

# God's Mighty Hand of Victory

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[ 0 : 00 ] Gracious Father, we thank you that we can meet as brothers and sisters around your word. As we listen, I pray that you may strengthen us to respond in faith and walk like Christ. Amen.

As a kid, I lived next to a church and I would often play ball on the grass next to the building. The wall of the building was really high, like five metres high from the grass and really long. And one time, as happens, the ball went up on the roof. And so I told my friend, don't worry, I got this. Down one end of the wall, there was a low bit of wall which you could climb onto with a boost. It was probably about maybe 1.8. This is the architect I had draw it for me because I couldn't find a photo. I was quite small at the time. I was about 11, normal-sized 11-year-old.

On the other side of the low bit, there was a paved courtyard. And on this side, there was grass. And so as you can see, joining the low bit of wall to the top, there was a brick slope.

[ 1 : 19 ] So that was about 45 degrees. And as you can see, the slope didn't go right up to the wall, up to the roof, which would be, you know, too easy. It hit the wall about 1.5 metres below the roof.

And so what you had to do was, so the wall was about a length of a brick wide, so not very wide. And so you had to get on the wall and walk along it.

And then at the angle bit, just holding onto the bricks, you sort of had to climb up the slope.

Slippery. Dangerous. But then when you get to that top bit, you can't simply stand up because there's nothing to hold onto.

Except grim death. And so with three metres of pavement down here and four metres of grass down here, you've got to just feel the slits in the brick praying.

And then you can get the flat surface of the roof to stand up. And then from here, it's still about this high. You have to jump a little bit to get yourself up on the roof.

[ 2 : 26 ] And I did it. I was very happy. It was difficult and dangerous and scary. It was the first time I'd done it. I made it up and I got the ball down.

It was tough work climbing up the roof just then. But you see, my plan to rescue the ball wasn't done, was it? The ball was down, but I wasn't.

And gravity can be a friend at times, can't it? And sometimes not. The difficulty of climbing down was not being able to see where I was putting my feet. And so while hanging over the edge from my hip, the distance from the roof to the brick slope was longer than my leg.

To get back down alive, I'd have to, while holding on, jump a little bit and land on that brick slope.

As I moved just past hanging on my rib cage, I started to panic.

I didn't like this plan. I can't just drop. I could break my leg or worse. And so there I am hanging on the roof.

[ 3 : 35 ] Unable or at least unwilling to go any further. Unwilling to trust myself that I could make it. Unwilling to trust my friend who says, it's right there, just put your foot down.

And because of that jump at the start, unable to get back up. In recent weeks, we've seen the amazing power of God, haven't we?

In fighting for his people through the decimation of Egypt. We've seen the goodness and faithfulness of God in protecting his people. The blood of the lamb, the Passover, Pharaoh finally giving up.

In this passage, God finally leads his people out of Egypt. And we'll see again God's great power and goodness and faithfulness and glory in the destruction of his enemies and the salvation of his people.

The passage begins with God leading his people out of Egypt. Have a look. Verse 17. When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on a road through Philistine country, though that was shorter.

[ 4 : 42 ] For God said if they faced war, they might change their minds and return. So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. And the Israelites went ready for battle.

Finally, they're out. And not only are they out, but God is taking them on a special road so they don't accidentally run into a fight. And you read this and there's a sigh of relief, isn't there?

Israel gets to breathe the air of freedom. Egypt is finally behind us and God is leading us a special way so we don't have to have a fight.

Good old God. He knows what he's doing. Can you imagine they'd be pumped? They leave Egypt and they're ready for battle because, well, you never know what might happen. And the rest of chapter 3 seems to affirm this positive plan, doesn't it?

They take Joseph's bones with them. Joseph who'd promised that this was going to happen. And God literally goes with them. Did you notice that? Verse 21.

[ 5 : 45 ] By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light so they could travel by day or by night. And neither the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

How happy they must have been. How sure they must be of God working for them, saving them, protecting them. We see you, God. We see your plan to save us.

We know you are with us. What a great plan this is, God. But it's common, isn't it, that God is doing more than we can see.

