

'Delivered from every peril'

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Preacher: Mark Chew

[0:00] The picture is on the slide. Still my introduction. But I wonder who's familiar with this children's book?! Everyone. Okay.

You can borrow it from the library, but you can borrow if you're interested.! But we'll do one better. Let's play the video. Celebrating 25 years.

Hi, my name's Michael Rosen, and I help make a book called We're Going on a Bear Hunt. And it goes something like this. Chum, chum, chum, chum, chum, chum, chum, chum, chum, chum. We're going on a bear hunt. We're going to catch a big one. What a beautiful day. We're not scared. Uh-oh. Grass.

Long, wavy grass. We can't go over it. We can't go under it. Oh, no. We've got to go through it. Swishy, swashy, swishy, swashy, swishy, swashy.

[0:59] Chum, chum, chum, chum, chum. Chum, chum, chum, chum. We're going on a bear hunt. We're going to catch a big one. What a beautiful day.

We're not scared. Uh-oh. A river. A deep, cold river. We can't go over it. We can't go under it. Oh, no. We've got to go through it. Dive in. Splash, splash, splash, splash, splash, splash. Chum, chum, chum, chum.

Chum, chum, chum, chum. We're going on a bear hunt. We're going to catch a big one. What a beautiful day. We're not scared.

Uh-oh. Mud. Thick, oozy mud. We can't go over it. We can't go under it. Oh, no.

[1:58] We've got to go through it. Squelch, squurch. Squelch, squurch.

We're going on a bear hunt. We're going to catch a big one. What a beautiful day.

We're not scared. Uh-oh. A forest. A big, dark forest. We can't go over it.

We can't go under it. Oh, no. We've got to go through it. Stumble, trip. Stumble, trip. Stumble, trip. Chum, chum, chum, chum. Chum, chum, chum, chum. We're going on a bear hunt. We're going to catch a big one. What a beautiful day.

[2:57] We're not scared. Uh-oh. A snowstorm. A swirling, whirling snowstorm. We can't go over it.

We can't go under it. Oh, no. We've got to go through it. Ooh, ooh. Ooh, ooh.

Ooh, ooh. Ooh, ooh, ooh. Chum, chum, chum, chum. Chum, chum, chum. Chum, chum, chum.

We're going on a bear hunt. We're going to catch a big one.

What a beautiful day. We're not scared. Uh-oh. A cave. A narrow, gloomy cave.

We can't go over it. We can't go under it. Oh, no. We've got to go through it. Tip-toe.

[3:54] Tip-toe. Tip-toe. Tip-toe. What's that? One shiny wet nose. Two big furry ears.

Two big goggly eyes. It's a bear. Quick. Back to the cave. Tip-toe. Tip-toe. Tip-toe. Back through the snowstorm.

Ooh, ooh. Ooh, ooh. Ooh, ooh. Back through the forest. Stumble. Trip. Stumble. Trip. Stumble. Trip.

Back through the mud. Cap. Cap. Squash, squash, squash.

Back through the river. Dive in. Splosh, splash, splash, splash, splash, splash. Back through the grass. Swishy, swashy, swishy, swishy, swishy, swashy. Down the road, up to our front door.

Open the door, up the stairs. Dup, dup, dup, dup, dup, dup, dup. Oh, no. We forgot to shut the door.

Back downstairs. Dup, dup, dup, dup, dup. Shut that door. Boom. Back up the stairs. Dup, dup, dup, dup, dup.

[4:52] Along the passage. Into the bedroom. Into bed. Under the covers. We're not going on a bear hunt again. Okay.

End of play school. Now, you may be wondering why I've played that. We'll get to that in a while. You may also be wondering what the whole point of today's passage is.

Is it simply a travel diary with a lot of challenges along the way? A bit like the kids on a bear hunt. Or is there more? Well, I'm going to try and unpack it today.

Because I want to show that it is actually more than a travel diary. But I'm going to do things slightly differently. As in, it's a long passage. And I'm not going to work through it sequentially.

Instead, I'm going to pick out the themes that run through what are the three sections in this passage. So, we'll jump around a bit. As in, go back and forth.

[5:56] But hopefully, as I'm going through it, I'll refer to the verses. And then you wouldn't lose the way. But firstly, as I said, there are three sections to this passage. And on the slide, you'll see that verses 4 to 9, that's the incident with the bronze snake.

Then 10 to 20 is where you actually get the travel details of the route from the desert to the promised land or the edge of it. And then finally, in verses 21 and 35, the two battles.

