to bring peace and security into our hearts and lives in a world that can seem so often to be full of chaos. We sang Psalm 106 and we began reading from Psalm 77, remember Psalms, telling us to look back, to reflect, to remember for the sake of a life of faith and obedience. In the book of Deuteronomy, so Moses wrote the book of Exodus, he also wrote the book of Deuteronomy, 16 times the people of God are told to remember. Remember that you were slaves and God redeemed you, that's the dominant one. Remember the Lord your God, He is the one who will give you the ability to prosper in the promised land. Remember the Lord's victory on your behalf, so don't live in fear of your enemies. As the people of God, we always need to remember who our God is and what He has done on our behalf, because the dangers are real and they're always there to our faith. We see them in the story of the Israelites, where our faith can become weakened, where we can be conformed to the world, where our hearts and our minds can turn towards idols. So we're going to use Exodus 13 and 14 to hear news reports, to hear true facts, to strengthen our faith, to remind ourselves of these basic truths that we find here, that God is the God who guides His people, that God is sovereign and He gains glory for Himself, and that God saves His people by grace. So let's begin by thinking about the truth that God leads His people. This is there at the end of chapter 13 from verse 17 to 22.

Let me just briefly summarize. So last time we were here, we were in Exodus 5 and 6, and we heard the promise of God that by His mighty hand, by His power, and in response to His covenant loyalty, He's going to keep His promises, rescue will surely come. Chapters 7 to 12 are then full of God's mighty acts. We have this great conflict going on between God and Pharaoh and the false gods of Egypt, sometimes described as a God conflict. We have these plague events, these judgments where God shows His superiority. We also have God's grace on display in the Passover event, so the judgment that falls on Egypt, the people of Israel are spared so long as they obey God's Word, so long as the Passover lamb is killed and the blood is sprinkled. So that now Pharaoh eventually turns and the nation of Israel comes out. They enjoy their freedom. So that's where we find ourselves today. Moses is reporting for us on some of the early movements of the nation as they experience this newfound freedom.

So in these early days, what does Moses pass on to us? He tells us that God leads His people. He makes clear that they are a pilgrim people. Verses 17 and 18, we have that sense that they've been

taken out, but they're still on this journey, and it's a journey that God is directing. So it says He didn't lead them into Philistine land because that would most likely tend to war. So He took them on this longer route. God knows their faith is weak. They'd be prone to be discouraged. And so as an act of kindness, and as a means by which He'll show His glory, He takes them on a different route. They come out on this journey following God, ready for battle. And this pilgrim people remind us that we too, as the people of God, we're a pilgrim people, aren't we? We are journeying the life of faith as a journey, and we're called to walk by faith. And we are invited to walk by faith, understanding and growing in our appreciation that God looks after us. We are safe in our Father's hands. John chapter 10,

[6 : 52] Jesus reminds us that no one can snatch His people from His Father's hands. So we're a pilgrim people, just like them. And this pilgrim people, they were invited to remember God's promise. Takes us to that really, perhaps, surprising, strange incident of Joseph and his bones. Verse 19, Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the Israelites swear an oath. Takes us back to the end of Genesis. So as Joseph was dying in Egypt, he believed God's promise that in the fullness of God's time, His people would be released from Egypt and taken to the promised land. And so Joseph's dying wish is that his bones would travel to the promised land, expressing faith in God's promise.

So now, 400 and something years later, the rescue has come. And so the people of this generation, as they carry Joseph's bones out of the promised land, they have this visible reminder, God has kept that promise. It took a long time, but it was exactly the amount of time that God had for them. Now, as we journey in the life of faith, we too are invited to remember God's promise. We don't look to the bones of Joseph. He was a prince of Egypt, but he chose to identify with his people even as he died. We look to Jesus, the one who left the glory of heaven, the one who chose to identify with us, came to save us. We know as we look to Jesus that he keeps his promise, dying to rescue us, establishing the new covenant in his broken body and his shed blood. So as we journey through life, we remember God's promise. And as a pilgrim people, they also enjoyed God's presence. Verse 20 to 22. After leaving Succoth, they camped at Etham. By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud, by night in a pillar of fire, so they could travel by day or by night. The pillar was always there, always visible. The 24-hour news cycle in the Israelite camp, our God goes before us. He is with us.

