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- [0 : 0 0] I want to consider with you this evening this famous and dramatic story of God bringing the Israelites through the Red Sea.
- It must have been incredible, wasn't it, to have walked through hundreds of thousands of them with walls of sea on either side and them walking through in dry land.
- And I'm sure like many of you that's a story that I've known since I was very small and I've often wondered, you know, did the children put their hands into the walls of water on either side?
- What was it like to have gone through? But there are important lessons for you and I in this story about God and faith and how we react to our circumstances.
- This is what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10 and verses 11 to 13. He says, These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come.
- [1 : 1 5] So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall. So this, and we're in no doubt that he's referring to this particular event amongst others because he specifically references it in verse 1 of 1 Corinthians 10 where he talks about how they all passed through the sea.
- And he says these things, this story included, has been written down as warnings for us. So there's lessons for us to learn about how we live in 2014 from this great story of old.
- Now what we're going to do is start in the middle of the story. In Exodus chapter 14 and verses 11 and 12.
- This is going to be our starting point. They're terrified and they say to Moses, Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?
- What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? At this point in the story where we're going to begin, the people are trapped. There is the Red Sea on one side and there is the Egyptian army on the other side.
- [2 : 3 3] And this is the point then we're going to start. There are four points that I want to make and this is the first one. The first one is this, the danger they could see. The reason that they cry out in panic is because what they can see.
- We're told of that in 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.
- So what these people can see is on one side is sea. And if you walk into sea, then generally, especially this kind of thing, you're going to drown. And on the other side is this huge army which is coming in pursuit of them.
- And if there are any doubt as to the size of the army, we're told about that in verse 7. He took, this is Pharaoh, 600 of the best chariots along with all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them.
- So here they are being pursued by the world's most powerful army. And this army has the very best and latest in army technology, the chariot.

[3 : 45] Now we think of the chariot as a bit primitive and basic, you know, and we live in the age of nuclear weapons and jet fighters and so forth. But in that day and age, having a chariot was a huge strategic advantage.

And here we're told that Pharaoh has 600 of the best and more besides. And here they come then in hot pursuit.

And as the Israelites look at the situation, there's nowhere to hide. They are in a dangerous and desperate situation.

They're either going to be drowned or they're going to be massacred or they're going to be captured. And they start to think, we were better off where we were before.

Okay, we were slaves. But at least we knew the routine. We shouldn't have upset them with all those plagues and trying to come out and worship our God.

[4 : 47] We're no better off here. In fact, we're worse off. And they let rip. They get angry at Moses. It's all his fault. After all, he's the leader that brought them out into this situation.

And they say, didn't we say to you in Egypt? This is verse 12. Leave us alone. Let us serve the Egyptians. There's actually no record that they actually said that.

But they're frightened. And they're sulking. And they're panicked. And they're nervous. And they're preoccupied by what they can see. Now, I guess that none of us has faced this particular combination of circumstances.

But you may have felt exactly the same way as they did. Hemmed in. Trapped. And everything in your life seems to be unraveling.

Perhaps you have money worries. Or job insecurities. Or relationship challenges. Or the plans and vision and dream for the church just don't seem to be going as you would hope.

[6 : 02] And you can look at your circumstances. And everything about them says to you, get depressed. Get worried. Get frightened. Be nervous. That was the danger they could see.

Second point is the realities they had forgotten. You see, from what they could see, their reaction was understandable.

From what God had just been doing with them, their reaction is totally bizarre. Let's just remind ourselves what has just happened in these people's life and experience.

They have just experienced the most dramatic rescue ever. Being set free from Egypt. And God had brought all these different plagues, remember?

And how he had confronted Pharaoh and forced Pharaoh to acknowledge that the Lord indeed was God and to let them go. And the final plague was the Passover where the firstborn was struck dead.

[7 : 12] Unless there was blood on the lintel of the doors, in which case God passed over. And after 430 years in captivity, Pharaoh lets them go.

600,000 men and their families and their animals left Egypt with the full blessing of the Egyptians, who were just glad to see them go.

Now, who had accomplished this great deliverance? Well, clearly God had. He had intervened in the most incredible ways. This is what the people had just experienced just a few weeks before, a few days before.

Now, the narrative of Exodus 13, verses 17 through to 14, 4 really makes one big point. And the big point that it makes is that God was continuing to lead and guide his people.