One with Sihon, the king of Amorites. And the other one, Og, the king of Bashan. And if you look in your Bibles, those are the three headings as well. So, let's get to the first point where the first thing we see that is a theme throughout the passage is that there are dangers and demands to this journey.

And the first of those demands is that this journey actually demanded patience. So, let's go to verse 4 where we read that they traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea to go around Edom.

But the people grew impatient on the way. And we saw last week why they needed to go around, isn't it? Because Edom, that's the nation, denied Israel entry through their territory.

[7:12] And in particular, to go along the king's highway. So, if you could recall just from the map from last week, the route that Israel takes is that red route.

And we're now on sort of the eastern side near where Mount Hor is. And so, the shortest way, really, through that land would have been onto the king's highway and then up north into Moab.

And that was a well-worn road, as I said, used by many. But because Edom said no, what they had to do is go all the way south and then come back around. And so, that made the journey much longer.

But time-wise, this was also a much longer journey because they had been wandering for 40 years because of their rebellion against God. Now, had they not rebelled, they would have entered Canaan directly from the south, right?

Head straight up north without even needing to go near Edom. And as I said, this being the 40th year, most of the first generation would have died already. So, the impatient ones that we're talking about are actually the younger generation, the next generation.

[8:24] Those who are actually eager to enter the land. And they have been waiting, to be honest, all their lives or most of their lives, right? And through no fault of their own because it was their parents rather than they who rebelled against the Lord.

But while God was punishing the first generation and not allowing them to go in, with the second generation, God was actually trying to train them in patience instead.

You see, He didn't want the second generation to fall for the same mistakes that the first made. And that was the mistake of failing to trust in Him and His Word. Because when the first generation rebelled, what they essentially were doing was that they did not believe that God would deliver what He promised.

And that is the land and victory to the enemies. But being impatient is also an expression of a lack of faith, isn't it?

Because to trust God means to wait upon His Word to be fulfilled rather than to take action into your own hands. Ask yourself that question on the screen.

[9:38] Can an impatient person ever trust in God? And if you think about it, the answer is no, isn't it? Because an impatient person is always trying to do things instead of waiting on God.

And so whether by circumstance or by God's intent, and it's a combination of both, this journey required patience from Israel. That's the first demand. But second, because they now then have to go the long way around, the terrain that Israel travels through proves to be actually challenging and arduous.

And so we're going to skip forward now to the second section in verse 10. And this little section here is a bit of a geography lesson. But I want to show you as I read those verses again, and those places wouldn't mean much and it doesn't matter, I want you to see if you can pick up the type of

terrain that they're actually traveling through.

Okay? The Israelites moved on and camped at Oboth. Then they set out from Oboth and camped in Ai-Abrim, in the wilderness that faces Moab towards the sunrise. From there, they moved on and camped in the Zered Valley.

They set out from there and camped alongside the Anon, which is in the wilderness extending into Amorite territory. The Anon is the border of Moab between Moab and the Amorites.

[11:04] And that is why the Book of the Wars of the Lord says, Zahab in Sufa and the ravines, the Anon and the slopes of the ravines, that lead to the settlement of Ar and lie along the border of Moab.

Now, there's a break then in the itinerary, but if you jump then to verses 18 to 20, the journey continues. Then they went from the wilderness to Metinah, from Metinah to Nahaliel, from Nahaliel to Bamoth, and from Bamoth to the valley in Moab, where the top of Pisgah overlooks the wasteland.

So, I wonder whether you've picked up the clues here that, actually, what they're traveling across are not flatlands. Okay? They're not even rolling hills. But when you hear ravines and slopes, this is steep and difficult territory.

And, you know, when they get to Pisgah, which I think is a mountaintop, it overlooks a wasteland that is down below, meaning that they were actually high up, almost in a plateau.

And actually, if you bother to go to Google Maps, and you zoom in on the Dead Sea, you can see all that terrain, okay? It's actually quite clear. But here's the significance, because you look again at the map from earlier, and you see the red line that the route that the Israelites take.

[12:24] Well, they're actually going up north, past the east of the Dead Sea. And if you close up, and I've got another slide that closes in on that area. So now we are closing in on the Dead Sea down in the south, on the left-hand corner.

You see also the nations of Moab, the Amorites, which was written in the passage. And I've got two rivers along there as well. The Dead Sea is shaded in the yellow, and then I've marked out in the blue the approximate route of Israel into the land.

