

PM Exodus 13:17-14:31 "The Lord your God will fight for you: you need only to be still"

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[0 : 01] Our reading tonight is from the book of Exodus towards the end of chapter 13 at verse 17 through to the end of chapter 14.

This is one amazing narrative. Let us enjoy this as we read it together. Exodus 13 verse 17.

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near.

For God said, lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt. But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea.

And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him.

[1 : 03] For Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, God will surely visit you and you shall carry up my bones with you from here. And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham on the edge of the wilderness.

And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.

The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people. Then the Lord said to Moses, Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Peahiroth, between Migdal and the sea, in front of Baal-Zephon.

You shall encamp facing it by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, They are wandering in the land. The wilderness has shut them in.

And I will harden Pharaoh's heart. And he will pursue them. And I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host.

[2 : 23] And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord. And they did so. When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed towards the people.

And they said, What is this we have done that we have let Israel go from serving us? So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him.

And took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

And he pursued the people of Israel while the people of Israel were going out defiantly. The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea by Peheroth in front of Beelzefah.

When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly.

[3 : 39] And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt?

Is not this what we said to you in Egypt? Believe us alone that we may serve the Egyptians. For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.

And Moses said to the people, Fear not. Stand firm. And see the salvation of the Lord which he will work for you today.

For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you. And you have only to be silent.

The Lord said to Moses, Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. Lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea and dry ground.

[4 : 53] And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, so that they shall go in after them. And I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his hosts, his chariots and his horsemen.

And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen. Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel, moved and went behind them.

And the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel.

And there was the cloud and the darkness, and it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and made the sea dry land.

And the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

[6 : 11] The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and his horsemen. And in the morning watch, the Lord, in the pillar of fire and of cloud, looked down on the Egyptian forces, and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, clogging their chariot wheels, so that they drove heavily.

And the Egyptians said, let's flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians. Then the Lord said to Moses, stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.

So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course, when the morning appeared.

And as the Egyptians fled into it, the Lord threw the Egyptians into the midst of the water, of the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea.

Not one of them remained. But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand, and on their left.

[7 : 43] Thus the Lord saved Israel that day, from the hand of the Egyptians. And Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.

Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord, and in his servant Moses.

Amen. May God bless that reading of his word to us. Amen. Our text for tonight, for a wee while, is The Lord will fight for you.

You need only to be still. Exodus 14, 14. Now, we all have noticed in the press or on television, the high number of migrants, some as refugees, coming to the United Kingdom in recent years.

That figure was put at 745,000 people for 2022, in recently released figures. And any European country, Greece, Italy, Germany, France, could produce similar statistics.

[9 : 15] Now, refugees, or migrants, that there's a distinct difference, they need not necessarily have to change country to experience refugee or migrant status.

They can also be internally displaced within countries. Go back only four generations from me, and you will find Clan Mackay being displaced from Strathnaver in Sutherlandshire at the time of the Highland Clearances.

So, my recent ancestors knew what it was to be refugees in their own country.

The Lord Jesus himself, as a baby, was a refugee with Mary and Joseph in Egypt until he was relocated to Galilee when the political climate in Judea had changed after wicked King Herod's death and that enabled him safe passage back there to Nazareth.

But I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus has a special place in his heart for those folk who are refugees, migrants, foreigners, along with the poor, the destitute, the widows, and the orphans.

[10 : 47] Scripture tells us as much. But this evening's passage describes for us the beginning of the simultaneous migration or refugee movement of around two and a half million people.

these were the refugee children of Israel moving from one country to another. We know that's the number because we have a census described in these first five books of the Bible of the fighting men who came to just shy of 700,000.

And then we have to add the older men, the younger children, the women. And so a very fair estimate is that two and a half million people, half the population of Scotland were moving at the one time from one country to another.

So this is an unparalleled migration of refugees because they all travelled at once.

Not in handfuls here, a handful there, one boat here, one boat there, so to speak. This was all together. And it was unparalleled because what could have been a ten day journey to their destination took forty years.

[12 : 31] And it's unparalleled because this vast group of people did not lack food or water for those forty years despite traversing an inhospitable desert.

Though a generation, a rebellious generation, died out during that journey, there were as many refugees, migrants, arrived at the promised land as there were set out from Egypt forty years earlier.

And it's unparalleled because these clearly disadvantaged people, these slaves in Egypt, made this journey replete with so much of the gold and silver treasures of Egypt wished on them by their hitherto tyrant rulers.

This exodus, for such it was, was unparalleled in history. Now, I make no bones about having a heart for refugees myself.

my ancestors were refugees. The passage of scripture we've read is very precious to me for that reason. But I've got another reason to hold this passage dear in my heart, because a segment of this passage, indeed the text for tonight, is the very reason I am alive at all.

