

Let the Journey Begin

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

Date: 09 April 2011

Preacher: Rev Donnie G Macdonald

[0 : 00] Let's do it again in chapter 14 and in verse 13. Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you today.

To the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.

Moses was sent to Pharaoh with one simple demand, a demand that had come from God himself. Let my people go. Pharaoh was reluctant to let the people of God go.

And he did his utmost to keep them in bondage. But you know what happened. The Lord sent plague after plague after plague, bit by bit, breaking the resolve of this tyrannical ruler.

[1 : 28] And it climaxed to that most awful of events where there was the slaughter of the firstborn of Egypt on that evening of the Passover.

And it was then that Pharaoh was broken. And it was then that he agreed to let the people of God go.

And so they left. Egypt behind them. Canaan in front of them. And what an awesome sight it must have been.

Over two million people marching out of this land. filled with excitement and joy. Their oppression had come to an end.

And just as God had said to Pharaoh, let my people go. Now it's as if he is saying to the children of Israel, let the journey begin.

[2 : 32] But it was not to be as they expected. It was a little over a hundred miles to Canaan. But that journey had to do a lot more than just get them to Canaan.

This journey would involve the preparation of a nation. This journey would involve the defeating of many enemies. This journey was to be used to reveal much of God's glory.

It was a journey like no other. That night of the Passover was not the concluding chapter. It was just the opening verses. There was so much more that had yet to be written.

In the same way, we go to Calvary Hill. And there as we see the Passover lamb being slain.

We hear our God saying, let my people go. And the powers of darkness, they are defeated. And there begins a journey.

[3 : 50] A journey for the people of God. A journey for the Church of Christ. A journey that has much more to it than just getting the people of God into glory.

It's a journey that would shape the Church. A journey that would see the defeating of many enemies. A journey that would reveal much of the glory of God.

In the same way, when you and I come to faith, it's just the beginning. Over you and over me, God says to the powers of darkness, let him, let her go.

And we begin our Christian journey. And in that journey then, there is much that has to be done to us. To prepare us, to mould us.

During that journey, we will face many enemies that need to be defeated. Enemies within and enemies without. And during that journey, there will be much of the glory of God being revealed to us.

[5 : 10] The example of the Exodus for the children of Israel is an example that teaches us, I believe, much about the journey that we ourselves need to take as Christian men and women.

And it's at that that I want us to look at today. And I want us to, as we look at this passage together, to consider four things that are involved in this journey.

First of all, the following. Secondly, faith. Thirdly, fear. And then finally, the fantastic.

First of all then, we see that this journey involves following. God is always with, and God is always watching over his people.

It has always been the case that he has been with his people, never leaving, never forsaking them. But here we see how in a very real and tangible way, God comes among his people.

[6 : 31] They are at the start of their journey, and they become aware that there is this pillar of cloud there before them by day. And there is this pillar of fire that is there before them by night.

And this pillar of cloud, this pillar of fire, they are both symbols of the divine presence. And those clouds were there for, I believe, a number of reasons.

One was to give to the children of Israel a sense of assurance. Every time they looked at that cloud, every time that they saw that pillar of fire, they are being reminded that God is with them, that he is there in power, that he is there in love, and it gives to them a real sense of assurance.

The only kind of picture I can have in my head, perhaps to try and illustrate this, I can remember when one of his own children was very young, and when you were sitting there beside the child, he was very happy, very content.

The moment you moved out of the room, he would begin to cry. If you came back into the room, quiet and content. But even when you'd get up to move a wee bit, he would begin to cry.

[8 : 03] Just your presence there gave a sense of assurance and peace that everything was okay. Well, the cloud, the pillar of fire, gave that kind of sense of assurance to the children of Israel at the beginning of this journey, because the cloud was there, because the fire was there, God was there, and therefore they felt all was okay.

But the cloud, the pillar of fire, gave more than just assurance. It gave guidance. We're told that the pillar of cloud, the pillar of fire, went before them.

It was something that led them on the way. It was, if you like, that divine sat-nav that led them in the direction that they were meant to go.

But it did more than that too. It gave to them protection. We'll see more of this later, but you see how the pillars came between them and their enemies, protecting them from any danger or from any attack.

But for the children of Israel, as they began their journey to the land of promise, it was not to be for them a challenge in orienteering, but it was to be for them a lesson in following.

[9 : 30] Because all they had to do was to fix their eyes upon this visible presence of God. And they had to follow the pillar of cloud.

They had to follow the pillar of fire. And as long as they followed, then they would safely arrive in Canaan. The problems would arise when they ceased to follow and when they ceased to focus on the leading of God in this way.

God in a very real and tangible way comes amongst his people. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. And more than that, we have the Spirit, God within us. And it is in Jesus and in the Spirit of Jesus that we are given our sense of assurance.

Go to Romans 8, most beautiful passage. It is the presence of the Spirit within us whereby we cry, Abba, Father. His presence within the believer's heart is what gives to us that sense of stillness and assurance that we are the sons and the daughters of the living God.