In chapter 14, verse 1, the Lord said to Moses, tell the Israelites to turn back. Verse 3, Pharaoh will think the Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert, and I will harden Pharaoh's heart and he will pursue them.

There is more going on than Israel can see. It reminds me of this play that I was watching recently. There's a picture up on the slide. There are these two characters.

[ 6 : 53 ] You can see them a little bit, but that's the point. Character A on the left, character B on the right. Character A had evil intent that he was hiding from the guy on the right.

He told character B, oh, look after the treasure chest and it will be safe. But then the stage goes dark. You see the sinister red light shines down on his head and you hear the inside of his mind. As soon as he leaves, all the treasure will be mine. That's how it goes. Thanks, Andrew. Israel see freedom.

But God says to Moses, I'm bringing Pharaoh back to pursue them. You see verse 4? I will harden Pharaoh's heart and he will pursue them. I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.

It seems like God isn't planning freedom for Israel, but only for himself. God plans for God. God plans, it says, to gain glory.

[ 7 : 57 ] Will this be good for Israel? Will this help save them? It's hard to say for sure, but Egypt hasn't been that good for Israel in the past.

I wonder how you feel about this. God plans in order to gain glory. He plans for himself. You might feel odd about this and you're probably not alone.

It does sound odd, doesn't it? God is kind. We know he's good and loving. But is that what we see here? Is God being selfish?

Is God seeking his own ends? Well, before we answer those questions, we need to see what happens next. The story turns to Pharaoh and we discover that he is concocting a plan of his own. Verse 5. When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, what have we done? We've let the Israelites go and have lost their services.

[ 9 : 06 ] So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. Pharaoh hears that Israel have gone and he wakes up to himself. How could we allow our servants to leave?

Who's going to make our bricks and do all those things that we don't want to do? How could we let this happen? And while some may be able to sympathize with Pharaoh's feelings about losing a valuable part of their economy, what I wonder is, how could Pharaoh's memory be so short?

How could he have forgotten that God brutally forced him to release Israel? How could he forget what it cost Egypt and even his own family?

Well, whatever it is in Pharaoh's memory, he thinks he's made the wrong choice. So he decides to pursue the Israelites to win his slaves back.

And it's hard to understand what's going on in Pharaoh's mind at this point. Why would he take on God again? What will be different this time? It kind of reminds me of a scene from the first Captain American film.

[10:16] I've got a picture. This scrawny Steve Rogers is being beaten to a bloody pulp. He's clearly overpowered and outmatched, but he keeps coming back for more, doesn't he?

Just give up, Steve. The difference here is that Pharaoh isn't the good guy being brave, fighting for truth and justice in the American way. Thanks, Andrew.

Pharaoh's being foolish. I sort of wonder why no one in his posse tried to stop him. And this shouldn't be too surprising, I think. Because if we look back over the Exodus saga in chapters 5 to 13, this is what Pharaoh is like.

Time and time again, God overpowered Pharaoh, and Pharaoh even admitted that he was overpowered and wanted to let Israel go, only to change his mind. And what's clear is that Pharaoh is just a fool, isn't he?

And in his foolishness, he stands opposed to God. He's hard-headed and hard-hearted, which is exactly what God said he would do.

[11:21] Now, as we see Pharaoh's behavior, some of you may hear this and begin to wonder, well, is Pharaoh really doing any different to God?

God is planning for glory. Pharaoh is planning for his nation, perhaps. How is God doing right and Pharaoh doing wrong? Before we answer that, we have to see what happens.

So what happens is, Pharaoh and his army charge out. Horses and chariots, horsemen, troops, pursue the Israelites to overtake them.

And Israel, they're on foot, women and children in tow, Pharaoh approaching, what will they do? Have a look, verse 10.

As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up. And there were the Egyptians marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us into the desert to die?

[12:26] What have you done by bringing us out of Egypt? Israel don't seem to make plans so much as to whimper and blame. Israel had tasted the free air.

