

## Exodus 13:17-14:31

### Crossing the Sea

#### A difficult problem

What is the most intractable problem facing humanity?

Think about it.

Is it drugs?

The need for pure drinking water?

Overpopulation?

Disease?

War?

Racism?

Degradation of the environment?

Our own personal shortcomings?

Violence?

Hatred?

Poverty?

Not according to God.

According to God, the most intractable human problem is the one within human beings.

The most intractable human problem is the heart of humans.

It is their disposition towards sin.

It is their independence.

Today we are going to have a look at THE great act of salvation in the Old Testament.

And as we do, I want you to ask what it has to say to us about sin.

How does it deal with sin?

How does it impact on this most difficult of all human problems?

#### The Story of the Exodus

##### **Introduction (13:17-22)**

In the introduction to the story we are told a number of things:

- God cares for his people – He knows that they are not ready for war (as we will see!) and so he leads them by a less dangerous route.
- Moses takes the bones of Joseph with them. On this death bed, Joseph had looked forward in hope to God bringing them out of Egypt. Though he has been long dead, his hope is about to be realised. God is about to give the land he promised to Abraham to his people.
- God begins to lead his people with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. This will be his characteristic way of leading them in the future days as they travel to the promised land.

##### **God's Plan (14:1-4)**

- 'I will harden'

- ‘Pharaoh will pursue’

We have had hints throughout the story that everything that has happened in Egypt has happened according to a well thought out plan.

God has known from the beginning what he is about.

He has planned his activities.

And his planning has a purpose.

This is spelt out in verse 4:

### **God’s Purpose (14:4)**

- ‘I will gain glory’
- ‘The Egyptians will know’

God’s purpose is his own glory.

It is that he is known in the world.

That he is recognised as God.

And that the Egyptians know him as God.

### **God’s People (14:10ff)**

Verses 5-9 tell us how things develop.

As God had predicted, Pharaoh’s heart becomes hard.

He realises that they are not just gone for 3 days.

And he realises that he has lost a large and valuable source of labour.

And so he gathers his forces.

Notice the repetition of the references to chariots.

Chariots were the deadliest elements of the ancient military arsenal.

And charioteers were the elite warriors.

These men and many others are gathered together.

And according to God’s plan and purpose they set out against the Israelites.

Verses 10ff focus in on the people of God.

We are told a number of things.

First, we are told in verse 10 that they ‘cry out’.

The Hebrew word for ‘cry out’ is the same one that is used in 2:23 when the Israelites cried out to God and he remembered his covenant.

They are terrified by the army and they tell Moses that they would prefer being back in slavery than being here.

Second, we are told of God’s response through Moses.

He says a number of things to his people:

- ‘Don’t be afraid.’ (13)
- ‘Stand firm’ (13)
- ‘Keep still’ (14)
- ‘you will see deliverance’ (i.e. ‘salvation’) (13)
- ‘The Lord will fight for you’ (14)

### **God’s Provision (14:15ff)**

In verses 15ff we are told of God’s provision.

He has provided Moses the deliverer.

And he uses this human agent to do his purposes.

Moses is to raise his staff again and God will part the water (16)

Later he will stretch out his hand again and God will drive the sea back and turn it into dry land (21).  
God provides another act of creation.  
Just as he divided the land from the sea in Genesis 1, so he divides the sea here.  
The Israelites walk through.  
The Egyptians follow.  
Then Moses stretches out his hand again.  
And the Lord acts as a warrior and fights for his people.  
The sea falls back into place and the Egyptians are drowned in it.  
Lastly, God's provision draws out a response from the Israelites.  
Look at verse 31.  
The Israelites see God's great power.  
They see his provision for them.  
And they fear the Lord and put their trust in him.

## **Interpreting the Exodus**

### ***Planned***

Now let's have a go at interpreting these events.  
The first thing I want to say is that throughout the rest of the OT these events are regarded as a pattern for the way God saves.  
They are a pattern for God's salvation.  
If this is so, what do we learn about the way God saves?  
Well, there are a number of things.  
We learn that God is a God who carefully plans.  
We have seen this throughout Exodus 1-14.  
We have seen this throughout the story of the Bible from Genesis 1 to Exodus 14.  
We will see it again and again throughout the Bible.  
God is a God who plans.  
He sees us as we are.  
He sees the world as it is.  
He sees his own desires for us and his world.  
And he plans for how his desires will be put into place.  
Often in the Bible he then tells his prophets about those plans.  
And then he goes about fulfilling them in accord with his word to his prophets.  
God is a God who makes plans and fulfils them.

### ***Purposeful***

This brings us to the second thing that is evident in this story.  
Although God is a God who plans, his plans have a purpose.  
He plans according to this purpose.  
He plans and acts so that his purpose will be fulfilled.  
Now in our story he has told us of his purpose.  
His purpose is threefold:

1. That he might be glorified;
2. That his people might be saved; and
3. That Egypt (and Israel) might know that he is God and that Israel might fear him and put their trust in him.

You can see how the Exodus is a pattern for God's action in all of history, can't you.

After all, as we read through the Bible I think it is clear that God's plans and actions in the world are just like this.

For example, we learn from the New Testament that God's actions in Jesus are:

1. That Jesus is glorified and through this God is glorified;
2. That God's people are saved; and
3. That the world might put their trust in God through putting their trust in Jesus.