[10 : 59] It is his presence with us that gives us guidance. You think of Christ in John chapter 14 and when he is speaking of the Spirit that he will give to his people, he speaks of the Spirit as being the teacher, the comforter, the guide, the one who will lead and direct us in the way that we should go.

We think of the presence even of the Spirit of Christ among us as giving us protection, protection from ourselves and from our own sinful hearts and protection from all the things that we have to confront in our Christian lives.

what does he ask us to do? He does not say find your own way to glory. He says simply follow me. Follow me. This was the call of Christ to his disciples as we see it in the Gospels. Come follow me. follow me. Do you know when we read about the would-be followers of Jesus in Luke chapter 9 and there are those who are saying we'll follow you wherever you go.

And remember what Jesus said. He said well you know no man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God. He says if you're going to be a follower of me you must keep your eyes focused on me.

[12 : 34] You must go straight ahead and not turn to the right or the left your job is simply to follow. You think of when he spoke of himself as the good shepherd.

He said my sheep know my voice and they follow me. We take the lead of the good shepherd. If you think of the time when Jesus is with his disciples and he is telling Peter even about the way in which he is going to die and Peter then starts thinking about the other disciples and he says of John what about him what's going to happen to him and you remember Jesus replied what is that to you follow thou me that is our job that is our purpose not to find our own way but simply to follow Jesus that's what the journey involves fixing our eyes upon Jesus the author and the perfecter of our faith it involves following which brings us on to the second thing it involves faith following the lead of God never mind doing the expected or the predictable indeed the journey of the children of Israel has been described God doing the impossible using the improbable in a way that was unpredictable and that is exactly what you see here God didn't lead his people in a way that always made sense he led them in a very strange direction look at chapter 13 and verse 17 it came to pass when Pharaoh had let the people go that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines although that was near but God led the people about through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt it made no sense there was a very direct route to Canaan but God does not lead his people that way he takes them round by the wilderness and this must have been confusing and they would have to have exercised faith just to go the way that the Lord was leading them and not the way that would have made sense to them he led them to strange places look at chapter 14 and verse 1 the Lord said to Moses speak to the children of Israel that they turn and encamp before the harrier between Migdal and the sea over against Baal Zephon before ye shall encamp by the sea he is taking them to a place that is effectively a cul-de-sac it's a dead end a place where they would be in most danger it made absolutely no sense this was a strange place to take them to and they would have to go there in obedience and exercise faith he would ask them to do strange things look at chapter 13 verse 19 Moses took the bones of Joseph with him for he had straightly sworn the children of Israel saying God will surely visit you and so on what an odd thing to do they're leaving the land of Egypt they're going to the promised land and they're being told that they have to take the remains of Joseph with them it didn't make sense they had to do all these things trusting simply putting their faith and being obedient in that faith they had to trust in the love the power and the promises of God and when you look at the past year you begin to see what God was doing why did he lead them in this strange direction well we're told it's because God said less can adventure that people repent when they see war and return to Egypt God was concerned for them that if they went through the land of the Philistines that they would immediately hit hard things and difficult things and that they would lose heart and that they would go back to Egypt so this strange direction that God was leading them was done with the motive of love and concern behind it why does he take them to this strange place this cool of danger a place where they would be vulnerable because there he would display his power to them there they would see an incredible deliverance like they would never have experienced otherwise there they would come to appreciate something of the mightiness of the almighty

[17 : 36] God and that's why he takes them there why do they do strange things why carry the bones of Joseph because God was going to show how he fulfilled his promises the promises that were made to Joseph were not forgotten and this Joseph who was buried there in Egypt would indeed himself be taken to the land of promise flowing with milk and honey all these things that made no sense when first they were being asked had behind them the love of God the power of God and the faithfulness of God during our own journey is it not often the case that sometimes we wonder about the direction that the Lord is leading us it sometimes makes no sense the twists and the turns that our lives sometimes can take but behind it is the love and the wisdom of

God sometimes we find ourselves in places that we would not want to be we find ourselves in places maybe in our work lives that are difficult we find ourselves in places in our family lives that we just would not choose we find ourselves confronting situations that are just so big and difficult to handle and why is it taking place well often because that's the place where God will display to us something of his almighty strength when we are facing our own weakness sometimes we're asked to do strange things things that we just perhaps do not understand and yet it is in fulfilling these strange commands of God to us that we find his promises fulfilled and we realize something of his great faithfulness and this is why we exercise faith this is why the journey is a journey of faith a journey whereby we walk in obedience trusting constantly in the love and in the power and in the promises of our great and glorious

God following faith fear Egypt faith behind Canaan in front and in between there are reminders of one and four cases of the other soon the children of Israel were to realize that Egypt was not so keen to let them go there is this change of heart that has taken place in Pharaoh he realizes what he has done and he decides that he is going to retrieve the children of Israel to take them back into the bondage of Egypt and so he mobilizes his troops and he has his chariots and his horsemen and his army and they're all sent out to take the children of Israel back and you can imagine how it felt for the children of Israel they've taken this long route round they turn and what do they see behind them they see this incredible military force hurtling towards them how do they respond well look at verse 5 they are we're told terrified they are absolutely terrified because of this great scene of this military force that was approaching them so it's not verse 5 it's verse 10 when Pharaoh drew nigh the children of Israel lifted up their eyes and behold the Egyptians marched after them and they were sore afraid and they cried out to the