They'd seen God's power and God's victory, hadn't they? They were almost free. But now, Pharaoh is approaching. And like with Pharaoh, I wonder how Israel's memory will go.

You want them, don't you, just to think back a few days and weeks, you want them to see Pharaoh coming and say, look at this clown coming for another serve. What a fool.

That's what they should say. They should remember God's power, shouldn't they? They should remember God's victory. They whom God has fought for. They should trust. They should know, shouldn't they?

That's not what happens. No, they blame Moses. Did you notice the sarcasm and accusation in their comment? They didn't say, how will God save us? They didn't say, what will happen?

[13:33] What will he do? But already having decided that Pharaoh will win, they say, was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us out here to die?

It's curtains for us. We're done for. How could Israel think like this? How could they not trust God? Well, it's because of fear, isn't it? But not fear of God, who's just broken Egypt in half.

Fear of horse. Fear of army. Fear of death. Now, I'm sure that death would be frightening when you're looking down the barrel. My nan was in hospital last year, and we all thought she would die, including her.

She is an old godly woman, a prayer warrior, a mature Christian, confident of her salvation. But she was looking death in the face.

[14:41] And I heard her say to a doctor, trembling, I'm not going to die, am I? Death would be scary.

And so I'm not saying that Israel are foolish to fear death. But they are foolish. Why? Because their fear is misplaced.

They should have trusted God. They should have trusted Moses. They should have known. They should have looked at Pharaoh, and he's probably very tough, and scary army, and laughed, like God does in Psalm 2.

I've got a slide. He looks at the kings of the earth, and laughs. Israel should have looked at Pharaoh, and his army, and mocked.

You've got nothing. But despite all that's happened, despite all they've seen, they don't trust God. [15:44] They fear people more than the one who made people. They fear death more than the one who has power over death. How foolish. Thanks, Andrew.

And so here's where Israel make their plan. We would rather go back to slavery. Instead of stand in faith. We would rather have stayed as slaves.

We will not stand. We will not trust. And Israel are no better than Pharaoh, are they? They forgot God's power, which was for them, and they forgot that slavery is so much worse.

Like Pharaoh, they're doing what they've always done. Back in chapter 4, Israel believed that God would save them, and worshipped. But as soon as things got hard, they forget and blame Moses for their trouble.

And here, as Pharaoh's army bears down upon them, with enemy and sea, barring their way to freedom, they give up. They forget God.

[16:48] They don't even consider His help. They can't see any good for them. Slavery will be better. It kind of reminds me of a kid hanging off a roof in a tight spot, not trusting my mind, which says only a little further, not trusting my friend, which says, who says it's just there.

No possible good could come from this. And in that moment of fear, I didn't care that the bricks were just below my feet. I wanted to be back on the roof, back in safety.

Didn't matter that the roof didn't solve my problem. At least I'd be safe. No chance of falling, or continuing to play the game, or going home, or having dinner. Israel didn't trust God, and they wanted to return to the safety of slavery.

They forgot what God can do, or perhaps just didn't think He could do it. In that moment of fear, they didn't trust God, and they were so wrong. And not just Israel, but Pharaoh too, forgot how much he'd suffered from opposing God, and he was so wrong.

But it's not all disappointment, is it? Right in the middle of the passage, there's Moses, the only one trusting God, not afraid, expecting God's deliverance.

[18:21] And so in the rest of the passage, we see the plan that matters. We've seen how God plans. Now we see God's plan. Despite the best laid plans of Pharaoh and Israel, only God's plan happens.

And what will He do? Or just as He's promised, as Moses says, He will deliver His people. Verse 15. Then the Lord said to Moses, Why are you crying out to me?

Tell the Israelites to move on. I love this command from God. Yeah, there's a sea in the way. What of it? I put it there. I can move it. He continues, Raise your staff and stretch your hand out over the sea to divide the water so the Israelites can go through on dry ground.

Perhaps this will finally be their freedom from Pharaoh. Then the Lord said to Moses, Verse 17. I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so they will go in after them.

And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army through his chariots and his horsemen. Israel were backed against the sea and their doom in the shape of Pharaoh and his army were quickly approaching.

