

The Glory and Guidance of God

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn now to the chapter that we read earlier, Exodus chapter 13, page 67. Exodus chapter 13.

I'd like us to look at this passage between verse 17 and the end of this chapter, but taking into account the following chapter that gives detail as to what happened.

But just let me read these verses once again. That's verse 17 of chapter 13, page 67. When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, though that was near.

For God said, lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt. God led the people round the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. The people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt, equipped for battle.

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.

[1 : 07] And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham on the edge of the wilderness. And the Lord went before them by day, in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way and by night, in a pillar of fire to give them light that they might travel by day and by night.

The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people. Those of you who were here last Sunday night will remember that we were talking about Exodus chapter 12 and how God delivered the people of Israel out of Egypt by the Passover feast.

And it was as they kept the Passover, or through their keeping the Passover, by faith that God delivered them and took them out of a land that had been an awful place.

It had been a terrible place where they had experienced terrible cruelty and oppression from the people of Egypt. The whole of Exodus is a fascinating book.

And if you've never read it, I would encourage you to do so. It's also a very easy book to read because it is a story. It has a beginning and has an end.

[2 : 24] And it's a story that has many, many interesting incidents. Many, many places in the book of Exodus you'll stop and you'll say, I wonder why that happened, or I wonder what was happening here, or I wonder how I can understand this.

There's intrigue and mystery and amazing episodes in the history of the children of the people of Israel. So I would encourage you to read it.

Young and old, young and old. No reason why a young person cannot pick up his Bible and read lots and lots of the Bible, particularly a book like this.

There is absolutely no reason why I still remember the first time I read the book of Exodus in a modern version of the Bible, the kind of version that we have here today. And it just shed light on a story that I'd never read.

I brought up in a Christian home. I thought I knew what the book of Exodus was all about. But yet, when you read it from start to finish, it all of a sudden begins to show you things that you've never seen before.

[3 : 29] So I'd encourage you. Start today. Start today and work your way through the book of Exodus, and it will amaze you what you'll learn about the various characters involved. There's loads of different people in the book of Exodus.

For example, there are Shiphrah and Pua. Shiphrah and Pua. Do you know who they were?

If you don't, then it won't take you long into the book of Exodus to find out who they were. Shiphrah and Pua. Then there was Jochebed, Amram, Moses' parents. Then there's Moses' brother, Aaron, three years older than himself.

There's Pharaoh, the evil tyrant, Pharaoh. And then, of course, there is Moses himself. In fact, you might be forgiven for thinking that the book of Exodus, that the main character in the book of Exodus is Moses himself.

The Bible itself tells us that amongst everyone who ever walked the face of the earth, there was nobody like him. He was quite a unique person in the hands of God, a unique character, a unique temperament, a unique nature.

[4 : 41] God had prepared him for the time that he was going to lead the people out of Egypt and through the wilderness. An amazing, amazing leader.

And if ever there was an example of leadership, wise leadership, then it's Moses. But the main character in the book of Exodus is not Moses.

It is the Lord himself. And particularly, the way in which God makes himself known. He reveals himself in the book and in the story of the Exodus.

You could say that the whole Bible was God making himself known. But in the book of Exodus, you have God making himself known in a particular way.

In a glorious way. You have the glory of God running all the way through Exodus. That was what the burning bush was all about.

[5 : 55] That's why Moses couldn't come any closer. Because here was the burning presence and glory of God. In the fire in the bush. And here in this chapter, you have the glory of God once again.

In the fire of the cloud that led the people of Israel out of Egypt. You have the glory of the Lord coming down. That same fire coming down onto the mountain where Moses was.

Up where he went to meet with God to receive the Ten Commandments and the law. The glory of God again. And in Exodus chapter 33, Moses still hasn't had enough of the glory of God.

He wants to see more. And he asks God in Exodus chapter 33, A most peculiar question.

He says, Lord, show me your glory. And then when the tabernacle was built once again, The glory of the Lord came down into the place called the most holy place.

[7 : 07] Indicating that the purpose of God was to dwell amongst his own people in the middle of them. God wanted to be amongst.