Notice that each of these purposes are dependent on none but God himself.

And we can see that here in our passage today as we have seen it throughout the Exodus story.

You see, the purposes of God are totally from God.

God alone is the agent of salvation in this passage.

God alone works salvation.

God alone accomplishes the rescue of Israel.

They simply walk through the water.

They simply benefit from God's actions.

They simply trust what God has done for them.

### ***The problem with the Exodus***

So, the events of the Exodus reveal God to us.

They show us the God we know from the rest of the Bible.

A God who plans.

And a God who has a purpose.

A God who alone is the agent of salvation.

But the events of the Exodus also show us a problem that has been evident since Genesis 1.

I want you to take a look at a few verses with me.

Take a look at Exodus 14:11.

What do you notice?

What stands out in the passage?

What is so staggering given the previous 13 chapters?

Surely it is the fact that Israel does not yet understand.

They don't yet trust God.

Now look at 14:31.

Here we are told that Israel fears God and trusts him.

Now look at Exodus 15:22ff.

Three days have passed since God rescued them from the Egyptians at the Red Sea.

The Israelites grumble that God is not looking after them.

As the story goes on, we will find that the not only doubt God's provision for them.

They actively rebel against him.

The point I want to make is this.

You see, the Exodus is THE great event in the Old Testament.

Moses is THE great deliverer in the Old Testament.

This rescue, this deliverance, these great acts of power, are the foundation stones on which the covenant between God and Israel was made.

But what I want you to notice is that no matter how great this rescue was it still left Israel with one great problem.

The great problem is sin.

The plagues...

The Exodus...

The giving of the law in Exodus 19...

Could not stop the people of God from doubting God.

The plagues...

The Exodus...

The giving of the law in Exodus 19...

Could not stop the Israelites from rebelling against God in the wilderness and throughout their history.

You see, the great human problem is sin.

It is seeking to be independent from God.

It is doubting God's goodness.

It is wanting to be the master or mistress of your own destiny.

You see, the Exodus might have been the great OT act of deliverance and salvation.

But the truth of the matter is that it did not solve the problem of sin.

After and even during the rescue, the Israelites are still sinful.

Their hearts are still not changed.

Sin has still not been dealt with.

As Psalm 106 says – 'Israel forgot all that God had done for them.'

## **Solving the problem with the Exodus**

It is this problem that the New Testament addresses.

Come with me to the book of Hebrews.

The book of Hebrews is addressed to people who had become Christians but were in danger of slipping back to being Jews.

The person who wrote Hebrews therefore spends a lot of time comparing the old covenant with the new covenant that came into effect with Jesus.

At every point he explains that Jesus is superior to the old.

For example, it was often thought that the old covenant was delivered by angels to Moses.

Look at Hebrews 1.

It tells us how Jesus is superior to angels.

He is superior because he is not just God's representative or God's messenger.

Jesus is God's Son (Hebrews 1:1-3).

In chapter 3 we are told that Jesus is superior to Moses because Moses was just a servant of God where Jesus is God's Son (Hebrews 3:1-6).

In chapters 5ff we are told that Jesus is superior to Aaron and all the other Old Testament priests.

They were priests who were sinful themselves.

They could only offer the blood of animals.

And the blood of animals could never deal with sin.

And their priesthood was transitory.

However, Jesus was a priest forever.

Jesus was perfect in his obedience to God (Hebrews 5:7ff).

What's more, he didn't offer the blood of animals.

No.

Instead, he offered his own blood.

And his blood was sufficient to cleanse the worshipper from sin and a guilty conscience.

This is the point of Hebrews 8:7ff.

[Read and explain]

You see, the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is that sin was dealt with.

In the new covenant, Jesus dies and sin is therefore forgiven.

There is nothing that stands between us and God.

God forgives our wickedness.

He remembers our sins no more.

Now look at Hebrews 10:15ff.

At this point the author begins to draw his argument about the superiority of Jesus to a close.

And as he does so, he makes some points of application.

He draws out the impact of the new covenant for those of us who are Christians.

Look at what he says.

We are people who have received a great salvation.

What then should we do in response?

Let us...

- draw near to God ...
- hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.
- Consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.
- Not give up meeting together...
- Encourage each other...

I want us to stop and think about ourselves as a congregation this evening.

You see, do you remember the Israelites?

They saw God's great salvation in the Exodus.

They saw God rescue them from slavery through plagues, the passover, and the red sea.

Their salvation was entirely the gift of God.

Yet they forgot God and his acts for them.

And they slipped away.

Let's not be like them.

Let's not be hard of heart like them.

Let's congregationally remember what God has done for us.

Let's remember that our salvation is not a salvation from slavery to Egypt.

It is a salvation from slavery to sin.

It is a salvation from a guilty conscience.

It is salvation from death.

It is salvation from the devil.

It is salvation from fear.

And having remembered... let's do what the writer of the Hebrews suggests.

Let's...

- draw near to God ourselves.
- hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.
- Consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.
- Not give up meeting together...
- Encourage each other...

These are the marks of the true Christian community.

This is what we meet together to do.

Let's keep each other honest, remembering the great salvation won for us upon the cross.