[19:33] It would have been scary. However, had Israel trusted God or understood anything about who or what He is, they would have known that the sea is no barrier.

God tells Moses, Put your hand out over the sea to divide the water. This command makes me think of a time when God might want you to stand out in faith.

Do something in obedience. Demonstrate your faith. It might be something odd, something unexpected, even embarrassing, even if not that difficult.

Perhaps it's just a comment. I'm a Christian. Oh yeah, I go to church. Oh no, sorry, I've got Bible study.

Oh, I still trust that God is good, even when church leaders fail. Putting your hand out over the sea isn't hard, is it?

[20:37] But if no one expects it to open, which is probably everyone, then you're standing there like a fool with your arm out. The Israelites are thinking, Moses, we're about to get trounced by the Egyptians and you want to do way of watching.

Doing something in faith, even very little, can be very hard because of embarrassment or fear. And a lot of the time, no one is expecting anything to happen.

Maybe even you. Will it really matter if I say anything? What difference will it really make in this moment? They're not going to fall down and worship God.

Is it really worth it? Well, Moses doesn't hesitate. And this is according to Moses' attitude of faith in this passage.

Verse 21, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned to dry land. The waters were divided and Israel went through on dry ground with a wall of water on their right and their left.

[ 21 : 47 ] God leads his people to safety by opening a sea and allowing them to walk on dry ground. Can you imagine how foolish the Israelites felt at that time as they looked to these walls of water each side of them allowing them to escape from Pharaoh?

Just a moment ago we said slavery would be better and now we're walking down the middle of a sea. Walking the path to freedom.

But hold on. Didn't God's plan God didn't only plan to bring his people to safety but to get glory through Pharaoh and his army and they are still trailing behind.

And so in verse 23 we see God's judgment. The Egyptians pursued them and all Pharaoh's horses, chariots, horsemen followed them into the sea. Pharaoh hasn't given up the chase yet.

He's persistent if nothing else. Certainly not perceptive considering the walls of water he's going past. And I think this too is a challenge like Moses' faith isn't it?

[ 22 : 57 ] It's a challenge to those tempted to scoff at Moses or the faithful disciple. Look at that idiot. Don't they realise how foolish they look?

Don't they know that God won't do anything? Can't do anything? Doesn't exist. They too refuse to recognise the reality of the true God in creation in the word in Christ.

their foolish hearts are darkened and like Pharaoh they are without excuse. But like in this passage God is very aware.

God is watching. God is fighting. He isn't distant. He isn't weak and he isn't dead and judgement is coming. Look at verse 24.

During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. He jammed the wheels of their chariots so that they had difficulty driving and the Egyptians said let's get away from the Israelites the Lord is fighting against Egypt for them against Egypt.

[ 24 : 12 ] At long last Pharaoh or someone in his army comes to their senses God is fighting for them. It wasn't the blood it wasn't the frogs it wasn't the death of the firstborn it wasn't the sea being opened but finally after God looks down and he jams their wheels they realise God is fighting for them.

The Egyptians recognise what's going on that God is fighting for his people just as he planned but God's glory is not only in their recognition is it?

verse 26 Then the Lord said to Moses stretch out your hand over the sea so the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen. Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and at daybreak the sea went back to its place.

The Egyptians were fleeing toward it and the Lord swept them into the sea. The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea not one of them survived but the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground with a wall of water on their left and right.

Egypt opposed God and so as God saves his people he judges and destroys his enemy according to his plan.