He loved his people so much. Despite all the rebellion and sinfulness, He loved them so much that he wanted to be right where they were in their midst.

So, all the way through the book of Exodus, You have this glory of God being revealed to his people.

But I want us to concentrate on this passage today In terms of not simply the glory of God, But the guidance of God.

Because that's the theme that runs through this passage. It was one thing for the Israelites to leave Egypt. They were all mightily relieved to be at last set free from the cruelty of the Egyptians.

[8 : 07] It was another thing altogether for them to know, For them to adjust to a life that was very different from the life that they had just lived. Because despite the cruelty of the Egyptians, They all had their own homes.

They all knew where they lived. They had their beds to go to. They had food on the table. They had clothes to wear. And they knew that every day was going to be roughly the same as the day before. But now, now that they were out of Egypt, Their experience, their life was a very, very different one. And the greatest challenge that they faced was facing the unknown. For them, what for them was an unknown future. Even the very next day, from day to day, was unknown.

They had absolutely no idea what lay in front of them. And that wasn't an easy thing to have to face. It meant that instead of knowing that every day they were going to have to work for the Egyptians, That every day they were going to have to trust completely and entirely in the Lord.

[9 : 24] And like this, this is a tremendous example of the life of a Christian. Because a Christian is in exactly the same position.

Where he or she is guided every day by the presence of the Lord. I want us to think about three things. Perhaps, not only for those of us who are living normal lives, lives with a normal routine, But perhaps there are some of us here today who are particularly conscious, And particularly sensitive, To what for them is an unknown future.

Perhaps something has happened in your life, That you didn't expect to happen during the week. Maybe there is a decision coming up, That you're going to have to make, That you didn't know about, Or that you fear.

Perhaps there is an experience you're going through, That you don't understand. Many is a Christian, Goes through these decisions and experiences.

Maybe you've just become a Christian, And for you, You're listening to every word, Because you can see yourself in this passage, As a person who has come out on the side of the Lord, But you don't know how to live from day to day.

[10:47] What does the future hold? How am I to live as a Christian? And what does it mean to put my trust completely in the Lord? Well, once again, we turn to the Bible, As God's word for us.

Don't think that God's word is for 2,000 years ago, Or 3,000 years ago. God's word is as relevant for you and I today, In our decisions, In our difficulties, In our unknowns, As it ever was.

And that's why the Bible lives, Because through these events, God speaks to us. And that's why the worst thing you can do as a Christian, Is stop reading your Bible. That's why you must return to your Bible, Day by day.

Sometimes you feel, Well, I can't even remember what I read. That's okay. You ask God the next day to help you to remember, And to bring you back to remember, But don't stop reading it.

Whatever you do, Don't stop reading your Bible.

Because it's amazing, How you read through the Bible, And you come across something you never expected to come across, And it comes at you with such power, You know that God is speaking to you, In his word.

[12:01] God speaks to us, In his word. I want us to think, About three very brief things. First of all, That very often, When the way ahead, Seems long, And hard, In front of us, It is because God is working, In the background, For our good.

God works, In the background, For our good. Now I'll show you, How we get this from this passage.

Here were the Israelites, They had just been taken out of Egypt, And they knew that God was leading them, To the promised land, To the land he had promised them, The land of Canaan.

Now, All you have to do, Is to get a map, And you'll know, That there is a straight way, Between Egypt and Canaan, And it doesn't take that long. But, As they were guided, By God himself, They knew, Or they discovered, That God was not taking them, On the straight, And the easiest way.

That's what it tells us. God, Verse 17, God did not lead them, By the way of the land of the Philistines, Though that was near. For God said, Lest the people change their minds, When they see war, And return to Egypt.

But, Verse 18, God led the people round, By the way of the wilderness, Towards the Red Sea. In other words, God is deliberately choosing a route, That is longer, And harder, For the Israelites, Because, But it is because, He has a reason, For doing so.

[13:46] He always has, A reason, For leading us, And guiding us, In the way, That he leads and guides us. And it's always, For the good, Of his people.

