

Extraordinary Salvation

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you, brother. Nice to see you all today. My name is James. And at the end of last year, we had a staff day out. The whole team went out and we spoke about ministry and what was important and challenging for us coming out of COVID. And we drank coffee and we walked around the lake at Narrabeen. There were about 10 of us walking around the lake together. And suddenly our group came to a halt. There was a snake in front of us. Everybody stopped. And part of our team at the time was our dear sister Erin. Erin is from the US and she got married at the end of last year and she moved to Canberra. And it turns out that she had a massive fear of snakes. And as soon as she caught sight of the snake, that was, you know, 20 meters away, she started moving backwards very quickly. I had to look because there was a pole there. I didn't want to walk into it. And the rest of us were like, oh, it's just a snake. What's the problem? Come on. We'll just walk slowly around it. There's no need to fear it. Now, I don't know if you would react in the same way. We all have our fears, whether it's, you know, snakes or spiders. But there are also much more deeply rooted fears. Fears of how other people view me. Fear of failing. Fear of not doing enough to make the people in my life happy and pleased.

And just like seeing a snake, these deeply rooted fears cause us to respond. These fears can drive us. The fear of failing can motivate me to work harder and study harder. The fear of not pleasing my family can drive me to seek money and success. And these fears are often bubbling under the surface for us.

We're often confronted by them, but we don't actually know when these fears are coming up. It's one thing to see a snake and then respond. And we can say, I have run away because I saw a snake.

But it's much harder to understand how our fears in life are motivating us. We can end up being in a never-ending cycle of trying to beat our own fears, trying to find success, trying to beat them. And when we do get a measure of success, we can think, I can deal with my problems. I can deal with my own fears.

I can save myself. And these fears can make us forget that we have a God who saves us. That there is a God who is to be feared. And that he is the one for us to be placing our trust in.

[2 : 5 1] We are in a series looking at the book of Exodus called Ordinary People, Extraordinary God. And we've seen that Israel is on the very brink of being saved. Last week, we saw the Passover where God brought judgment on Egypt and Israel was saved by the blood of the lamb. And now they've fled Egypt, but they're pursued by Pharaoh's army. And the challenge for Israel was to not fear Pharaoh, but to stand firm and to trust in God. This is our challenge too. Now we don't have an army breathing down on our necks, but we do have an army of challenges before us. Challenges and trials and struggles that fuel our fears.

And in the face of these, God calls us to stand firm because he fights for us. So I'm going to pray in a moment. Please be reading along with me in Exodus 14.

Have the St. Paul's app out so you can take notes. If you want to use the QR code on the seat in front of you, that'll take you directly to the St. Paul's app so that you can be making notes as we go. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for your word to us today. As we consider Israel's fear and how you save them, help us to have a deeper knowledge of the things that motivate us so that we would not be motivated out of fear, but that we would respond to you out of trust. Amen. Firstly, today we're going to see the approaching fear, particularly for the Israelites.

So first of all, approaching fear. Israel, as I've mentioned, they fled out of Egypt and God gives them instructions where they are to set up camp because God has a plan for the location.

[4 : 5 3] It's the same plan as behind the plagues so that the Egyptians would know that the Lord is God, that he is in control. So chapter 14, verse 5.

When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, what have we done? We've let the Israelites go and we've lost their services. We've lost all our slaves. What are we going to do? We've lost this large and valuable source of cheap labor. Let's go and get them. And this has been Pharaoh's pattern. He's changed his mind, continually. And so he gathers his army and he charges after them. And we get the details of Egypt's army for the first time here. And it's a very impressive army. His chariots are mentioned four times in four verses. Chariots were the most dangerous weapons of the day. You know, I imagine, fighter jets. That's what the chariots were for the time. Highly flexible, fast, dangerous. They would have been terrifying. Imagine you are running away. You are fleeing with all of your possessions on your back. You're holding a child. You're dragging another child along. And there are horsemen. There are horses dragging chariots with men in the back with spears and swords bearing down on you. The Israelites' response is almost understandable here. It's almost understandable.