In fact, the only time he doesn't go before them is when he goes behind them to shield them from their enemies. So God, as it were, literally draws near to them to direct their steps, reminding them and reminding us that freedom, because they're now enjoying freedom, freedom is to be free to enjoy life with God. And this remains the great reality for the church today. God is with us. He's with us by his Spirit. He's with us now as we worship. Jesus promised he wouldn't leave us as orphans. He would come to us. And Jesus is still leading us by his Word and through his Spirit. And so it's so important for us as Christians and as the church that we keep God's Word in front of us. But we have in the story of Moses and Israel and the Exodus good news that we need to hear and we need to keep hearing. That we're not left to our own devices as the people of God, but rather he leads his church.

[10 : 34] Jesus leads his church, coming to be present with us, coming to be strong when we are weak and when we are fearful. So that's the first thing we see, first thing we hear of this good news. The second thing is that God gains glory. That's there at the beginning of chapter 14. Now, I think this is a really interesting chapter. But picture for a moment. So we know from watching the TV news that there are war reporters who go into hostile territory, bringing reports back right there as the action is happening. Well, picture this evening an Egyptian war reporter. So he has followed Pharaoh and his armies to the sea. He has watched what's just happened. And now he returns back to the center of power in Egypt. He returns to the palace, bringing the news they dreaded and feared. Pharaoh and his army, they're defeated. They're gone.

Posing the question, what has happened? How has the most powerful empire on the planet been defeated at chasing former slaves? How has this happened? And the headline that we have is in verse 4. Here's how it happens. I will harden Pharaoh's heart and he will pursue them, but I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen. God's design, part of God's design in these events is that the Egyptians would come to know, I am the Lord, discovering the hard way.

God alone is glorious. God is the true king. God is in control. And the Egyptians, they've had a front row seat as this action has been playing out. How have they seen the glory of God on display? Well, they've discovered that he is the glorious king over creation. Think about verse 16 for a moment. Think about the way this is presented. Raise your hand. Raise your hand. Raise your hand. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.

What does that make you think of? If you know the beginning of the Bible, it will probably make you think of Genesis chapter 1 and day 3 when God the Creator divided the sea so that dry land could be formed.

The sovereign Creator King is doing another great work here, bringing, as it were, new creation so that His people can be set free. God is bringing life to His people in this event, showing Himself glorious over creation. Of course, He's been showing that all through the plague events. So, whether it's turning the Red Sea to blood or whether it's sending gnats or flies, showing that He is in charge, showing that the false gods of Egypt are powerless to resist. So, He's the glorious king over creation. They are also seeing that He is the glorious king over Pharaoh. Pharaoh who set Himself up as a son of the gods.

[14:45] In verse 3 and 4, God deliberately, we're told, sets the Israelites on a path so that Pharaoh will think the Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, and I'll harden Pharaoh's heart and He will pursue them.

The only real confusion, and we see this all through these chapters of the book of Exodus, is Pharaoh's confusion in thinking, in thinking He can resist God and His will and go unpunished. Exodus chapters, all the way from 4 to 15, has this repeated theme of Pharaoh's hard heart. And so, sometimes the emphasis falls on God hardening Pharaoh's heart. At other times, Pharaoh hardens his heart.

What happens is, no matter God's words, let my people go, no matter God's actions, putting His glory on display, Pharaoh resists, and he stubbornly says, no. And God is sovereign, and He hardens the heart of this evil king.

He's going to bring His judgment into the present. That Pharaoh's stubbornness and the delay in setting the people go free is actually going to allow more of God's glory to be seen, more of God's power to be shown, more differentiation between Egypt and Israel, because Israel doesn't experience the judgments of God.

[16:23] So, even Pharaoh's own officials at one point will say, Pharaoh, this is the finger of God at work. And then you get that lovely verse in chapter 12, verse 38, as the Exodus event takes place, says the Israelites journeyed. There were about 600,000 men on foot beside women and children.

Many other people went up with them. So, some of the Egyptians who are living there, seeing what God is doing, saying, I'm not following Pharaoh. He's clearly not in charge.

So, they become part of the people of God, and they join God's people. God is gaining glory over Pharaoh. He is the glorious king over judgment and salvation.

The message to Pharaoh has been clear from the beginning. Let my people go so that they might worship me. The message to Moses was clear.

Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt are going to be judged. Pharaoh has been wicked. He is the one who gave the order, the national order, to throw babies into the Nile.

[17:41] He is the king who has deliberately been enslaving God's people against God's will. And so, God says he will gain glory.

And he gains glory through judgment and salvation. It's an important theme through the Bible. The only way for God's people here to have peace is if their enemies stop pursuing them.