You see, The journey, From Egypt to Canaan, Was not simply, The shortest distance, Between two points. That wasn't the point. God could easily have done that, If he had wanted to.

But for the people of Israel, The journey in the wilderness, Was to be an education. It was God's way, Of teaching his people, How he must be worshipped, And how he must be served.

And how we must live, The life of faith. And these were, Massively important things, They had to learn. They were first of all, God's people.

They belong to God. They were in covenant relationship, With God. And that meant, That God was their God, And they were his people.

[14:52] Now they must know that, For themselves. And in order for them, To know that for themselves, They must learn it for themselves.

And you know, There are many things, In the Christian life, That can only be learned, Through experience. There are some things, That can be learned, Simply by reading the Bible.

But there are other things, That we have to go through, In order to learn, What God has to teach us. And this was one of them. How to trust, You see it's easy enough to say, Trust in the Lord with all your heart, Lean not to your own understanding.

These are God's words. But you have to learn that, Through experience. And often that experience, Is painful, And slow, And hard, And demoralizing, And it requires us, To wonder, What is God doing?

You see, According to our logic, Or the Israelites logic, Why does God not take them, By the straight way? There was a reason, They didn't know the reason, Because, It was in the

background.

[15 : 57] God knew, God's able to see, The big picture. God is able to see, What would happen if, And what would have happened, If he had, Led them through the straight way, Was they would have met, The Philistines, And many of the, Formidable armies, That were on the way, The Israelites were not, They weren't military people, And, As soon as they, Came up, Came, Into contact, With the Philistines, They would be frightened, And they would have, Turned straight back, See, God knew his people, And God knows us as well, And he always knows, What is good for us, There's that verse, In Romans chapter 8, That says, God works all things, To the good, Of those who love him, And who are called, According, To, His, Purposes, Now we have to believe that, And we have to rest on that, And we have to lay hold on that, Great truth,

And it's not easy, To do so, The second thing, I'd like us to, Look at, In this, In this passage, Is the promise, Of God, And the faith, That rests, In that promise, God had made a promise, To his people, And that promise goes all the way back, Hundreds of years, And as time went on, As decade, And century went on, The promise of God, Must have seemed less, And less likely, To his people, Believing in a promise, Is easy, When the promise, Is first made, It's not so easy, As time goes on, And as it looks more likely, That the promise, Won't come to pass, You remember the life of Abraham, He was already old, When God promised him, That he would have a son, But God didn't keep,

That promise right away, It was years later, That Abraham, Actually became a father, 25 years, He had to wait, For God to fulfill his promise, Now that's where faith comes in, Faith has to listen, To God's word, And believe it, Even though we don't see, Any evidence for it, And it was the same year, God had promised, His people Israel, That one day, Even although they had come down, To Egypt, To settle there, That one day, He would lead them, Out of Egypt, And into, His promised land, That was to be their land, The land that he would meet, With them in, And the name, That the land, That would belong to them, And yet, As the years went by, It became, It must have appeared, Less and less likely, That that promise, Was going to be fulfilled, It was 400 years,

Since Joseph, And the family of Jacob, Had come down to Egypt, 400 years, You know, I was thinking this the other day, We were actually studying, The book of Exodus, During this week, I was away at our ministers, In service, In Edinburgh, And one of our sessions, Was on, The book of Exodus, It was absolutely fascinating, It was one of the highlights, Of the week, And it struck me, At that time, You know, 400 years an hour, For us, Is a massive amount of time, Isn't it?

You look, You look back, Even 400 years, At the way they dressed, In the, 16th century, Or the 17th century, We've all seen pictures, Of the way that people dressed, 400 years ago, Where they had these massive, Great wigs, And ornate clothing, And totally different, From the way people dress, Now, And the way people spoke too, If you ever read a book, That was written, 400 years ago, You almost can't understand, The English that is written, Because all the spellings are different, And the words have a different meaning, And all of these things, Life was so different, Can you imagine, 400 years ago, If you had told them, That we'd be able to fly, In airplanes, From one part of the world, To another, And that we'd be able to, Have mobile phones, That you'd have a phone in your pocket, They wouldn't even know what a phone was, And 400 years, You see, We come, We, We, We, We read the book of Exodus, And you don't even think about it, Do you?

