

The Great Escape or RESCUE

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Date: 16 May 2021

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[0 : 00] I mean, I could be showing my age, but I wonder if anyone has seen or heard of this movie. Anyone? A few people.

It's got that really catchy theme song, which we can't actually play for those online, sorry. But it's The Great Escape, which, as it says there, is based on a true story.

During 1944, during the Second World War, there was a great escape from one of the German prison camps. More than 200 captured soldiers dug three different tunnels from the camp under the fence out to the tree line at various places around the prison camp.

The three tunnels they named Tom, Dick and Harry. And on the 24th of March, 76 of these captured soldiers took advantage of a moonless night.

So it was darker. And they crawled through one of the tunnels and escaped with civilian clothes and forged papers, including one Australian pilot from Perth, actually.

[1 : 11] The event, of course, was made famous by that movie. Movie, the last surviving escapee died only in 2019, 2019. So on the next slide is a picture of a head popping out one of the tunnels, which it does kind of look comical if it were not based on a life and death situation.

Well, today we come to another story, which one Bible writer has called, one Bible scholar has called The Great Escape from another life and death situation.

The Israelites from Egypt. But as we'll see, it's not really an escape. It's more of a rescue, which is why I crossed out the word escape on the title and put rescue, because as we'll see, Israel does nothing and God does everything.

And he does this that he might be glorified as the true God and that Israel might have reverent fear and trust in him. So that's where we're heading.

But it begins with God caring for his people and keeping his promises. Have a look at the first paragraph of your readings there. When Pharaoh let the people go, he did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter.

[2 : 26] For God said, if they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt. So God led the people around by the desert road towards the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt ready for battle.

Now, last week, we saw the final plague upon Egypt because Pharaoh refused to let God's people go. The plague of the firstborn son, which finally did prompt, as we read here, Pharaoh letting God's people go.

By the way, God had said this is going to happen right from the beginning in chapter 4. God said to Moses, look, tell Pharaoh, this is what the Lord says. Israel is my firstborn son.

And I told you, let my son go so he may worship me. But you refuse to let him go. So I will kill your firstborn son. And that's what we saw, sadly, happen last week. This is why God sent that plague.

But now Pharaoh finally gets the message. Well, sort of. And he lets God's people go. But did you notice in verse 17 that God doesn't take the people the short way to the promised land?

[3 : 35] He takes them the long way. So on the next slide is a map. So Egypt is on your left there. And then you've got the Sinai Peninsula. Mount Sinai is right down the bottom of that kind of upside down triangle.

Canaan is top left. In fact, if we go to the next slide, we'll zoom in a bit. Canaan is in Israel, the promised land. And unfortunately, that's where there's fighting at the moment. The Gaza Strip and so on.

But the red line going eastward across the top near the sea, that's the shortest way to get to the promised land, isn't it? But it goes through the Philistine countries.

And so God doesn't lead them east. He leads them southeast towards the Red Sea. Why? Well, verse 17, because God knows their hearts aren't ready for war.

If they face the Philistines, they'll turn back to Egypt. But that actually doesn't make sense of the end of verse 18, does it? Because verse 18 ends with saying that they went up out of Egypt ready for battle.

[4 : 36] So are they ready or not? Well, the phrase ready for battle is a Hebrew expression that just could mean in an orderly fashion. Or it could be that they left Egypt with weapons in their hands, perhaps physically ready for battle.

Either way, God knows their hearts are not ready for battle. And we'll see this later on. And so God takes them the long way around.

He cares for them, you see, for their good. And God continues to care for them by remaining with them to guide them every step of the way. And look at verse 20 to 22, the third paragraph there. God goes ahead of them, guiding them.

And I love verse 22, how God never leaves his place. But guides them every step of the way. Is this not a great picture of God's care for his people?

[5 : 55] You see, sometimes in life it may feel like God is leading us the long way around. Now, why are we having to go through all this? And we wonder why he's putting us through it.

And while the Bible can give us several reasons for these things, one reason here is that God leads us for our good. He sees the bigger picture. He knows our hearts better than we do.

And he always leads for our good. What's more, he leads us and guides us every step of the way in that long journey round, wherever it might be.

And not by a pillar of cloud or fire, but by his spirit that works in our conscience and by his word, the Bible. Even when it doesn't feel like it, God really does care for us and lead us for our good.

But God not only cares for his people, also keeps his promises. Have a look at verse 19, the second paragraph we skipped. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the Israelites swear an oath.

[7 : 03] He had said, God will surely come to your aid and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place. This is a strange little verse, really.