Lord they are facing something that just seems too big for them and they can't cope and as they look at what's taking place they start facing things that make them even question and doubt even the goodness of God to them and the power of God protecting them you know how they begin to argue why have you taken us here is it simply to die in the wilderness where there are not enough graves in Egypt this is a hard time and they are frightened and what does Moses say to them in their fear fear ye not stand still and see the salvation of the Lord have you ever stopped to ask why it is that so often throughout scripture throughout both old and new testament you have the Lord saying to his people fear not don't be afraid why so often because often we are afraid often we are facing things that seem too powerful for us often we are facing situations that would make us question and doubt and that is why over and over and over again the Lord says to us don't be afraid fear not he knows how scary it can be for us as we are on our

Christian journeys he knows how difficult it can be at times and constantly he is there reassuring us saying don't be afraid don't be afraid all you have to do is be still and observe the deliverance the salvation of the Lord I have to say the verse 14 for myself is very precious the Lord will fight for you and you shall hold your peace often when we talk about holding peace it means all it means about being quiet but really in the context here it really should be all you have to do is stand still the Lord will fight for you all you have to do is stand still you know just now because of a certain situation in Psalm 23 again very precious there is a very frightening experience that all believers go through and it is the walking through the valley of the shadows shadows can be very scary they can be very frightening but they cannot harm us they cannot touch us and God says to us you do not need to fear even when you walk through the valley of the shadows because I am with you and my staff and my rod will comfort you and my goodness and mercy will follow you so that you will be in my house all the days of your life the Lord will fight for you all you have to do is stand still fear not it's what the Lord says and then the final thing the fantastic you will see the deliverance of God you will see the salvation of the Lord and they did in the most amazing and spectacular way they saw the deliverance the salvation of the Lord look what happens the Israelites are there cornered the Egyptians have come with all their military might and the children of

[25 : 42] Israel are protected the angel of the Lord comes in behind them the pillar of fire comes in behind them and creates this wall so that the enemy cannot touch them there is hardly any distance between them but yet the children of Israel are safe they are protected by the divine presence and by the divine power they may not have felt that way but they were so secure they were untouchable and then what happens God God provides for them a way of escape again in the most spectacular fashion Moses raises the rod over the Red Sea and the sea parts so that there is this channel of dry ground for them to march over so that they can get to the land of promise and then what happens well there is the destruction of the threat that was there before them the

Egyptian forces they are engulfed by the sea that closes in on top of them and they are completely destroyed it is an incredible thing it is absolutely spectacular and fantastic they have seen the glorious salvation of their God at work and it is so fantastic they can do nothing but sing Moses and the children of Israel they sang this song unto the Lord that recognises what he has done and is summed up probably best of all in verse 11 of chapter 15 who is like unto thee O Lord among the gods who is like thee glorious in holiness fearful in praises doing wonders and this was just the beginning throughout their journey they would continually see the fantastic they would see something of the love of God displayed day by day they would see something of the power of God being displayed day by day they would see something of the faithfulness of God being displayed

day by day they would continually witness the fantastic yes they would continually face problems yes they would continue to face fear yes they would have to continually be focused on their following there were so many challenges but there would always be the fantastic to observe and so with us it is no different in our journey we have to focus on our following in our journey we have to exercise faith in situations that are confusing and that we do not understand in our journey there are many times of fear but there is also the fantastic in the way in which God delivers us in the way in which God keeps us in the way that God answers our prayers in the way that God is faithful to us in the way that God reveals his love and his mercy to us in the way that we discover his grace is sufficient for us that is the absolute fantastic in the journey so that we too can do nothing else but sing

O God who is like thee among the gods who is like thee glorious in holiness fearful in praises and doing wonders may God bless to us his own word let's pray our God and our Father we give thanks to you for that call that you gave to us to follow we give thanks our God for the way in which you have hitherto helped us through good and through difficult times through times of joy and times of sorrow that you have brought us to this point and even to this place we thank you that you have been true and faithful having never let us down and having never let us go we thank you O

God that even during the times when we have moved away from you that you have never left us we bless you that you are the one who has begun that good work and that you will complete it for the day of Christ Jesus Lord God we ask that even now as we bow before you in prayer that you give to us that sense of your greatness and that you give to us that appreciation of your grace and we ask Lord God that even amidst all the troubles and the difficulties that we face in our Christian journey that you would help us to give praise and thanks to you for the fantastic for the blessings the many many blessings that we receive through

Jesus Christ we thank you that you have lavished your love upon us so that this day we can rejoice even knowing that we are the sons and the daughters of a living God hear our prayers for Jesus sake Amen so that everyone Jesus Jesus Amen and then God increase el about however thanks everything for theérêt to