Maybe if they hadn't seen God's amazing miracles, the plagues that he had brought on Egypt to judge them we could understand it. But Israel show what they are afraid of. Chapter 14, verse 10. As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up and there were the Egyptians marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, Moses, was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?

[7 : 08] What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, leave us alone, let us serve the Egyptians? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert. There's an interesting repetition in the wording here of the language of crying out. Israel had been crying out to God to save them when they were in Egypt. Save us from our harsh slavery. And God heard them. He heard their cries. He's intervened to save them. And now as he is saving them, they're crying out again. God, don't save us. Send us back. What they're doing is they're focusing too much on their immediate circumstances. Seeing God's plagues should have reminded them of how big this God is. This quick mood change of Israel to a challenge or trial is the first of many that we're going to see throughout the rest of Exodus. And the way that Israel respond is it's really like a temper tantrum in a young child. Either let us be slaves or let us die in the desert. You know, at the first sign of trouble, they're willing to just head straight back to Egypt. With the Egyptians pursuing, Israel doesn't give a second thought to God's promises, they've still not learned that their circumstances are not the final standard on which to see that God is working. It's actually very easy for us to get into the same mindset as Israel, to question God. God, I'm looking at my situation right now. Where are you? Why aren't you working? Jesus himself had a moment like this in the Garden of Gethsemane. Just before he went to the cross, to his death, he sat in the garden and he prayed to God. He didn't face an army bearing down on him. He faced crucifixion, the judgment of God for our sin. He faced the fear of that coming day. And in that day, he placed his trust in God. Moses speaks into this situation of Israel fearing. And he calls them, it's our second point today, to stand firm because God saves. Verse 13, 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 to be still. The Israelites faced an army and they wanted to respond out of fear. And Moses calls them, don't be afraid. Stand firm, be still. The Lord will fight for you. Can you imagine trying to be still and trusting God when you can see the dust of one of the greatest armies of all time bearing down on you? You're sandwiched between this impending doom of the army, the desert and the sea. It's die by sword or drown. Every instinct you have is telling you to fight or flight, to run. Do they try and fight Egypt? Well, that's totally hopeless. Do they try and flee? Either way, not trusting in God. Now these commands from Moses, they sound really pastoral and caring. You know, don't be afraid. Everything will be okay. But they're actually not words of comfort. Moses isn't giving words of comfort. He's not saying everything will be fine. It's actually a really impatient command from Moses. The last part of the sentence that says, be still, one commentator suggested a slightly different translation, which is be quiet. Or even further, shut up. It's a really direct command because of Israel's lack of faith. Their fear at the invading army shows where Israel's true fear and trust lie. This fear and trust go together. Our fear reveals the things that we trust. Israel continued to fear and to trust in Egypt. [11 : 45] They hadn't realized yet how big their God was that they could actually trust in him. They wanted to go back to Egypt because they were afraid of what was coming. They had trusted that

things would actually be better in Egypt as slaves than trusting in God. They've quickly forgotten the many years of pain and slavery because their situation had changed. And so fear and trust go together. Moses's response to their fear and to their worry is trust in God. And they needed a sharp rebuke. Now Moses had been a shepherd for 40 years before he came back to Egypt. And sometimes sheep need a bonk on the head from the shepherd's crook. You know, imagine a shepherd with a stick, the staff. Sometimes sheep need a bonk on the head. Don't go that way. Go that way. Don't go that way. That's bad for you. That's where the lion is down there, you silly sheep. God has a much better plan for you in store. Stand firm. Don't be afraid of them.

Sure, they've got one of the most imposing armies of all time, but they're just an army. God has shown you how powerful he is. You saw the Nile turn to blood. You saw God send plague upon plague. God struck to the very heart of Pharaoh killing his son. What makes you think an army can do anything when you've got the Lord fighting on your side? And so God is going to display his power. In the face of a seemingly hopeless situation, God will do something that would have been completely unexpected.