We skipped it before and we didn't really miss a beat, did we? In fact, the story actually flows better without it. So why does the writer put it in?

Well, because these words in verse 19 signal to us that something significant is happening. It's like one year when I forgot Michelle's birthday, my wife Michelle's birthday. It was a Saturday morning. She woke up and smiled at me as though I was supposed to say something. And so I did. I said, what? And then one of my kids ran in and said, happy birthday, mom.

And their words signaled something significant was happening. But I'd forgotten again. Well, these words here signal something significant is happening, that God is keeping his promise of land.

[8 : 08] You see, that's how Genesis ends on the next slide with Joseph saying, I'm about to die, but God will surely, truly come to your aid and take you out of the land of Egypt to the land he promised.

And so when our writer quotes Joseph with those yellow words, he's signaling that's what's happening here. God is keeping his promise.

And again, this is encouraging for us because it can feel like God takes a long time to keep his promises, can't it? It was a long time for Israel and the Bible gives us good reason for that.

But either way, God does keep them. He is faithful. We can trust him. Well, this rescue begins with God who cares for his people and keeps his promises.

But at the heart of it is God who judges and saves. Point two, chapter 14, verse one and two. Have a look there. Then the Lord said to Moses, tell the Israelites to turn back and camp near Pi-Harioth between Migdal and the sea.

[9 : 19] They are to camp by the sea directly opposite Baal-Zephon. Now, we don't know exactly where these places are. The next slide is our best guess.

I haven't labeled all those names, but see where the red line ends. Most archaeologists and scholars, they think that these places are around this point at the top of the Red Sea.

But the question for us is, why does God tell them to turn back from Ethan, back to go down and get hemmed in by the Red Sea in the desert?

Well, verse three tells us. God continues. So the Israelites did this.

You see, God tells Israel to turn back to kind of provoke Pharaoh to change his mind, as he does in verse five.

[10:33] And once Pharaoh changes his mind, God will harden or literally he strengthen Pharaoh's heart, give him confidence to chase after Israel.

Now, to be clear, it's Pharaoh who changes his mind. He could have seen Israel wandering in the desert and thought, I'll let the desert kill them.

I've had enough trouble with this nation. I mean, 10 plagues, that's enough trouble, right? He could have just left them alone. What's more, God doesn't make Pharaoh do something that Pharaoh doesn't want to do.

He wants Israel to stay. He didn't want to let them go. He didn't want to let concede that God is God. Rather, God simply strengthens his heart after he changes his mind to do what he wanted to do all along.

Look at verse five and following. 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?

[11:35] We have let the Israelites go and lost free labor. So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. He took 600 of the best chariots along with all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them.

The Lord strengthened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites who were marching out boldly. The Egyptians or Pharaoh's horses and chariots, horsemen and troops pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea.

Pharaoh gets all his chariots and officers ready. He changes his mind, calls them all together. And then God strengthens his heart, gives him confidence to charge out.

And here is all the might of Egypt versus the might of God. This is the big showdown. How will Israel respond?

Whom will Israel fear more? God or Egypt? Well, verse 10. As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up and there were the Egyptians marching after them.

[12:45] They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. You see, Israel was not ready for battle, were they? God was right, do you remember?

And if they had been, if it had been any other nation, they would have hightailed it back to Egypt. But it's Egypt coming after them. And they're terrified. So much so, verse 11.

Now that's an extraordinary thing to say, isn't it?

Particularly when they've seen from God 10 plagues already. I mean, is that not enough to fear God more, to trust him more? But they don't.

They fear Egypt more and have no faith in God. And sadly, they'll do this again and again throughout the book. But before we're too harsh with them, we can sometimes respond the same way too, can't we?

[14:00] Especially in the face of overwhelming odds. Especially when we cannot see any way out. Whether it's a health situation, a job situation, a family situation.

You know, when our prayers aren't answered the way we would like. We can fear our situation rather than having faith in God. It's easy to do, isn't it? Sometimes it is easy to fear the situation and it's hard to trust God.

And so Moses encourages them in verse 13 and 14, top of the next page there. Moses answered the people, 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 be still. Did you notice this is all going to be God's work? The Lord will fight for you. Today you'll see the deliverance of the Lord.

[15:07] This is not the great escape. It's the great rescue. Israel contributes nothing. They don't dig any tunnels. They don't forge any papers. They don't fight any Egyptians.

All they're to do is to trust. To stand firm and be still in heart. Trust. Not so much stand firm and be still with their feet.

Because they're now told to move with their feet towards the sea. Have a look at verse 15. Second paragraph there. Then the Lord said to Moses, Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on.

Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the waters so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. I will strengthen the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them.

