

Exodus 14 “God’s Power to Save”

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Preacher: Will Spink

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! God died in Egypt, right? That's where God's people were, but Joseph trusted God's promise to bring his descendants up from that land to the land that he'd promised. Through the miraculous plagues, through the Passover night, God brings his people out of bondage in Egypt into relationship with himself, into true freedom. Notice in Exodus, that's how God describes what he's doing with the Israelites as he brings them out of Egypt. Chapter 19, verse 4, you yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you where? To myself. I brought you to myself. God rescuing from bondage to himself. That is still our story, isn't it? That's the story we've been celebrating this morning. It's the reason we confess our sin and we celebrate God's forgiveness and that we live in relationship with him because that's how God works. This relationship as his special people is what God is rescuing and restoring them for. So this deliverance, this redemption, this exodus becomes the prime example in the Old Testament of God's power to save.

It's used dozens of times, over and over. It's what they told each successive generation about Yahweh. Who is he? What do they need to know? With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, he brought us out of bondage in Egypt. That's who he is. That's the kind of God we serve. Psalms praise God for this rescue. And then over and over in the New Testament, it's referenced as a picture of how God through Jesus powerfully rescues his people from bondage to sin, from certain death and brings them into freedom and certain life with him. That's what it's a picture of. That is the point of this whole story from the plagues in the early chapters of Exodus to the Passover. That's Exodus 12. That God is powerful to rescue and to restore.

As God reiterates time and time again, it's about his power to save. Nowhere is that more evident than in the pinnacle of this story at the Red Sea. In case you're not familiar with it, what has happened is that Pharaoh, king of Egypt, has finally let God's people go, but then he changes his mind again and he chases after them with a great army. Let's pick up the story in chapter 14 of Exodus.

I'm going to read a few parts now and come back to others, but let's start at verse 9, reading God's inerrant, infallible, inspired words so that we learn who he is and how we relate to him. That's why he's given it to us. Exodus 14 at verse 9, the Egyptians pursued them, the Israelites, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them and camped at the sea. Now we're going to skip down partially to avoid words that are really hard for me to pronounce.

[4 : 29] And then we see how the Israelites respond and how God works and skip down to verse 19. Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness, and it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night. God's people and the Egyptians kept apart.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. Down to verse 26, what happens? Then the Lord said to Moses, stretch out your hand over the sea that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the

Lord threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen. Of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained, but the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right and on their left.

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses. This is God's word. Let's pray and ask for his help.

Father, show us your great power afresh this morning, and we might delight in you and in your salvation, that Jesus might be more beautiful and needful and glorious to us than ever. We ask it in his name. Amen.

[7 : 02] Amen. My hope this morning is for each of us personally to feel the power of God's rescue of us.

That means in this Red Sea story, if you're actually going to feel it personally, you need to feel the dirt and the mud in your toes walking through where that sea was to safety.

Kids, I didn't have you come up on the steps this morning, but you listen to God's word even when you sit out there, right? Like the part of it that I just read about this story of the Israelites and the Exodus, the Red Sea. I want all of us to imagine, okay, I need you to go there with me. Imagine that you're actually experiencing this miraculous rescue. So I want us to try to do that through the eyes of two made up kids. I made them up. Okay? You with me? I'm going to tell you different parts of their stories that I made up a few times this morning. Kids, I want you to think of yourself as Jeremiah or Anna, all right? Boy, Jeremiah and his sister, Anna. I'm going to read you some of their story that I wrote.

Jeremiah and Anna could hardly walk another step. They'd been walking for days in the hot desert since they left Egypt. As exciting as it was at first, they got tired fast, especially seven-year-old Anna, whose left leg didn't work quite right. She'd always had a limp. Her older brother, 12-year-old Jeremiah, could run faster than any other boy in their whole tribe, but he was getting tired too. They were relieved to stop and set up camp, even with the water of the Red Sea so close by. Jeremiah and Anna were just finishing putting the pegs in the tent when they noticed all the adults rushing to talk to Moses. It wasn't long before Jeremiah ran back to Anna with news that he'd overheard.