You see, he had not just rescued them and got them out of Egypt. And as soon as they crossed the border, as though God said, right, okay, off you go now. I've done my job. You know, you find your own way. The whole point of the narrative is to say that God was instrumental in every aspect and detail of where he was taking them to.

- [8 : 33] Let's just see it. So verses 17 and 18 underline for us that he was directing them. So God didn't lead them on the most direct route. But he said they were unprepared for that.
- So God himself led them by the desert road towards the Red Sea. You see, he knew that they weren't prepared for the shortest route, the opposition that they might face.
- And so he himself directed them in a longer way. Verse 19 is an emphasis on the fact that God had kept his promise to Joseph.
- You see, back at the end of the book of Joseph. Sorry, the book of Joseph. The book of Genesis, even. Just making sure you were awake and listening.
- In Genesis chapter 50 and verse 25, Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, God will surely come to your aid and then you must carry my bones up from this place.
- [9 : 34] So Exodus 17, 19 is to remind us that God had spoken through Joseph that one day they would be led out. And Joseph said, don't bury me. Just keep my bones until the day that you go and then take my bones with you and then you can bury them.
- And that's now happening. It's a reality. God had kept his promise. And God was with them at every point of the way.
- Verses 20 and 21 describe how God was visibly with them all the time. The pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire which went before them by day and by night.
- It's what we call a theophany. An appearance of God. An outward display of his glory. His personal presence was with them.
- So if at any point the people doubted, are we going the right ways? Is God still with us? They only had to look. And their invisible form, whether a day or night, was a visible symbol to them of God's presence amongst his people.
- [10 : 45] And then chapter 14 opens by God telling them what's going to happen. He tells them to turn back.
- And Pharaoh will think you don't know what you're doing. And Pharaoh is going to come after you. And then I'm going to give you a great victory. It's not like God had left any details out.
- Now as a military strategy, it's lunacy. God basically tells them to go back and camp by the sea, look vulnerable.
- I'm going to send the Egyptians out and then I'm going to accomplish another great victory. See, God had a plan to trick the Egyptians into pursuing them. And then God would show that he truly was God and Lord and King so that no one could doubt it.
- And God had shared this plan with them so that the Israelites could be prepared and ready and expectant.
- [11 : 52] But when they saw Pharaoh and his chariots, it's as though all of that information just disappeared out of their heads.
- And all they could see was an army and chariots and on the other side, sea. And they seemed to completely forget the fact that God had just rescued them from Egypt.
- God had just been making the point that he was with them, that the cloud of fire and the pillar of cloud and fire were with them.
- And that God had told them exactly what was going to happen. They seemed to forget all of those things. Do we not often do the same?
- We think about life by what we can see. And we forget God.

[12 : 55] Maybe you're saying, yeah, but we're not in the same situation as them. We've not been rescued from slavery by the Passover in the last few days. It's not like God has promised his presence with us by a fire or by a cloud.

You and I, if we are believers in the Lord Jesus, if we're God's children, we have been rescued by something greater than the Passover. We have been rescued by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But we don't have God with us all the time. So why does it say in Hebrews 13, 5, never will I leave you nor forsake you? Why does it say in 1 Peter 4, 14 that we have the Holy Spirit with us?

But God hasn't told us his plans like he told them. He may not have told us the specific detail like he did them. But God has told us the general outline of what is to happen.

He's told us that in this world you will have trouble. John 16, 33. But he tells us to take heart and have peace in him because he has overcome the world.

[14 : 15] So as we think about life, we should expect that there will be trouble because Jesus has said you will have trouble in this world. But that's not to depress us but because we're to take heart because he has overcome the world.

And we know that he is taking us home to be with him. And we know that his plan is to gather people from every tribe and tongue and nation and to gather them together as one great church of redeemed people to enjoy and worship him forever and ever.

But these too often are the truths that we forget. And we look at our circumstances and we only look at them with earthly eyes.

And we forget the reality that God has saved us and God has made promises. And God is with us. And God has plans.

And sometimes God will put us in a position just like he did them where they're trapped. And sometimes God will put us into circumstances where we are trapped.

[15 : 27] To force us to look beyond our circumstances and to look to the God who is over all things. So that he will have all the glory and all the praise.

And that there isn't any obvious human solution to this dilemma that we find ourselves in. Because he wants us to trust him to sort it out. That leads us to the third point.