And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army through his chariots and his horsemen. The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.

[16:10] Now in verse 15, it seems Moses complains to God about Israel complaining to him about bringing them out in the desert to die, so to speak. But God says, stop complaining, move on.

For God is about to work through Moses to part the Red Sea for Israel. And he's about to strengthen the Egyptians' hearts to follow.

Yet before he does that, he actually, I think, gives the Egyptians one more chance. You see, in verse 19 and 20, the third paragraph there, there's this calm before the storm.

There's this pause before the judgment. The angel of the Lord in a pillar of cloud moves between Egypt and Israel. And for the whole night, Egypt has darkness while Israel has light.

And neither side goes near the other. But why this pause? Why not just part the Red Sea now and move on through? Is it simply because God needs time for the east wind to drive back the sea?

[17:19] In verse 21, he certainly uses all night to drive back the sea with the wind. But he's God. If God can create the world in six days, then he can part back the sea in six minutes.

Or was it then that Israel needed a bit more of the morning light so they could see where they were going through the sea? Well, no, they had the pillar of fire to guide them even at night.

So that's not the reason either. Rather, I wonder if it's God giving Egypt one last warning to go home before he strengthens their hearts to chase Israel into the sea to their doom.

You see, what was the plague before that terrible judgment of the firstborn son? Can anyone remember the plague just before the firstborn son one?

I've got some chocolates which I left in my bag. But it's true. Darkness. I can't remember who said it. See me afterwards. I don't want everyone to see me.

[18:20] I only got three chocolates in my bag. Darkness. Yeah. Egypt had darkness. Israel had light. And then we had the terrible judgment of the firstborn son. It kind of reminds you of the crucifixion.

You remember what happened for three hours before Jesus died and suffered the terrible judgment of our sin? The whole land was in darkness. Yeah. And here is darkness again while Israel has light.

It's as though God is saying a terrible judgment is about to follow again. Don't you remember what happened last time? Egypt. This is your last chance. So verse 21.

Moses raises his staff and the wind blows. Though we're told it's the Lord who drives back the sea. It's his work again. And in verse 22. Israel crosses on dry land with a wall of water on either side. Kind of like the picture in the title slide there. And the Egyptians. I'll pick it up. Verse 23. The third last paragraph. The Egyptians pursued them.

[19:21] And all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. During the last watch of the night. That is just before the crack of dawn. 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 for them against Egypt.

After 10 plagues, you'd think they'd work that out already. But verse 26. It's a great rescue for Israel. But it's a terrible judgment for Egypt, isn't it? I mean, God entices Pharaoh to change his mind. And after he changes his mind, God strengthens his heart.

And then here he makes the chariots difficult to drive. Confuses them so much so that they actually flee into the sea rather than to the shore. Did you notice? And all who chased after Israel.

[21:02] All who did not heed the warning of darkness were drowned. Their bodies washed up on the shore. It's pretty full on, isn't it? And our natural reaction is to ask, why is God's judgment so extreme?

Why does he hammer them so hard? Three quick reasons. First, it's what they actually deserved. As we saw, this is the nation who had abused God's son, Israel, for years.

This is the nation who refused to let God's people go. This is the nation who opposed God and drowned the Israelite infants in the Nile. And so now God justly drowns their army in the sea.

God hammers them because they deserve it. It's just judgment, actually. But second, he does it to save Israel fully. That's what verse 30 seems to say.

Did you notice that? That day, verse 30, the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians. You see, it's not until this moment, when there is no more chance for these Egyptians to change their minds again, that Israel is fully and finally saved.

[22 : 19] And so like last week, we see that their salvation comes through judgment, doesn't it? Just judgment for the Egyptians, which graciously saves Israel.

But third, the main reason the passage gives us is that so that God is glorified as people come to know that he is the true God.

And we saw this on the next slide three times. God say, I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh. How? Well, they will come to know that all the Egyptians back home who are still alive will come to know that God is the true God.

They'll be forced to confess it. And by doing so, God is glorified. You see, God judges here to gain glory for himself. But isn't that a bit selfish?

I mean, imagine I decided to change the name of Holy Trinity to St. Andrew's. And down on the welcome side, I put a photo, a big photo of my face with a big cheesy grin. And underneath, I said, welcome to St. Andrew's.

[23 : 26] You're in the right place because I'm here. I can't even stand thinking about it. No one likes a glory hog, do they?

Particularly in Australia, we cut them down. But here is God judging Egypt because they deserve it, yes.

To save Israel, yes. But to gain glory for himself. I mean, who does he think he is? God or something? That's the point, isn't it?