[9 : 21] The people in the back had seen the Egyptians coming after them. They had thought they were free. Jeremiah held his sister close as he could see the fear in her eyes.

I'm really scared, Anna admitted. Those men say we're all going to die out here. Jeremiah knew the feeling. Just a few nights ago, he had been so scared about the angel of death.

After all, he was the firstborn son. He'd heard rumors from his friends. He'd overheard his parents whispering, and he felt real fear as they held on to him tightly that night. It was like he was leaving for college the next day or something. But just like his dad had said, the next morning, he was fine, alive. Yahweh really must have meant what he said about the blood of the Lamb.

And now, Jeremiah felt invincible. Later that night, beside the sea, he wasn't surprised at all when the winds started blowing. Wow, you could hear the howl coming through.

And you could feel the rush as the waters of the sea moved back like giant walls of water in an aquarium held back by some invisible force. What was going on? They'd heard about the plagues.

[10 : 55] They'd even seen some of them, but they'd never seen anything like this. The Israelites started walking across on dry ground, ground they couldn't even see a few minutes before. All of a sudden, they were walking right across the dry ground. Jeremiah ran confidently up ahead, right all the way up behind Moses. Anna, on the other hand, limped behind, fearfully at the back of the crowd.

Most of the way across, she rode on her daddy's shoulders, but even then, she was scared the whole time of getting crushed by these waters. She knew water meant chaos and death. She didn't even know how to swim. As scared as she was, as little as she understood of what was going on, and as long as it took her to make it across, sure enough, there she was back beside Jeremiah the next morning. The fast brother and the fearful sister had both made it across safely. It's interesting to consider, isn't it? How might you have felt? Apparently, quite a lot of Israelites thought this was the end of the road for them. They knew the cruelty of these Egyptians all too well. Alas, their freedom, oh, it was short-lived.

Their deliverance, it was as fake as they feared. Verse 10 of chapter 14. When Pharaoh drew near, remember he's got a big army with him, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them and they feared greatly. They feared greatly. And yet, every single one of them was spared. Those full of faith and those full of fear, just like with the blood of the lamb at Passover. Do you ever feel like you have weak faith? Like maybe you have more doubts about God than most of your friends? Like you're someone who gets fearful easily when threats are on the horizon? Then you're just the kind of person that God loves to rescue. Because see, when we are weak, then he is strong. When we are sure sin will master us again, when we believe Satan's accusations that God could never love someone like us, certainly not. When we fear failing yet again and disappointing even ourselves, God delights to deliver. He rescues and restores us to relationship with himself just as he promised. So friends, never forget that it is the object of your faith, not the size of your faith that saves you. Amen? It's the one in whom you put your faith. Jesus brings the most faithful and the most fearful of his followers all the way home. He does. Perhaps even more remarkable is how the Israelites respond to their fears in this passage. I mean, just remember, days and weeks removed from seeing Yahweh demonstrate repeatedly and conclusively his power greater than any of the gods of Egypt in the plagues. They assume that this time the Egyptians will be too strong. They will surely kill them. They complain, don't they, against both God and his representative Moses. The end of verse 10, the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. They're angry, by the way, in case you can't tell how they're crying. They said to Moses, is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you've taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt? Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness. As I read this this week, I thought, does any of us have anywhere near God's patience? Can you believe this? What would we say, right? Fine, go back to Egypt.

You're so ungrateful. You're so ungrateful. So entitled. Not our God. No. What does he do? He finds these ungrateful, entitled people and he says, I'm going to rescue you anyway. I'm bringing you across. He rescues even these ungrateful people who think that life in bondage in Egypt might actually be better than life with God.

You'd never say it that way, would you? But isn't that what we say when we go back to the same sin again? Anyone ever committed the same sin more than once? I need to see a few more hands before we keep going, okay? Making sure you're with me here. You've committed the same sin again. Getting angry and bitter, you're saying, must be better than forgiving. You're saying, living my own way with my body must be better than God's design for my sexuality. You're saying, disobeying my parents must be better than obeying them when they don't really know what they're talking about. Or maybe it's that we've just, in general, given up on living in the power of Jesus' spirit and we've let sin be our master again, which I just can't help it. God will never help me be free of this struggle. I know because it's been a week and sin is tempting me again. I give up. I may as well just live with it. I'm always going to be this way.