And that is the answer they received. Chapter 14 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. You see by what they could see the Israelites thought they were in immense danger.

[16 : 31] On one side is sea. On the other side is a huge army with chariots coming marching towards them. But they weren't in any danger at all.

When they looked at it from God's point of view. Because they were right where God wanted them to be. And the issue that was at stake they thought was their lives.

Are we going to survive? But actually the issue that was at stake was God's glory. And God would protect his name and his reputation and his glory at any cost.

Was God so weak that he was going to rescue his people out of Israel to out of Egypt. And then dump them by the Red Sea to watch them drown or be slaughtered by the Egyptians.

Of course not. And so Moses says to them do not be afraid. Stand firm.

[17 : 30] Be still. It's a negative imperative. A command to do nothing but to trust in God. Moses was not comforting the people.

He was rebuking them. They had no right to be afraid. They had no reason to fear. Just think of all that they'd gone through.

All that God had been teaching them. Now was their chance to bring all of that truth to reality upon their situation. And they needed to learn to stand firm in that truth and in that reality.

They were perfectly safe in the arms of God. And they needed to stand and to trust and to watch him intervene and save them. And they needed to do something. And they needed to do something. Amen.

I'm no military strategist. But just standing still isn't usually great military advice.

[18 : 32] the difference is that these people have God with them he was their warrior and what they needed to do was to trust him and to watch him intervene on their behalf and save them and this is the lesson I believe of this passage that you and I need to learn time and time again to trust God rather than panic you see God has saved us he saved us by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ dying on the cross but God is also saving us in the present tense day by day he is keeping us and saving us and working out his purposes and God also will save us in the sense that he will keep us and take us to heaven and to glory to be with him and you can talk about saving in all those tenses of past and of present and of future yes Satan is against us and yes we live in a bad world where there is trouble and hardship and difficulty but we have to learn that instead of running or worrying or panicking or getting in a tizzy we have to learn to trust in our saviour God and watch him solve it

Christianity is all about what God has done through the Lord Jesus Christ and this is a God who has promised that he will finish what he has begun and yes we're very good at saying yes I trust Christ and putting it in the past tense as though this is something we've done before but the call to live as a Christian is to trust him in the present and to trust him in the now and to trust him in these particular circumstances that you and I face tonight and tomorrow morning the Lord Jesus Christ has atoned for sin he's turned aside God's wrath he offers us perfect righteousness he is risen again from the dead and once we have put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ we must learn to stand our ground when Paul writes to the Ephesians in Ephesians 6 he tells them to do the same thing

Ephesians chapter 6 again he's using the idea of warfare and the armour of God and he says this finally be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes for our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers against the authorities against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms therefore put on the full armour of God so when the day of evil comes you may be able to stand your ground and after you have done everything to stand stand firm then did you get it?

stand stand stand stand Spurgeon says that's what we're being called to do and sometimes God puts us into a corner to help us to learn this truth and this reality and he puts us in a corner where we can do nothing and we those of us who like to plan and to strategise we look and examine and we say should I do this?

should I do this? and we find we can't do anything God has cut off every option for us to do and all he says to us is you must just trust me I can see it all I'll get you out but you've got to trust me we have to learn to help one another with this too when the people are panicking Moses did not say ah I understand it's a terribly big army they've got a lot of chariots must be really frightening for you all but that's what we do isn't it?

[23 : 29] when people are overwhelmed by their circumstances we come with just with sympathy too often we say ah it's terrible and yes there is a time to be sympathetic but sometimes there is a time to challenge wrong thinking too and to say look you're only looking at things from one particular angle you have failed to see that there is a whole another dimension and dynamic which you are not bringing to bear which is the reality of what God has said and this truth needs to be applied to this situation that's what Moses did didn't he?

he rebuked them telling them to stand firm to trust God this wasn't a time to be wavering and just offering sympathy these people needed to grow up and to learn and to build on what God had done and was doing and to trust him and sometimes we have to lovingly challenge and rebuke unbelief because that's what it is isn't it?