And that happens because God acts. How does God act here? Through this great miracle, he divides the Red Sea.

The people go through safely. But the water comes down. The waters of judgment cover the Egyptians. Again, going back to the book of Genesis.

The waters of judgment that covered the earth in Noah's day. Here are the waters of judgment coming over Pharaoh and his army.

[18:44] And the Egyptians themselves are in no doubt. In verse 25, God jammed the wheels of their chariots, so they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, Let's get away from the Israelites.

The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt. God is going before them. God goes behind them to protect them.

And God fights for them to give deliverance from their enemies. Israel are kept. Israel are saved. No longer forced to serve a cruel tyrant king, working them to death. Now they have freedom to serve the good and gracious Lord and King.

God gains glory. Of course, there are some difficulties that folks might have, that we might have with these scenes.

[19 : 43] Let's just think about them for a couple of minutes together. Does judgment, because judgment features throughout the Bible, does God's judgment make God unworthy of worship?

So some people have the idea that God is love and can only ever be love, and so any judgment would make them that would be unworthy of God. Is it unworthy of God to harden Pharaoh's heart in an act of judgment?

I think perhaps on one hand, it's really important to recognize our particular point of view. You know, as we read the Bible, we read in a particular culture, we read in a culture and context where we have freedom, where we have peace, where we are not an oppressed or persecuted people.

But it's really interesting, if you hear reports, you talk to believers from persecuted places. If we had the opportunity to speak to a Christian believer from North Korea, or from Eritrea, where they are suffering horror and imprisonment and labor camps, and the threat of death constantly because of their faith, you would hear time and time and time again, the justice of God presents real hope for us.

That in the end, evil will be done away with. That God's salvation will come. A God who didn't care about child killing, remember Pharaoh advocated national child killing, a God who didn't care about cruel slavery, a God who didn't deal with sin in the end, that would be a God who would be unworthy of our worship.

[21 : 36] He wouldn't be just. He wouldn't be righteous. But that's not the God of the Bible. We may wrestle with His timing.

Sometimes it's difficult because we read of God's judgment, judgment brought into the present, and that can be really striking to us, and it's intended to stand as a warning that we need to be ready to meet the reality of judgment day.

Sometimes we can struggle because we feel that there is so much injustice in the world, and we long for God to act now, to fix things now. But as the people of God, we can rest in the promise that in the end, the judge of all the earth will do right.

God's judgment doesn't make Him unworthy of worship. But perhaps there's another objection that someone might have. Does seeking His own glory make God unworthy of worship?

You know, for us, if we see someone who's all about their own glory, self-promoting, vain, it can seem like the height of arrogance. It can be really off-putting.

[22 : 49] Especially as we understand ourselves as people, we are not ultimately glorious. But we need to recognize that God exists in a whole different category to us.

He is the highest good. He is absolute perfection. So for God to seek anything less than His own glory would be for Him to suggest that there is someone or something that's better than Him.

And that's impossible. Rather, what God does is He puts His glory on display in salvation, that we might see His glory.

And especially for us in the New Testament age, we see the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus, His perfect character. We see the glory of God's victory over sin and evil at the cross of Jesus.

And we are invited, as the people of God, to find our highest joy in our glorious God. The Bible teaches us that we shouldn't settle for anything less.

[23 : 55] We shouldn't be too easily satisfied. Rather, we are to pursue our joy, understanding that true joy comes when we know and enjoy the God who is glorious.

It is good news that God gains glory. And it is good news, thirdly, that God saves His people. Let's, for a moment, act like investigative reporters as we consider these events.

You know, investigative reporters, they're not just interested in, here's the events that have happened, but they're also wanting to probe deeper and to say, well, why? Why did these events happen?

What's the significance of them? And when we do that, we discover the good news that God saves. He's pleased to save by grace. The first fact that we can discover, who is saved?

What kind of people are saved? Verse 10, we find the Israelites looking up. They've got the Red Sea behind them. They've got the Egyptians coming towards them, and they're terrified.

[25 : 06] Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? They're caught between a rock and a hard place. All they can see, the only two options that they can see, well, either there's slavery in Egypt, or there's death.

And so they say to Moses, why did you take us out? At least if we're slaves, we're still alive, we're not dead. One of the things that we see repeating in the story of Israel, and when we're honest, we see it in our own lives, is how slow they are to believe and to trust, how weak their faith is, how weak our faith is so often.