[18:14] And somehow we sometimes think that that's actually the better way, that life will be better that way. The fleeting pleasures of sin, right? Our wealth, our comfort, our pleasures, our power.

Yeah, it might not be perfect, but it'll be better. I'll take those instead of the goodness, the promises, the forgiveness, the deliverance, the presence of God.

God? Does God leave His people like us to fight the Egyptians on their own this time?

Just that's one too many people. Is that what He does? No way. He shows His power by rescuing and restoring to Himself yet again a stubborn people who forget how good they have it with Yahweh.

Here is God delivering His people from a tight spot, right? A difficult situation for sure. In particular, the Scriptures tell us this is a picture of our deliverance from our ultimate tight spot.

[19:32] God's bondage to sin, keeping us captive to a sinful nature and a fear of death. But God has set us free, free to live with Him, not to live in sin.

So even though sin will keep pursuing you and keep tempting you and keep pretending to be stronger, don't you believe it? It is not your master anymore.

Sin cannot have you back because God has moved between you and your sin. Isn't that a great picture? Don't you love that picture?

God has moved between His people and the Egyptians chasing after them to have them back in bondage. God has moved between you. You are in Christ.

You are protected in Him. God has moved between you and your sin. So even though your faith gets weak, even though you fall again, even though you start to believe, it would be better and easier just to live the way you used to as sons of disobedience.

[20 : 39] God says, no, I will protect you. I will rescue you. I will bring you across safely home. Jeremiah felt invincible.

But he wasn't taking any chances. He believed God was rescuing them from the Egyptians. Well, at least he was rescuing some of them, the best of them, of course.

While his parents gathered up the tent and helped Anna to her feet, Jeremiah zipped off to the front where Moses had just lifted up his staff. The winds had just started to howl and the water had just made a wall on either side of the dry ground.

Picture it up there, okay? He cut in and out of Israelite traffic to get to the front. And this is so me, by the way. Even in my car, he was going to get across first.

After running a long time, he looked back and he didn't like what he saw. The Israelites were coming across, but not fast enough because so were the Egyptians.

[21 : 55] Now, Jeremiah was a fast runner, but he knew enough to know he couldn't outrun those chariots. Man, they were fast. Fear started to grip his heart. He couldn't even call out to warn his family way behind him.

That reminded him of what Moses had said. Fear not. Stand firm and see the salvation of Yahweh. Yahweh will fight for you and you have only to be silent.

Well, good, Jeremiah thought, because now that's all I can do. Perhaps the culmination of all of these types of people that God rescues and restores.

Certainly the most important reality here in this text is that God is so powerful. He saves people who can't save themselves. This is the point, actually, that God has set up this whole situation to show his people, isn't it?

God has actually brought them through a winding road to this place where they are stuck. This text is very clear. It's no accident that they're stuck here.

[23 : 11] Death on one side from the Egyptian warriors coming after them. Death on the other side from raging waters in the sea.

Life nowhere to be found. No matter how fast you can run. Then what does Moses say to them? When they're right there in that spot, God's got you right where he wants you.

You sure? Verse 13. We're scared, Moses.

Jesus. Paraphrasing. Fear not. Stand firm. Watch God. And shut up.

Fear not. Stand firm. Watch God. Shut up. That last word. Be silent. Or be still.

[24 : 30] It means trust God's power. Not your own. Perhaps here with a hint of don't cry out against his saving work.

He's doing something. He's got this. Quit trying to fix it yourself. Quit arguing about a better way to handle it. And trust him. You can't miss the grace of God here, can you?

In his almighty power. What's God doing? He's showing us that you will be saved completely by the grace of God. Not because you're faster, smarter, or better than anyone else.