He is. And so he does deserve glory. And he has every right to gain it for himself, to defend his name amongst those who oppose him, that they might know he is the true God.

And that Israel might rightly not fear Egypt, but reverently fear God. Verse 31. 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 his servant Moses.

[24 : 39] You see, what God had done to rescue them changed them, didn't it? Before Israel feared Egypt, but now they feared the Lord, trusting in him and Moses, his servant.

And we'll see another response next week. But this week, that's to be our response too. For we have been rescued in an even greater way, haven't we? We heard this in our second reading. We've been rescued from a greater danger. So on the next slide, God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness. That is being slaves to sin that leads to judgment in hell.

I mean, that's a greater danger, isn't it? And he's rescued us through a greater person, not just a servant like Moses, but his son, Jesus.

But like Israel, we too contribute nothing to it. And like Israel, we are saved through judgment. For at the cross, Jesus is drowned in judgment.

[25 : 42] Not for his sin, like Pharaoh was, but for yours and mine. And as Jesus willingly bore hell in our place, he not only brought us salvation, but he also brought God glory.

On the next slide, Jesus is praying. He says, Father, the hour has come. The hour refers to the time of his crucifixion. And notice what he says, glorify your son, that your son may glorify you.

Because in his death, Christ brings forgiveness that we might have eternal life. And what is this eternal life? Well, it's that we might know, go back, sorry, not yet.

That we might know the only true God, you see. Just like the Egyptians were to know the true God, even in a forced way. You see, the cross brings us salvation.

It brings God glory. Because it enables us to know God as the true God. And seeing what God has done to rescue us, the judgment we deserve, but that Christ took, it ought to lead us to fear God as God.

[26 : 54] To put our trust in him and Jesus, his son. And so have you done that? Have you, like Israel, come to realize yet that no other God has done anything like this for you?

And so fear him more than fearing what your relatives might think of you if you become a Christian. Put your trust in him and his son Christ.

Have you done that yet? And for us who have, then we're to continue to fear God as God. Which means continuing to trust in him and his son, even when he leads us the long way round in life as

we saw before.

Even if we have to wait for his promises like we saw before. But fearing God also means standing in awe of his greatness. Earlier this year on the next slide, there was a BBC article which read, Boris Johnson in awe of pandemic parents.

He was referring to the homeschooling that the parents did during their lockdown in the UK. What is with his hair? I don't understand. Anyway, on the next slide, then there's Barty, Australia's world number one.

[28 : 08] And this just last Friday was Barty in awe of this young gun, Coco Gough, who's coming up in the ranks. Now, both Boris and Barty are in awe of people who do these great things.

Yet how much more so ought we be in awe of God who's done this greatest thing at the cross? When we did nothing to earn it.

But the fear of God also means we won't treat God flippantly, but seriously, reverently. And I wonder if this is something that we younger generations, I say we, can I say we, we younger generations have lost.

Yes, God is our loving father. He loves us deeply. We can come to him anytime, anywhere in prayer. But he's still God. And I wonder if we reverently feared God a little more.

We'd, you know, for example, take his name in vain a little less. Younger Christians today find it all too easy to take God's name in vain because it's everywhere.

[29 : 16] Isn't it? You know, people often say God this, God that. Oh, my God. It's an acronym now, isn't it? OMG. But to treat the God who rescued us from the terrible judgment we deserve as an acronym, as a swear word.

It's not really reverent fear, is it? Or if we reverently feared God a little more, we'd forget him a little less during the week. I must confess that when I was on leave, I found it all too easy to go a day without sending up a prayer, without reading a bit of the Bible, or even without thinking of God. Until late at night when I was drifting off to sleep, I realized and said, sorry. But how flippant is that to forget the God who rescued us from this terrible judgment we deserve until we come to church on Sunday?

Or if we reverently feared God a little more, we'd fear our overwhelming situations a little less. After all, he is much mightier than whatever we face, isn't he?

To paraphrase one writer on the next slide, we're to replace what we fear with the fear of the Lord that stands in awe of his bigness.

[30 : 34] For when we do, our fears begin to shrink by comparison. See what they're saying? 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.

When we see the mighty hand of the Lord displayed at the cross of Christ, we are to reverently fear God and continue to put our trust in him and Jesus, his son.

Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we thank you for this great rescue, which points us to the even greater rescue in Christ.

We thank you that at the cross, he was drowned in the judgment our sins deserve, that we might be saved and you might be glorified. Help us, we pray in our weeks ahead to reverently fear you as God and to continue to trust in you and your son, Jesus.

We ask it in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[31 : 52] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.