[14 : 06] I'd like to think through this passage together, and then I hope to share with you how this verse was, indeed is, my lifeline. Now, alliteration in the points of a sermon may sometimes be a reflection of the preacher's vanity.

Every talk has to have three headings, each beginning with the same letter of the alphabet, and I groaned a wee bit when I was studying tonight's word, and I found that the letter G linked many of the points to be made, I didn't set out to do it that way, but it was the way it unfolded.

First though, a mistake to be avoided is to think that this passage, wonderful passage, is primarily about an exodus of refugees and their adventures at the Red Sea and in the desert.

That is not correct. This passage is primarily about the glory of God. This God whose refugee people, his chosen people were making their exodus from Egypt.

This is all about the primacy of God, his amazing unsearchable plans, and his awesome glory manifested in the working of his right hand, his will, because this is an important, it's a vital segment of the redemption plan.

[15 : 36] If we read Matthew chapter 1 or Luke chapter 3, we have the genealogies of the Lord Jesus himself, and we can trace back to those descendants of Israel, or Jacob equals Israel, who were part of this exodus.

I look back to the highland clearances and I feel a passion about these things, and I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus looked back to his earthly forebears, and their history, with passion, with love, with possession, they were, after all, his chosen people, in both a Trinitarian and an earthly personal way.

History is just oozing out of this chapter. Indeed, in chapter 13 verse 19, we have it recorded that Joseph's earthly remains were taken out of Egypt in this exodus in accordance with an oath sworn to ancestors of the present refugees.

So, our first lesson is that the God of Exodus, our God, is a generational God, the God of history, his story.

So, a generational God, but he's also a guiding God. first of all, he chose to lead them, chapter 13 verse 17, not the quick road up the Mediterranean coast, even though it was the shortest, because the Philistines, whom they would have encountered going up this way, they would have been a formidable, aggressive fighting machine.

[17 : 23] And God saw that even though this people, verse 18, went up out of Egypt ready for battle, this people of his were still very vulnerable and militarily inexperienced, unlike nowadays, I may say.

And they would have turned tail and headed back for the pyramids if the alternative had been war with Philistia. But secondly, God guided them in a very practical, visible way by the pillar, the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.

These were one and the same pillar. And in a recognizable way, Almighty God was saying, this is the way, walk ye in it when you turn aside to the right or the left.

We might think of this as some sort of ancient equivalent of a divine satnav device, but it was much, much more than that. There was no problem trying to enter the destination for one thing.

This pillar never got its directions wrong. It never found itself in unmarked territory like some of our satnavs. And it never had to recalculate the best route.

[18 : 50] Verse 22 tells us, neither the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, left its place in front of the people.

Chapter 14, verse 22, except to work a miracle of protection on one occasion, as we have it in 14, 19 and 20, when the angel of God, who had been travelling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them.

And the pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. And throughout that fateful night, the cloud brought darkness to the Egyptian side and light to the Israel side.

So neither went near the other all night long. As Psalm 77 tells us, you are the God who performs miracles.

miracles. It's very interesting too, is it not, that the same supernatural, natural phenomenon affected different people entirely differently, with different outcomes.

[20 : 14] It was the same pillar, but the outcome for one side was utterly different from the other. One whose heart was not right with God, and one whose heart was right with God, even if only just.

So a generational God, a guiding God, but also a God of great gentleness and consideration. He had his people's interests at heart here. He knew their vulnerability.

He allowed for it. He chose to take them by a route that did not involve immediate large-scale conflict. Not that they understood that gentleness if we're to judge fairly by their moaning and whining.

The New Testament tells us about our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who also had and has a fellow feeling with our infirmities.

Elsewhere, we read that God will not permit us to be tempted more than we're capable of bearing, but will also provide a way out so that we can endure it. 1 Corinthians 10, 13.

[21 : 26] Have we not realized that our Father cares for his children as we care for ours? More than we could possibly imagine.

1 Peter 5 and 7, cast all your anxiety in him because he cares for you. How much does he care? Well, I think that Isaiah's description in chapter 40 of Isaiah verse 11 is so beautiful.

God cares this way. He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms and he carries them close to his heart.

He gently leads those that have young. A God of great, gentle consideration, in the quiet times and the times of unparalleled turbulence as we have here.

Now, it's always a mistake to understand gentleness as a sign of weakness. The New Testament makes it clear that gentleness is a virtue which comes from a position of supreme strength under perfect control.

[22 : 39] In Greek literature, the picture in the gentle word was of a fabulous stallion whose power was under control with the lightest of reins.

God's gentleness here is displayed from a place of awesome glory and power. So the next G is glory.