[20 : 35] 400 years, Ah, That's, That's nothing, But it isn't, It's a long, Long time, Many, Many, Decades and centuries, But I believe that for the Israelites, There was hardly any change at all, In their clothing, For example, And in the way they spoke, They were much closer to one another, In history, Than we would have been to, People who lived 400 years, Before us, And I believe also, That the promises of God, Were, As fresh on their minds, Then, Especially through Moses and Aaron, And those who listened to the Lord, Than they would have been, Perhaps, Uh, Between ourselves and 400 years ago, Because, 400 years previous, Joseph had died, You remember, Of course, Who Joseph was, The prime minister of Egypt, Great man, But before he died, He told his family, That his bones, Must be taken,

From Egypt, To the promised land, To the land of Canaan, Now that wasn't just, A sentimental wish, That was his way, Of believing, In God's truthfulness, That one day, He didn't know when it was, But that one day, God would once again, Lead his people Israel, Out of Egypt, And into the land, That he had promised, To give them, In the first place, And as a mark, Of his faith, In that promise, He made sure, Write it down, Remember it, Pass it on, From generation, To generation, Tell your grandchildren, Tell them to tell, Their grandchildren, That when, When, When, God comes for us,

When we're taken out of here, And when he leads us, Into the land of Canaan, Remember to take, My bones with you, It was an act of faith,

On his part, In believing God's promises, But I think there's more, Even than that, Because the book, The letter to the Hebrews, Tells us, That these men, Lived by faith, In another city, Another land, A land that was still to come, The land, That we have never seen yet, The land that is in the future for us, The city that's in the future for us, A city that Hebrews tells us, Is without foundation, Whose builder and maker is God, Why was it that Joseph specifically, Asked his family to take his bones with him, What meaning do bones have, Long after you're dead, They have every meaning if you're a Christian, Because we believe that one day, Christ will come, And he will raise our bodies, And it doesn't matter, If they've disintegrated to nothing, God will raise, Jesus will raise our bodies, And we will rise again, From wherever these, Our bodies have been scattered, To the four winds, And we will rise again, And we will go forever, To be with Jesus, He has the power, He's made the promise, Do you believe in that promise?

That's where faith comes in, To take hold, Of that promise of God, And that word alone, We've got nothing more, Nothing more than that at all, That we just listen, To Jesus, Who himself rose, From the dead, And by his resurrection, Because, He rose from the dead, We, Can believe in the promise, Of God as well, The third thing, We can face, An unknown future, If we are being guided, By the Lord, Himself, I want you to notice, How God chose, To guide, His own people, He did so, By doing it, Himself, This wasn't something, He was going to leave, Even to an angel,

[24 : 59] Although the angel, Who says, The angel of the Lord, Went in front of the people, With every reason to believe, That that angel, Was none other than, God himself, And we can also say that, Because of the form, The visible form, That God took, In order to lead, His people, It was a pillar of cloud, By day, And a pillar of fire, By night, Which never, Look at what it says, In verse 22, The pillar of cloud, By day, And the pillar of fire, By night, Did not depart, From before, The people, And that was true, On that first day, And it was true, On the 40th year, The pillar of cloud, Was always, In front of, The people, Of God, And that meant, That God himself, Was guiding, His own, People, Personally,

He took it, Upon himself, To guide, The people, Of, Israel, I believe today, That, The same, Is true, For every, Single, Christian, Jesus said, If you love me, He said, In John chapter 14, You can look it up, We, The father, And the son, Will make, Our abode, With him, Abode, Is an old word, For, A dwelling place, And just, As God, Made his dwelling place, Amongst the Israelites, And in front of the Israelites, God has also promised, That in Jesus, He comes, And he takes up, Residence, In the heart, And in the life, Of a Christian, And he does so,

Never to disappear, The pillar of cloud, Day by day, And the pillar of fire, Did not depart, From before the people, We also, Have that very, Same truth, Today, Now once a Christian, Realizes this, It makes a huge difference, To the way, In which we live, Our lives, For example, Every morning, Someone would come out, Of their tent, What's the first thing, That they would see? First thing, That would be right, Staring in front of them, Was, The presence, And the glory, Of God, And I can't think, Of a better way, To start the day, Than to see, The glory of the Lord, In front of me, You say, How can you do that?