By grace. This, friends, is what sets biblical Christianity apart from every other religion in the world. Every other religion has you build some bridge in some way across the raging waters to get to God, to life, and to freedom.

Yahweh, the one true living God, says, Let me part the waters, defeat your enemies, and bring you across.

[25 : 48] You stand still and trust me. It's the beauty of being in relationship with him. Right? You know this.

Many of you have experienced this. He blesses you. He loves you. He comes to you. Before you do anything to deserve it.

Exodus highlights this reality. God rescues his people from bondage into relationship with himself. And then he tells them how to live in this relationship.

Gives them ten commandments, right? That's famous in Exodus. You know the ten commandments. Those are in Exodus chapter 20. Here in Exodus 14, he brings them through the sea.

In Exodus 19, he says, You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. How I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. You're mine. My treasured possession.

[26 : 58] Already done. Now, don't have any other gods before me. Keep the Sabbath. Don't murder. And so on. Right? Relationship before requirements.

The order is crucial. Otherwise, get it backwards. And you're stuck in moralism with little Jeremiah. You know which people at church will really be saved? The ones who run fastest. Pray the longest. Serve the most. The rest of them, questionable. I don't know. Maybe they'll make it. Y'all, that is humanistic moralism that shows up in a lot of Christian churches.

That is God helps those who help themselves. And in case that confuses you, that is not Christianity. Christianity is God rescues those who cannot help themselves.

[28 : 06] Listen, not a single Israelite could save himself here. And every single Israelite makes it across safe. Because God is strong, not because they are.

That's how it works. Fleet-footed Jeremiah. He's there. Limp-legged Anna. She's there too.

The Bible says once that starts to come home in your heart, it does something. It does several things. Your pride starts to die.

It's not about how great you are. Your love for God begins to come to life. How great he is. How generous and gracious he's been to me.

And your love for everyone else lagging way behind you in so many ways. Your love for them begins to grow. And you run back to check on your sister.

[29 : 14] Is there someone you've given up on? Someone who's too fearful? Someone who's fallen back into the same sin pattern again?

They always do that. Someone who's clearly not coming to church enough, acting the right way, saying the right things. Maybe it's yourself.

You know yourself so well. A pastor friend said to me this week, Will, I just can't shake that feeling that I should be better by now.

I've been a Christian a long time and I'm still struggling with some of the same sins I did in college. I feel like a fraud sometimes. If that's you, if you could have written that, Remember with me that God has come in power to send a wind to blow back the waters, to defeat your enemies once and for all, and to bring you home to himself because he made you.

He made you for relationship with himself. He made a covenant to bless you forever. It's okay if you can't handle it. He can and he will.

[30 : 37] It may be a child or parent or another family member. It may be a friend or a neighbor that you think is too far gone. You've given up on him.

Would you start praying again to a God whose mighty hand and outstretched arm are not too short to save?

Fear not, dear ones. Stand firm in Christ. Watch God as he delivers in ways that you could never predict.

Shut up and marvel as God saves by his wonderful, powerful, amazing grace. People just like you who could never save themselves.

You're not any better. You're not any faster. You're not any more capable of making it across on your own than anyone else. One last thing that we can't miss in this story.

[31 : 46] Not only who are the kinds of people God rescues and restores is beautiful. Also, how does God rescue and restore? This part's shorter.

It's through a representative, a mediator, a go-between, if you will. We've seen already in our stories God rescuing through a substitute.

Here it's through a representative, Moses. Moses, we'll see throughout the story, represents God to Israel and Israel to God, doesn't he? Both directions.

When the people cry out against God, God tells Moses to stop. Verse 15. Then when God wants to bring his power to bear, to rescue his people, he tells Moses to hold out his staff.

Verse 21. And part the waters. Amazing. It's not Moses' power. Again, verse 27. Moses stretches out his hand and the waters crash back on the Egyptians.

[32 : 58] So, verse 30. Thus, the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians. The people feared the Lord.

They believed in the Lord and in his servant, Moses. Yahweh demonstrates his power and his representative, Moses, is vindicated at the same time, hours after hearing all the clamoring