What I've also done is to mark out two river systems, right? The Zered, down in the south, and the Anon, that's just a berthet in the north. And those were the two that were mentioned in the passage. Now, both these rivers actually flow west along that valley system. Now, it looks like it goes east because it's like flowing down, but actually, the Dead Sea is the lowest point in all of the earth, right?

It's 400 meters below sea level, which means when the rivers flow, everything flows into the Dead Sea. And it's called the Dead Sea because nothing can flow back out, okay?

[13:34] Like most rivers run into the sea, while the Dead Sea, it ends there. So the only way that water can get out of that system is to evaporate. And when it evaporates, the water that remains just becomes more and more dense, isn't it?

The salt and the miracles. That's why if you go to the Dead Sea, some of you might have, you can actually just float in it without any floating or life jacket. But those two ravines then, and you know, when you talk about ravines, what it is is it's a river on which both sides are steep slopes.

That's what a ravine is, right? And so if you look at that, and then you look at the direction of Israel's travel, you will see that what they've done is not travel along a riverbed, along the valley.

What they've had to do is to travel across the river, okay? And the map on the right there actually shows the elevation. So those little patchy shaded areas, those are mountain areas.

And you can see that on both sides of the river, there's actually a mountain range. And so what they actually have to do is they have to cross these rivers by going north. And look, these rivers are probably not very wide because it's in the desert.

[14:57] It may even be dry. So the problem is that they're not traveling, the problem is not trying to cross the river like that bear hunt, you know, splash, plush, splash, okay? The problem is that they have to actually go down and then back up again every river that they cross.

Now, if you're going on a hiking expedition with a backpack and some sturdy boots, maybe that will be okay, right? But this is a whole nation, right?

Trying to get across this terrain with children, with livestock, okay? I don't know whether you've ever pushed a cart uphill, but that's hard, isn't it?

And so they have to put all their belongings and push it uphill, okay? And of course, being a dry terrain, they were always looking for water as well. And the other thing you know when you go on a hike, what's the most, what's the heaviest thing in your backpack?

It's the water, isn't it? So it's not like they're going to carry gallons and gallons of water and just go from, no, they actually have to be searching for water as they go along. And so, really, this was a challenging place to be going through all the way around and then after that, not only going up and down and up and down, they have to find water as well.

[16:12] No wonder they were so excited, as we read, when they did find a well, right? And they wrote a song about it. So that's the second danger or demand, but the third danger that awaits them, as we heard in the third section, are the enemies seeking to destroy them.

First, the king of Sion, or Sion, the king of the Amorites, verses 21 to 23. And here, again, like Edom, initially, all Israel wanted to do was have safe passage.

But, again, they were denied it. Actually, they asked to just go along the king's highway, same thing again. And incidentally, if you think about it, the king's highway is actually the easiest route, right? That's why it's the king's highway, right? That's the road that the king goes through. They're allowed to go through and it's always the easiest road. The king's highway was the way to be able to get and navigate through all those mountain ranges.

But, Sion, the king of the Amorites, said no. More than that, though, they came out, they marched out, they mustered an army and marched out into the wilderness against Israel.

[17:21] Now, the other king, then, is the king of Og of Bashan. King Og of Bashan. And Bashan lies further north, so if you look at that map again, it's almost right to the end of the north.

And again, they come down south to meet Israel at Idre, which is over there just below that, in order to destroy Israel or to muster an army to march out against it.

Now, all these locations probably don't need to be remembered, but I think what we need to take note is that actually there are many dangers to this whole journey.

difficult terrain, belligerent enemies, and then thirdly, the constant worry about having enough water. And so, there are dangers and demands to this journey.

But, juxtapult, folks, against this is another picture that's consistent. And that is, throughout all of it, God provides and protects them from every peril.

[18:26] Now, this is already true, as we've seen throughout numbers, but we see that all encapsulated here. But, of course, God has not just been doing it here and now, but across the entire 40 years and through every part of the journey.

Despite the dangers and the demands, God has always been there for them. So, what has God protected and provided for them? Well, firstly, I want to show you that there's the provision of water. And for that, I want to move to the second point of the outline. And you need to also note that in each section, God speaks to them once.

So, there are three times in this whole passage where God speaks to Moses to pass a message to them. And each time, it relates to either protecting them or providing for them.

And so, I want to deal with the second one first. I'll come back to the first a little later on. And that's in verse 16 where the Lord speaks to Moses about water. From there, they continue on to beer, the well where the Lord said to Moses, gather the people together and I will give them water.