He tells Moses to raise his staff, to raise his arms, and to see the water divided so that the Israelites could walk through on dry ground. Verse 21, Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground with a wall of water on their right and on their left. In the plagues, God was using his powers of creation against Pharaoh. Here, the parting of the sea is an act of the reversal of creation. In Genesis 1, when God made the world, the seas came together and they separated themselves from the land. So the seas come together, and so you've got the sea and the land. But here, God splits open the seas to reveal the land. He sends the wind to do it, just like in Genesis.

But for the Egyptians, this act of creation is going to bring death, whereas for the Israelites, this act of creation will bring life. The Israelites will go through to the other side, whereas this act of creation is going to bring death to the Egyptians. It's the ultimate judgment on Pharaoh, who had been attempting to get rid of Israel and their firstborns. Verse 23, The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea.

Verse 25, And the Egyptians said, Let's get away from the Israelites. The Lord is fighting for them against us. All too late do the Egyptians realize that God is real, and he is fighting against them.

[15:34] Within moments, at Moses' commands, the walls of water come crashing down on the Egyptians, and the army is killed. They've paid their price for rebelling against God, for ignoring him.

Pharaoh has been fighting against the God of the world, thinking that he was God's equal, and yet he's destroyed. He set out to destroy Israel, but now the once mighty Egypt is brought face to face with his mistake. And Israel is saved from the hands of the Egyptians by the hand of God. They went into the water on the western side as runaway slaves, fearing for their lives. And they have come up out of the water on the eastern side as liberated, free people to praise God. This is God's marvelous salvation moment in the Old Testament.

The rest of the Old Testament will talk about this. Psalmists, prophets, writers will go back and remember this time. Remember when God saved us.

When we were hard pressed on all sides. When we were full of fear. There was an army bearing down on us, and God did the unexpected. He brought us through the water to salvation.

These aren't just saved people, but they are given a new identity. They are now following their God. And as they head towards the land, God is giving them.

[17:12] These are people who began fearing Egypt, desiring to place their trust back in Egypt. Let's go back to them. We won't die if we go back to them.

But the last verse of chapter 14 shows the significance of the salvation event as they begin to trust God. The people feared the Lord and put their trust in Him and in His servant Moses.

No longer afraid, wanting to submit to Egypt. Israel fears God. They have seen that He fights for them, and they're placing their trust in Him.

This is going to be a long journey for them. They're still going to struggle with this. But Israel is now fearing God and trusting in Him, instead of fearing in Egypt and trusting in Egypt.

God has used an amazing act of recreation to save His people. To take them from slavery and death to life and freedom.

[18:16] And they now get to be the people that God frees them to be. Our third point today, the people that God frees us to be. The death and resurrection of Jesus is so similar to this moment of

salvation in many ways.

This salvation through the sea is the big salvation moment in the Old Testament. But it doesn't deal with all of Israel's problems, as we're going to see in the coming weeks.

The salvation that we have in the death and resurrection of Jesus is so much bigger than this. Like the salvation through the waters here, God works an amazing act of creation in Jesus.

He brings life out of death to Jesus. And it allows us to come to life too. In 1 Corinthians chapter 10, Paul says that our ancestors, this Israel here, they were all under the cloud.

And that they passed through the sea and they were baptized into Moses. Israel were baptized into Moses when they went through the sea. They went into the water and they came out the other side.

[19 : 31] They went through the death and they came to freedom. And this happens to us at the cross on Good Friday. We were slaves to sin and facing God's judgment.

But by Easter morning, we are liberated. Freed people, freed from sin, freed from judgment. Not because we've gone through the waters of death, but because Jesus has passed through death. So when we are baptized, it is a promise that we are people on the eastern side of the sea. We're no longer stuck in sin and slavery and death.

We have been brought to life. We are people on the eastern side. We are free. And so Paul continues to say in Romans 6, Don't you know that all of us who are baptized in Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

And just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. We as a church believe that baptism is a really important sign.

[20 : 41] If you haven't had a chance to be baptized, come talk to me. I'd love to talk about the value of baptism. It is a symbol saying that God has taken me down to the waters of death with Jesus, and he has brought me up out of it to new life.