After gentleness comes glory. God is the definition of glory. Any glory that this world offers or displays is pathetic by comparison when we have even an inkling of the majesty and power and holiness and glory that is inherently his.

Who he is. What he is. And glory is what we must give him. It's only reasonable, don't you think? In this passage we see God's glory manifested in the outworking of his plans.

Chapter 14 verse 4. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord. I can't resist quoting again Psalm 113.

[23 : 58] Praise the Lord. Praise O servants of the Lord. Praise the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forevermore from the rising of the sun to its setting.

The name of the Lord is to be praised. The Lord is high above all nations and his glory above the heavens. Who is like the Lord our God who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?

Yes, that God. That glory. God is in super power rulers, super, beware.

God is in control. As we marvel at these attributes of the Almighty shown up in this passage, let's just pause to notice the godlessness of the Egyptians and the grumbling of the Israelites.

Military might was the Egyptian boast. How often we see that kind of boast nowadays. It was counted in their equivalent of tanks and missiles.

[25 : 24] Verse 7, 600 of the best chariots along with all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. Troops 2, verse 9, they had consistently disobeyed God's commands until the death of all the firstborn in Egypt, those not protected by the blood of the Passover lamb.

Till that death set off a wailing and a grief unheard of in Egypt's history, prompting them to usher out the Israelites out the door, giving them all the gold and silver they could carry, going out.

But even that one act of obedience, they now wanted to reverse as they careered headlong after the Israelites. And the Israelites, bewildered, belligerent to Moses and to God, they started grumbling and went on with little remission till, well, really, till the present time.

Though we have the detailed documentation of it for the next 40 years in the wilderness. But these were God's chosen people, his special possession, the children of the promise to Abraham.

God loved them and he covenanted that love to them if they obeyed him, if, if only. And we must set against all this, the generosity of the grace of God.

[26 : 56] Amazing grace, abundant grace, grace poured out time and time and time again on this truculent, grumbling, but gently guided generation of his people.

This helpless and hopeless people, utterly incapable of finding salvation for themselves or within themselves, and only finding refuge and strength and ever present help for their trouble in God alone.

And even that against their wishes it almost seems as we read this passage. And with irony, those Israelites shouted at Moses, weren't there enough graves in Egypt that you've brought us out into the desert to die?

Well, actually Egypt was famous for its graves, its pyramids, its funeral treasures, its mummies, its sarcophagi. But then there's a very solemn comment in verse 17 of chapter 14, that God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

The heat of affliction will harden and bake a heart that is not made up of the right stuff, just as it will soften and melt a heart that is right with God.

[28 : 17] But remember what the Israelites did in the wilderness at Meribah as we read and sing in Psalm 95, they hardened their own hearts.

No one else did it for them. But isn't that the way with all of us? No, you know, not one of us can bring anything good to this table.

We can only bring our sin and rebellious hearts and utter inadequacy and then by God's grace and through the Lord Jesus Christ feast on his goodness and grace.

And in this exodus from Egypt we find also God's guardianship over Israel is fighting for them. Who engineered the movement of the two and a half million people so that they could pass through the water?

God did. On dry land that is, they pass through the water? God did. Who shone light on their path and darkness on the Egyptians?

[29 : 21] God did. Who opened up the sea? God did. Who closed the sea over their adversaries? God did. We have the entire refugee mass of two and a half million quivering and shaking in fear, understandable fear from the human perspective, utterly helpless, prostrate, head bowed before the enemy, waiting for execution.

Except God says 14, 13 and 14 through Moses' mouthpiece, 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. Now, we are dealing here with almighty God who keeps all his promises, the faithful one.

And that is precisely what happened. God fought. Chapter 15, verse 3. The Lord is a man of war.

The Lord is his name. He fought for his people. He engaged the enemy on behalf of his impotent people. He annihilated that enemy. How great is our God?

[30 : 46] Do we believe that? Do we believe in God's power, majesty, omnipotence, care, particular concern, and compassion for you and me?

Because if we don't, we should. And if we do, we should be on our knees in humble worship and adoration. All we have talked about here so far is but a foreshadowing of Calvary.

What number are being saved? Two and a half million? No, a number whom no man can number. A number made up of countless individual ones.

A generational saviour? Oh yes, every age and generation, even now. A guiding saviour? Oh yes, he's the word made flesh.

He's given his word to us, to guide us. Study it, treasure it, make it your joy and delight, sweeter than honey to your lips. A gentle saviour?

[32 : 01] Oh yes, meekness from a position of omnipotence. That kind of gentleness from the gentle and lowly saviour of Matthew 11, with that bespoke yoke fashioned for each one of us, where he shoulders the burden and we share in the grace and comfort.