when we just look at our circumstances and think that everything is a total disaster basically we're saying that I'm going to read life by what I can see rather than what God has said that's called unbelief faith is about applying what God has said to these circumstances and trusting him in it and this is where we can be of great help and encouragement to one another to bring this aspect to bear and when people are thinking very negatively about their circumstances you and I sometimes have to gently come alongside them and try and enable them to see it from a different angle to see it from God's perspective and to help them and to help one another to stand firm and to trust him in these situations recognizing that what God has promised and that he will bring it to pass just like he did last time so we've seen the danger they could see and the realities they'd forgotten and the answer they received to stand firm fourthly and finally let's talk about the rescue they experienced so verses 15 to 31 of Exodus 14 tell this incredible story of how Moses holds out his staff and God separates the water and they're able to travel through on dry land and then once they've passed through he holds out his staff again and the waters come back forth and the Egyptians are all drowned and God causes the wheels of their great fighting machine the chariots to come off and they're all into complete confusion and it's a great victory for God and for his people and there's lots of questions about where and how but let's be straight basically it's a miracle there was once a liberal minister preaching and he mentioned this passage and this event and somebody in the congregation shouted out praise the Lord shouting all them

Israelites what a mighty miracle the minister said remember he's a liberal it's no miracle they just picked their way through marshland in six inches of water to which the man shouted out praise the Lord drowning all those Egyptians in just six inches of water what a mighty miracle God did this for his own glory showing the Egyptians and the Israelites that he was God and none other is and he judged them the Egyptians in their hardened unbelief and their refusal to acknowledge him as God yes they had let the people go they had been backed into a corner that they couldn't perform the miracles that Moses could do but Pharaoh whilst he was starting to see the reality kept hardening his heart against God he would never bow the knee and acknowledge him as the Lord and King and God and that's what happens if you keep hardening your heart against God eventually he will judge you but in the same act of judgment upon the Egyptians for their hardness and rejection of God

God rescues his own precious people and makes a name for himself by all his power and that's why Paul will refer to this in 1 Corinthians 10 as we read and to talk about how they passed through the sea and they were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea and they all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them and that rock was Christ nevertheless God was not pleased with most of them their bodies were scattered over the desert now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did so we need to heed the lessons of what they were learning as God rescued them and brought them through and you and I need to trust God to take us through all the circumstances of our lives now I don't know what's going on in your life

[29 : 39] I don't know what the things are that would make you worried and scared and frightened there could be all sorts of things but this story has been written that we might as we observe them panicking but then God rebuking them and rescuing them that we might learn from them and not respond in the same way and rather than be panicked and freaked out by our circumstances that we might learn to stand and to trust in God that he will care for us as his people as he has promised and he will find a way to lead us through and to guide us out and provide a way out for us you see it's about persevering faith and the journey of faith that we are called to as Christian believers is not just simple trust in the Lord

Jesus Christ to save us and to rescue us from our sins yeah that's the the centre of it but it's it is it grows bigger than that it's to encompass every aspect of life that now we know God and we trust him as our heavenly father and that when difficult circumstances come things that would throw us off course we will persevere and keep going that we will trust him we won't give up on this God who has promised to keep us and to save us and to bring us through all of these challenges and difficulties and to bring us ultimately home to glory will you trust him day by day maybe you're tempted to give up maybe you thought this being a Christian is much harder than I ever thought well this passage is an encouragement and a challenge to us not to give up but to persevere to keep trusting in our good God because he has promised to complete that work which he has begun and just as he rescued them from their circumstances so he will rescue us from our circumstances and bring us home to be with him forever and ever let's heed the words that Moses said 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 let's pray

Father in heaven we pray that you would help us to trust you in all the circumstances of life and we confess that often like the Israelites we are overwhelmed by what we see the difficulties and the challenges that seem to mount up in front of us and can make us panic and be fearful but Lord help us to remember what you have told us in your word to remember the realities that we've already experienced by your grace in our hearts that you are a sovereign God that you do have plans that you are with us that you do know what you're doing help us to trust you even in the most difficult of circumstances and not run from you but to you and to find your grace to be sufficient for our every need and Lord we pray you'd help us to help one another to stand firm in the promises that you have made to us and Lord we pray that we might then have the joy of knowing you guiding and leading and giving us great victory through our circumstances unto glory because this is what you have promised in this world yes we will have trouble but we are to take heart because you have overcome the world make us a people of persevering faith we pray we ask in Jesus name and for his glory

Amen we're going to sing as we close 7 6 3 we rest on thee and our shield and our shield and our shield and our shield and our shield and our shield and our shield and our shield and our shield and our shield and our shield and our shield and our shield and our shield and our shield and our shield and our shield and our shield