[ 25 : 40 ] The Egyptians know that God is the Lord but it's not only the Egyptians who are late to the party is it but the Israelites too look at verse 30 that day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore and when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant God's plan succeeds God gains glory through the destruction of his enemies and the salvation of his people and so how do we respond to God working for his glory especially with such a deadly outcome what this passage teaches us is that God's glory is for our good God had a plan which like

Pharaoh and Israel appeared to be for himself three times he states in the passage you see it on the slide I will gain glory through Pharaoh and his army God is working for his glory and while it isn't clear during the passage what through Pharaoh means it is by the end isn't it I will destroy Pharaoh and they will know that I am the Lord when they picked a fight with me and they will die thanks

Andrew so what does this mean about God planning for his glory it means that God's glory is the judgment of his enemies but not as an out of control bully who's being selfish God brings judgment and destruction of Pharaoh and salvation and freedom to his people just as he promised so God's working for his glory is for the good of his people and also for the judgment of his enemies God's glory means God's glory means God's glory and so I think the important question is what do we do in light of God's plan for his glory well I think it should make us desire God's glory now I think it's easy to hear this as a Christian and be like yeah I want that God's glory you might think of Philippians chapter two there's a bit of it on the slide at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth I want that who wants that yeah sometimes it's scary isn't it to say do something small but there's a challenge in desiring God's glory isn't there because what might God gaining glory mean in your life or in the lives of your friends in this passage as we see God gain glory what do we see we see fear faithlessness arrogant opposition and even death so perhaps God gaining glory will mean a great deal of suffering for you perhaps embarrassment sticking out looking weird maybe fear being pursued being mocked maybe hardship not having what you desire maybe the pathway through which God will bring you for his glory will be quite painful it may mean stepping out in faith it may mean being noticed when you don't want to be it may mean sticking with a decision or with a commitment and you may feel that what you once had before you stepped out was better and want to go back

God's glory is for our salvation but it may not be what we want may not be what you like just think of the example of Jesus in John 18 Jesus has just finished praying in the chapter before up on the slide Father the hour has come glorify your son that your son may glorify you Jesus is praying for God to be glorified just like we might desire and God has planned for his glory in Jesus hasn't he God will save his people he will judge his enemies but does that mean smooth sailing for Jesus no it does not as soon as Jesus has finished praying soldiers come and arrest him and take him to be crucified in the same moment as we see God leading his people to freedom we see final and harsh judgment of the enemy

[ 30 : 58 ] I think this passage in John has a similar image to Israel at the sea the enemies are coming just like God had told Moses Jesus knew what was going to happen in verse 4 and here we see the contrast between Israel and Jesus the enemy had come the Egyptians the soldiers both with the threat of death which was definitely going to happen for Jesus both in a predicament by the plan of God for his glory but unlike Israel Jesus doesn't fight in fact he stops those who do remember Peter he doesn't complain he even helps his attackers I am the one you are looking for so and so they led Jesus away to his farcical trial and unjust execution unlike

Israel Jesus trusted God unlike Israel Jesus knew that God's glory was for his good even if it meant great hardship and pain and anguish and darkness like Egyptians dead on the shore at the same time we see God's judgment of his enemy not Jesus but sin and death and God's deliverance for his people through God's plan of the horrible death and resurrection of his son.

Our sin is judged in Jesus and our salvation is won through Jesus. God gains glory, which is for our good, for our salvation.

So what should we do? Well, even though our sin is dealt with and salvation is assured, we're still commanded to trust God in this sinful world.

And when we're looking down the barrel of suffering, hardship, perhaps social death, we should pray that God will be glorified because we know that his glory will be for our good, even if it's not what we want in the moment.

[ 33 : 34 ] And so we should also pray for strength. Pray for strength so that we can look in the eye of that thing which makes us tremble.

It may be people's opinions. It may be loneliness. It may be a mediocre or a less exciting life. It may be not being the center of attention. It may be sickness or even death. And when we're up against that wall with the enemy all around, be like Moses who trusted the deliverance of the Lord. Be like Jesus who desired God's glory even to death. Don't be like me hanging off a roof too afraid to drop.

Pray for strength to drop knowing that while you might break your arm or be ridiculed or be sad or perhaps even die.

[ 34 : 55 ] Your ultimate salvation is assured. Know that God is planning for his glory which is for our good.

Shall I pray this now? Now Heavenly Father we thank you that you have and are working for your glory.

We thank you Father that you have judged the enemy's sin. We thank you that you have won our salvation in Christ. And so Father we ask for strength to look into the face of our enemy and trust you without fear knowing that you are working for our good.

Amen.