A glorious saviour, John says, we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth. One commentator has talked of the fullness of God's glory poured out in Jesus Christ.

And as for being our guardian who fights for us, let's ponder anew the cross, the cross of Calvary where the battle was fought and won on our behalf by the peerless son of God, defeating sin, death and the devil by the yielding up of his own life to pay the price for our sins.

He rose victorious, triumphant, the champion, the victor, hallelujah. And do you know what we contributed to that victory? Nothing, nothing at all.

Our Lord fought and won for us we only needed to be still. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

[33 : 40] This is why unto us a child was born and unto us a son was given and the government shall be on his shoulder and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

As people around the world are even now and over the next 24 hours or so celebrating the coming of Messiah, let us of all people remember that he came as God's gift to you and me.

He came to die for us. He came to give us new life. And if you haven't accepted him yet, please, please do so now.

Now, God's word is always relevant to our needs. I said earlier that I wouldn't be here were it not for this verse, Exodus 14, 14, and that's utterly true.

As I finish, let me tell you a story. When war was declared in 1939, my late father volunteered to serve in the Royal Navy.

[34 : 50] The sea was in his blood, coming as he did from Easter Ross. Now, I know we all think our fathers were amazing, but he was very gifted, both as a footballer, a left winger, and he ran like the wind, and academically he was the Ducks of Tain Academy.

And when he left school, he had a choice. He had been offered signing, terms by Aberdeen FC, and he had a place at Glasgow University to study for an MA.

It was difficult to make a living as a footballer in those days, so he wisely opted for university, qualified MA, started teaching English, but then war broke out, and he volunteered for the Royal Navy.

1942 saw him as a gunner and a frigate. One of the many frigates trying to guard the merchant ships of the Arctic convoys, the Russian convoys, which were taking supplies of all sorts to effectively the famine area in northern Russia at Archangel and Murmansk.

And that was in exchange for gold, which was then being used to fund the war effort. These were convoys notorious for their high mortality rates as German U-boats had easy pickings in the Barents Sea and the Norwegian Sea.

[36 : 32] Now my dad was a committed Christian, and he made no bones about it. Whenever there was a call to action stations, because his billet was a short distance from the gun he manned, he would pray.

We might call it an arrow prayer, a bit like one of Nehemiah's. And he would grab a verse from his Bible to hold on to, and he would take up his station always in time.

On the day I'm going to describe, it was a disastrous day for the Navy. It was pretty well flat calm, but a U-boat had sighted the convoy and was picking off ships by torpedo at will.

Several had already been hit and were sinking. But when the action stations were sounded, my dad opened his Bible, and the verse his eye lit on was Exodus 14, 14, the Lord will fight for you.

You need only to be still. So as he took up his station, though there was destruction and mayhem in every direction, boats sinking, plumes of smoke in the air, explosions, dad said to the men around him, it's all right lads, we'll be fine.

[38 : 00] Our boat is safe. Nobody will be harmed. God will fight for us. Well, mutterings were the response from the terrified crew.

And then a few hundred yards away, a German torpedo surfaced and was heading straight for the midships on my dad's frigate. And the crew started howling and wailing, we're going to die, we're done for, where's your God now Mackay, where's your God, where is he now?

And my dad just shouted, nobody will be harmed, nobody. Well, the torpedo was skimming towards the frigate and then when it was less than a hundred yards away, there was a gentle swell which tipped the frigate one way, caught the fins of the torpedo another way and the torpedo went underneath the boat and and there was no strike.

Nobody was hurt, no shot was fired. Even though a number of the surrounding ships were lost, there were no injuries here.

The men then hailed my dad as some sort of hero, cheering him and applauding him, even as he tried to point out that this was just God's word.

[39 : 36] And so that day my dad caused a great problem for the Royal Navy because they felt he should be recognized and rewarded with some sort of medal for bravery because the Royal Navy had no mechanism in place for rewarding almighty God.

Well, that miracle for such it was in response to faith in God's word is the reason that I'm here.

Because I didn't come along for a number of years after that. have you ever seen God's word and his promises come alive in your own lives?

I certainly have in mine. This doesn't mean that in our present bodies we're immortal or that awful things may not happen to God's people.

Most often then though, it is when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death that we fear no evil because of God's presence with us.

[40 : 58] His rod and his staff, they comfort us. Yet, in his providence, God can and does perform miracles as it aligns with his will.

He will perform those miracles. He did it in biblical times. He did it last century. He does it today in the fulfillment of his will, his plans and his purposes.

May he give us the eyes to see his good hand at work and ears to hear his quiet whisper.

To be still and to know in the very depths of our beings that he is God.

Amen. Let's pray together. Thank you.