[19:40] Now, we know what beer is in English. In Hebrew, beer means well. Alright? Still liquid, maybe not as good as beer, but it's good.

It's water. But they had to dig a well to find it. Okay? It's not a river. It's not, you know, just on the surface. And so, you know, unless you have the technology like geothermal imaging or something like that, you're not going to actually know where to dig the water, right?

So, this is something that God actually had to reveal to them. He says, come, gather here and dig a well here and I will give you water. And so significant was this, actually, that they actually, as I said, write a song about it to celebrate.

So, first, God provides them water. But second, God also protects them from their enemies, the ones that we spoke about earlier. So again, go to verse 34 where the Lord speaks to Moses again and He promised, do not be afraid of him, that's the bog of Bashan, for I have delivered him into your hands.

Along with his whole army and his land, do not do to him what you did to Sion, king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon. And so, in the one revelation, in the one verse, God deals with both Og

and Sion.

[20 : 57] One, he will deliver, one, Sion, that he has already delivered. And Sion, by the way, is no pushover as a king because if you read in verse 26, this was the same king that fought the former king of Moab and had actually conquered land from him as far as the Anon.

That is, he's conquered and taken land from Moab all the way up to the north of that river. Okay? So, God actually has protected Israel against their enemies throughout.

But the other thing that comes with that too is the provision, third point, or third sub-point in your outline, of land, more land. So, in verse 25, we read that Israel captured all the cities of the Amorites, that's a lot of cities, remember, all the way to the Anon, and occupied them including Heshbon, which is the capital, and all its surrounding settlements.

Then, verse 35, so they struck him down, that is Og, together with his sons, and you know, when you strike down your sons, you strike down all the successes as well, so no more kings, right? And his whole army, leaving them no survivors, and they took possession of his land. And so, God did not just give them their enemies, he gave them their land as well.

[22 : 20] And this land, we need to notice, is not land that God has promised up to now. This is not the capital P, capital R, promised land.

That promised land is only west of Jordan. All this land here is east of the Jordan. and so extensive actually is this territory that two and a half tribes, that of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh will end up settling here instead of in the so-called capital P, promised land.

So, this is like bonus land, if you like, extra, that God just gives to them because he's providing for them. So, all of these protections and provisions are great, but I want to come back to the one at the start because I think that is the one that is the most important of all.

Because on the first occasion where God speaks to Moses, God provides for the one danger that truly endangers them, and that is their own sinfulness.

Sin is the one thing that actually imperils their relationship with God, and therefore their source of provision and protection. So, let's go back to the start, and we've seen already their impatience, but now let's see their grumbling, okay?

[23 : 45] Because, as I said earlier, their impatience and their grumbling is a lack of trust in him. When we fail to trust God, we may not think like that, but what we're actually doing is to doubt God's character.

Because we're saying that either he's not powerful enough to deliver on what he's promised, or worse still, he lacks the will to do it, and therefore he's a liar, he's unfaithful.

That's what happens when we lack trust in God. And so, in verse 5, they showed their impatience by speaking against God and Moses and saying, why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?

There is no bread, there is no water, and we detest this miserable food. Now, water, again, that's not true, because throughout, whether it's from the rock or an oasis or whatever, God has always been providing them with water.

And as for the miserable food, what was that? That was the manna, wasn't it? That God provides six day of the week, for which they did not need to grow or to harvest or to bake or whatever in order to eat.

[25 : 03] Sure, it's probably not croissants from Laurence, okay, but it sustained them, it nourished them for 40 years, but they were complaining about it.

And so, the Lord judges them, and he sent venomous snakes among them, they bit the people, and many Israelites died. Now, what the Israelites then do and respond, I think is also another first, and that is, for the first time, they recognized their sinfulness.

More than that, they asked Moses to pray for them. And so, they said, we sinned when we spoke against the Lord against you, pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us.

Now, unlike the previous occasions, I think this is a true sign of repentance. And as Moses prayed, the Lord then provided for their deliverance from his judgment. And what the Lord said is, make a snake and put it on a pole.

Anyone who is bitten can look at it and live. Now, as I said before, God in his holiness must always deal with unrighteousness. If God does not deal with sin, then he is not holy himself.

[26 : 13] That's just not possible. But what God also does always is that he graciously provides a way out for us even when we've sinned, so that we can be forgiven and live.

And this is what he's done here for the people. But for the people here, faith must also follow repentance. That is, they need to actually not say they're wrong, but look up at the snake as well in order to be healed.