And I am born again. We do this in such a wonderful, visible way when we do baptism. We get a big tank of water. You go down and get baptized.

You go down, symbolizing that we have gone down into the death with Jesus. And when we come out, we're coming to life in Jesus because he was raised again.

It is good to do, to say to other people that this is the Jesus that I believe in. It is good to baptize your kids as well. Come and talk to me about this if you want to talk more about baptism.

And so Moses has called to the people of Israel, don't be afraid. Stand firm. Be still. Because God is fighting for you.

[21 : 50] And that is so true for us in Jesus. Our sin and our fears threaten to pull us down like they did for Israel.

Now we might not have an army approaching us, but we might have debt piling up, family challenges, our own sin, our fears of tomorrow.

These things threaten to pull us down into the watery depths. And so how do we respond to these problems? How do we respond to our fears? Well, not by pretending that everything is fine.

And not by thinking that we can climb our way out of the water. Instead, we tell ourselves what Paul said in Romans 6.

I have been pulled down to the depths. In the death of Jesus, I have already died. I died with him.

And do you know what? Those fears have died too.

[22 : 50] Christ has taken my sin, my judgment at his death, and he has given me victory in his life. Because he fought for us by dying on the cross.

Maybe we're tempted to return to slavery and the things that we're chasing, that we think will deal with our fears, the things that we think will satisfy us. But Paul's words here are the same as Moses' stand firm.

Stand firm, trusting in the work of Jesus. So that Jesus' finished work means that we can say, I am Christ's. I am on the east side of the sea.

I am no longer under the power of sin. I have gone through death in Jesus, and I'm going to stand firm in God's power. No matter what other people say, no matter what my inner voice says, no matter how my emotions make me feel, I am going to remind myself that I have died with Jesus, and I have life with him now, so I can stand firm.

And God calls us to be still. This is, ironically, the most active way to trust in God. Israel, seeing the army coming upon them, staying still.

[24 : 10] For Israel, standing still and not fighting meant that they had to trust in God. And for us, being still means not striving and struggling on our own against sin, or trying to get ahead in life, but we come to God and ask him, help me trust in you today.

Help me to be still. You rule. You reign. You have dealt with my sin. When we try and step in, we are saying to God, God, you don't have this situation.

You don't know the plans for my life. I need to be in control. And what it results in is busyness and stress, worry and poor decisions. Martin Luther was a German reformer in the 1500s.

He disagreed with the Catholic Church. He disagreed with their abuses. And he called the Church to come back to God's Word. But the Church, the Catholic Church, didn't like what Luther was saying and chased him and tried to arrest him to stop him reforming the Church.

And at a time, he was hiding out of fear. He was hiding out of fear from the Church and from those wanting to arrest him. And he found a castle and a prince that would protect him.

[25 : 37] And he was hiding from those who were hunting him, worried about his next steps, worried about what was coming. And he was heard wandering around this castle shouting, I am baptized!

I am baptized! I am baptized! Now, I'm not sure if you've been baptized and have ever shouted, I am baptized. But instead of running as a response to fear, instead of stressing and worrying, he was declaring his faith loudly to himself by reminding him, I have died with Jesus and he has given me life.

I have been baptized. It doesn't matter what you bring me next. It doesn't matter if I get arrested. It doesn't matter if they put me to death because I have been baptized. And that means that he had life and he could declare that loudly.

Brothers and sisters, will you stand firm in your faith in Jesus? Don't be afraid.

Will you be still and know that God has fought for you in Jesus? Let me pray. God, when we are attacked by our own fears, when we are full of worry, remind us of your love for us in Jesus so that we might stand firm.

[27 : 19] Help us not to be afraid, but remind us of our fear in you, of your awesomeness and your power, that you can deal with armies and you can deal with our own death and our own sin and our judgment in Jesus, that there is no problem too big for you.

Help us not see the situation immediately around us as the biggest thing in our lives, but remind us that you are. Help us to be still and know that you have fought for us in Jesus.

Amen. Amen.