And so God will send a message to them. So in Deuteronomy 9, God will say, remember, I didn't save you because you were righteous.

I didn't save you because you were on a different moral, spiritual plane to everybody else. And we see that, don't we? We see that in this text. But the wonderful thing for us is that the more that Moses is led to highlight the spiritual messes and failures of the Israelites, the more we see the sovereign grace and mercy of our God on display.

And as his patience and his kindness and his faithfulness to his promises, as they are spotlighted, gives us hope.

[26 : 40] Because we're just like Israel, prone to wonder, prone to despair, but we rest in the salvation that God provides.

Because that's the second fact. The people who are saved were helpless and hopeless, except for God. Who saves them? Verse 13 and 14 of chapter 14.

Moses answered the people in their distress, 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. Israel, here's your job. Effectively, do nothing. Stand firm. Stand still.

Let God work. It's the Lord who will deliver. It's the Lord who fights. The call to faith is a call to faith in the God who saves.

[27 : 42] This call to faith that we have is to place our trust entirely in our God and Savior. So that just like the Israelites, we don't need to be overwhelmed by circumstances or fears when our faith is built on the solid rock of God and His promises, of Jesus and His salvation.

Third fact, how are they saved? There's a summary in verse 29 and 30.

Well, having been told in verse 28, the water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen. Not one of them survived. But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground with a wall of water on the right and on their left.

That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians. This wonderful picture of God creating these huge walls of water and God's people passing safely through those waters, those waters that brought death and judgment on God's enemies so that they can look back and they can recognize they've been set free from slavery.

They've been set free from Egypt. They can actually see their enemies dead on the other side of the shore. Now they're set free to enjoy a new life of freedom with God, with a new identity, no longer slaves.

[29 : 20] Now they're redeemed people of God. They pass through the waters. I think when the New Testament writers speak of baptism, at least sometimes they have this in mind.

Baptism can be a reminder to us of the Exodus event that God in His grace and kindness saves His people, taking us from sin and death, bringing us forgiveness, giving us freedom, giving us new life and a new identity as a child of God.

And then we can turn to the eyewitness response. How did it make you feel? What did you do next? As we hear from those who experience God's salvation, there is so much that we can learn.

Verse 31, 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.

So they can testify. We know, we can see. God has rescued us from our enemies. God has brought life in the place of death. He has revealed His mighty hand and saved us.

[30 : 47] And we can do the same as the people of God. And our response like theirs ought to be to fear God with that sense of being awestruck at how amazing He is.

That we would rejoice and tremble at the goodness and glory of God and His saving grace. And notice too, they trusted.

They trusted both God and Moses, Moses, the servant of God. For their journey of faith, God would lead them, Moses, His servant, would lead them and they were invited to follow.

Just like us. Invited to trust our God and Jesus, the servant who suffered to save us. The one set over us to lead us.

So as the people of God, we need to hear this good news. We need to be consumed by this good news of salvation.

[31 : 51] Because we understand our own hearts and our own lives that we can have our attention distracted. We can find ourselves anxious and we need to come back again and again to this good news of solid joy.

In this world of the 24-hour news cycle, we need to make sure that this good news is what we hear first and most often. That this would take our attention and steady our hearts.

Because we know in Jesus, God still saves by grace. He is the one who takes the initiative. He is the one who responds to our spiritual distress.

In Jesus, God does act mightily to save us. Everything is completed. Salvation is a gift to receive by faith. And in Jesus, we have one greater than Moses.

The righteous servant we are called to follow. The one who in love actually went under the waves of God's judgment for us.

[33 : 00] So that we might have new life. Just as he after death enjoyed resurrection life. And God calls us to a life of faith and a life of worship.

To fear him, to trust in him, to walk in his ways, to stand still in amazed wonder at God's kindness and to move forward with trust.

This is our God, the great I am. Let's pray to him together tonight. Father God, we thank you that throughout the Bible you remind us of your great and gracious salvation.

You remind us that you are a God faithful to your promises. You remind us that you are a God who is with your people, that you lead your people, and that you are active for our good and for our salvation.

And so we pray that as we are surrounded by so much bad news, so much can throw us off balance and make us anxious and distract us, Lord, we pray that you would keep pulling us back to the good news of Jesus, our Lord and Savior, that our hope, our life, our joy, would be built on him, we pray.

[34 : 26] In Jesus' name, Amen. We're going to close with a hymn that reminds us of the truth that our God will go before us.

So again, let's stand together to sing. —