By opening my Bible, And by remembering, Just as each one, Of these Israelites, Had to, By remembering, Who I belong to, And who I serve, By remembering, By remembering, That I'm not here, To please myself, I'm here, To serve God, And to obey him, And to love him, You know, As Christians, We will never, Be satisfied, Until we're serving God, Because God has put, An appetite, In our hearts, That can only, Be satisfied, By living with him, And serving him, And walking close, And living close, To him, I suppose, That from time to time, The Israelites, Got used to the cloud, That must have been, A huge, Huge, Imagine, Imagine getting used, To such an, The glory of the Lord, Imagine becoming accustomed,

[28 : 51] To having the glory of the Lord, Amongst you, That must have been awful, But we can do the same, We can become accustomed, So much that we lose sight, Of the great promises, And the great truth, That God, Has given, To us, But it also means, That I know, The guidance, Of God, You know, For many Christians, Guidance is a real problem, And there are times, In our lives, When we have to make decisions, And we don't know, What decisions to make, And we have a, And we wonder, What God's will is, For us, And what God, God would want us to do, Well, I hope that, Whatever decision, That you and I make, In life, The very first question, That we ask is, What does God, Want me to do?

I hope that, I hope that we pray, About these decisions, And know, That when we do pray, And as we do pray, That God hears us, And he will give us, The right answer, But it's one thing, To ask God, To show us, What is decision, It's another thing, To be willing to do it, Why do I say that? Because, So much of modern life, Is about, Doing things to please me, It's the kind of world, We live in, We live for happiness, Don't we? We're told all the time, That our objective in life, Our aim, Our goal in life, Is to be happy, But sometimes, God's way, Is not the way, That's going to make us happy, God doesn't promise us happiness, The way that, The world outside, Looks for happiness, The important thing, Is to do, What God wants us to do, And then, We will know, A joy, That only he can give us, And a fulfillment, That only he can give us, The most important thing, Is to put God first, What did Jesus say?

Seek ye first, The kingdom of God, And his righteousness, And all these things, Will be added, To you, Many Christians are troubled, With this question, What, I wonder what God's plan is, For my life, You'll hear even Christians, Saying this, How can I know, God's will, For my life, How can I know, God's will, Well I'm going to say something, That perhaps you might, Even disagree with, Go away and discuss it, Think about it, I believe you, Don't know, What God's will is, For your life, And I believe also, That it's not important, To know, God's will, For your life, I believe, That the important thing, Is to, Do God's will, Every day,

And as we, Do God's will, Like the Israelites, Living with God, Was a day by day, Experience, And it was no use, Them asking, What's God going to do, In the next two years, Because God wasn't going to, Tell them what he's going to do, In the next two years, They had to live, Every day, For God, They had to get up, In the morning, And all their daily routine, Was centered, Around the presence, And the glory of God, And that's the way, We need to live as well, And as we live, Day by day, For God, And in obedience to him, Then don't worry, About knowing, What God's will is, Because you'll be doing it, Every day, Is a day, With Jesus, And every day, Is a step closer, To God, Keeping his ultimate promise, That, He will build,

[32 : 57] A new heaven, And a new earth, And he will take us, To be, With, Himself, Let's pray, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Our Father in heaven, We pray now, That you will, Enrich our minds, And we pray that, What we've been thinking about, Today, Will be the spark, That, Lights up, A fire in our hearts, A fire of knowledge, In which we, Seek to know you, More and more, And seek, In which we seek to, Walk with you, And live with you, More and more, And understand, Your ways, And your character, And your nature, Lord, We pray that you will, Make every day, A day of discovery, When we discover, Something else, About our saviour, And as we do that, We pray, That we will, Love you, All the more, For what you have done for us, In Jesus name, Amen, Amen, Amen,