It wasn't good enough that the snake was there, you know, and as long as they're walking around that they would be healed. No, God said to Moses, you need to look at the snake if you want to live. And the result was as God promised. Moses made the bronze snake, put it on the pole, and when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

Now the way it's worded there as well suggests that actually, this is not just for this incident but for any other incident later on. Whenever they were bitten by a snake, whenever they looked at the bronze snake, that is the bronze snake remained in amongst them, they lived.

[27 : 28] And we actually find that there's a passage in 2 Kings where they actually still had the snake like hundreds of years later, and the king at the time actually had to destroy the snake because it had become an idol.

They looked to it like it was a charm, when really it wasn't the bronze snake that healed them, it was their faith, that of looking at the snake which God used or saw as evidence in order to heal them. But as I said, I think this is the most critical danger for them, which was their failure to trust the Lord. Yes, there were the other perils, but this is the one that was the most important, which God has provided for them.

And so, in a way, it's like the bear hunt, isn't it? I finally got to the point about the bear hunt. It wasn't the river, it wasn't the oozy mud, it wasn't the snowstorm.

Yes, those are scary, but they managed to go through that all right, didn't they? Rather, it was the bear with the wet, shiny nose and the googly eyes, right?

[28 : 40] That is the thing that the kids had to flee from in order to be saved. And friends, sin is that same danger that we all have to flee from if we want to be saved.

And God, in His kindness, has delivered us from it. All the other dangers then, after God has delivered us from this one danger, our sin, all the other dangers and perils in our life actually pale by comparison.

Because when we're in right relationship with God, we are in right relationship with the one who will be able to protect and to provide for everything that we need.

And that's why the people then responded with song, didn't they? They celebrated because they knew that here was a God who would always come to their aid, whatever the peril, whatever the demand in life.

Now, as for us, Jesus tells us how to interpret this bronze snake, isn't it? Because in the other passage in John 3 10-17, he compared himself to that snake.

[29 : 51] He said, just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man, that is me, Jesus, must be lifted up that everyone who believes may have eternal life.

And then John 3-16, which you all know, for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus himself says that the bronze snake is a foreshadowing of himself, that when he himself is lifted up like the snake, anyone who looked to him in faith will not perish but have eternal life.

Friends, we may not be bad people doing horrendous things like we see on the news, but like Israel, we too have failed, haven't we, to trust in the Lord.

And so we actually need forgiveness from that because what we've done actually when we've failed to trust him is to malign God's character. It's to say, God, you are not who you say you are.

[30 : 59] Everything that you've promised in the Bible, we don't accept it. But God in his kindness has given us even his son so that we can look to him and be healed and saved, can't we?

And then once we've done that, God wants us to continue to trust in him. That is not malign his character, but to believe every promise that he's given us.

And as we saw last week in Romans 8, God's promise amongst many is that every peril in this life, whether it's sickness or death, whether it's hardship or conflict, poverty or disease, nothing, he says, will separate us from his love if we remain in Christ Jesus.

You see, like Israel, we can get really hung up, can't we, with all the troubles that we have in our lives. Will we find a job?

Will we find a life partner? What if we fall sick? What if I can't afford to buy a home? What if I never make up with my parents?

[32 : 13] What if there's all these friendships that I'm going to lose? It's so easy to be focused on these things that we forget to look to Jesus and continue to trust God.

But Paul has already said in Romans 8, that if God has given us his son, then why would he not deliver us from every other trouble and peril in this life? There will always be difficulty in life.

If you're fortunate enough in your life, your long life, not to have faced any, let me disappoint you by saying there will be difficulties in your life to come.

And some of these things, you're not going to be able to get over it or get under it. You're going to have to go through it, right? But when we're in Christ Jesus, we can be assured that God will go through it with us, right?

He will protect, he will provide, because he's already provided his son to save us from our sins and given us eternal life. The only danger for us, really, is when we stop trusting him.

[33 : 26] So, if you've done that recently or up to now, not trust him in life, much as I would like to encourage and comfort you, I think you also need to repent and come humbly before the Lord and say, Lord, I have not believed in your promise.

But then, knowing his forgiveness, what we then need to do is start again by living this life, looking to him in faith. And then, like the people of Israel, you can write some songs if you want, write a poem, but if you can't, be thankful and joyful that God will deliver us.

He will lead us through every peril. Father, we thank you that your son was lifted up so that those who believe in him, those who look to him, will have eternal life.

help us not to be troubled by the dangers and perils of this life, but to know that as you've promised, you will always deliver us, protect us, provide for us, all the way to the end of our life.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.