

God's Being-Saved People

Our Old Testament reading, Exodus 14:19-31, is the account of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, the central miracle of the Old Testament. The crossing of the sea is the main Old Testament symbol of the New Testament story of salvation through Christ.

Read **Exodus 14:19-31**:

¹⁹ The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them.²⁰ It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided.²² The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. ²³ The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. ²⁴ At the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. ²⁵ He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt."

²⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers."²⁷ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the LORD tossed the Egyptians into the sea. ²⁸ The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. ²⁹ But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

³⁰ Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹ Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

There's probably not a more important yet also more widely misunderstood word in our Christian vocabulary than the word "salvation." We who claim to have experienced God's saving grace need to be certain we've experienced the real thing, as real as crossing the Red Sea. I'll ask you, as would an evangelist, **are you saved, sister and brother?** But as we think about the heroic rescues of the storm victims in Texas and Florida, we should use the word "rescue" in place of "salvation,"

which has lost its relevance because of its traditional evangelism and church use. We should ask if we've been and are being rescued.

Israel's rescue through the sea was dramatic. Our experience with Christ likely hasn't been as dramatic, but it's been as real, and even more life-changing. Salvation through Christ is a life-and-destiny-changing experience that has a past, present and future dimension in Scripture. We who're in Christ speak of our having been saved, when we by grace through faith were made right with God and passed over from death to life (Jn. 5:24; Eph. 2:8f, etc.). We've been saved and are secure in Christ, yet are also continuing to be saved, and are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). And we'll be finally saved when we've passed through our earthly pilgrimage and arrive safely "on the other side," when our salvation is fully consummated and we're glorified with Christ (Jn. 17:24; 1 Jn. 3:2).

In other words, our salvation/rescue is not about getting a free ticket to heaven, about saying the right words to some evangelist that assures our going to heaven when we die. A look at the Israelites' experience of passing through the Sea should give us a more complete and realistic understanding of the greatness of God's salvation.

Salvation is God's great plan, which is often perplexing. God directed the route of the Israelites, avoiding the closest route to Canaan, which would have led them to a direct encounter with military opponents, for which they were unprepared. But then the Lord led them into a situation that was even more challenging than the first route, but was the way he chose in order to reveal his saving power. In fact, God chose a bewildering way. God led them to a place that continues to baffle scholars and one that lured the Egyptian army into an eventual entrapment and that caused the Israelites to feel totally vulnerable to attack and certain death. God's chosen path was so muddled looking that Pharaoh thought the Israelites were totally disoriented and were sitting ducks to be recaptured and returned to slavery in Egypt. So, with his heart once again hardened against God and his people, Pharaoh, having regretted the loss of the free slave labor of the Israelites, launched a full pursuit of these hapless children of God (14:1-9).

This is the way of God's plan for our salvation—always baffling and beyond our understanding. His ways are higher than ours and indeed beyond our understanding (Is. 55:8f). No human could ever devise a salvation plan through a cruel cross upon which God would sacrifice his Son in utter weakness, which to the entire world looked like a failed plan. No doubt Satan was delighted to see the arrest, condemnation and execution of God's Son on a cross. And of course, even Jesus' disciples failed to understand this way of salvation, and it didn't become clear until after his resurrection, ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit.

We all marvel at the heroism of many of the first responders, rescuing flood victims, at the risk of their lives, by helicopters, boats, and carrying victims through

treacherous waters. But Jesus didn't simply risk his life. He gave it for us sinners, experiencing the full horror of suffering and death (Rom. 5:6-8). And God works in perplexing and mysterious ways in our lives to bring us to faith and also to lead us in our faith pilgrimage. But God's plan for salvation, as the Israelites were to discover, *is always perfect.*

This route God chose for the Israelites, instead of delivering them to Pharaoh's army, resulted in their miraculous salvation. And we who're God's redeemed children can look back now and see that God knew what was best. The cross was no mere afterthought, but rather was in the mind and heart of God before the world was made (Rev. 13:8). And that's true for our salvation. We've also been in the mind and heart of God before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:4).

It's great to know God has a plan, a perfect plan, for the salvation of all who come to him, and also for your life as well. In the perfect way and at the right time, God sent his Son to rescue us (Gal. 4:4). In my life, he led me to himself through a godly home and other witnesses and influences. For others who have come to faith, God allows to wander about in a wilderness of what appear to be wasted years. And in many cases, salvation appears only a remote prospect. But God seems to specialize in what seems unlikely, just as was his plan for our rescue. As you look back over your life, you can say with David, "He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (Ps. 23:3).

I'm sure military strategists would have disagreed with God's plan for the Israelite's escape. We can actually expect to be on paths that make no sense to us. But we must trust that God knows what he's doing. *Salvation is by God's power.* The Israelites were being pursued by the greatest military power of the time, with the feared light chariots, which were the world's most advanced fighting machines. They found themselves trapped between this advancing army and the "deep blue sea."

The Hebrew "Yam Suph," is Sea of Reeds. No one knows this exact location, but likely it was a northern extension of the Suez waterway, perhaps a large lake, a term often interchangeable with sea. For example, the large Lake of Galilee is often referred to as the Sea of Galilee. With our text, liberal scholars attempt to give a naturalistic explanation of the crossing of what they picture for us as a swampy marsh rather than a formidable lake or sea. Seeing videos of the pushing back the waters of the ocean and gulf around Florida should convince even the most skeptical that parting the waters of a great body of water is no problem for God. We saw photos of the floor of the gulf, with Hurricane Irma having forced the waters away from shore.

Whatever the historical setting, the Israelites knew a formidable body of water confronted them as an impossible obstacle, necessitating the miraculous intervention of God Almighty. God will put us in a position to make us painfully aware of our total powerlessness to save ourselves. The Israelites stood helplessly between an

unconquerable army and an impassable body of water. Only God could deliver them. Christ alone can save us from the power of sin and the penalty of death and give eternal life, forgiving our sins and transforming us into the re-born children of God. By grace God calls us to take our eyes off ourselves and instead look in faith to Jesus. Jesus commands us to stop fearing and look to him in faith, as he did the disciples in the storm (Mk. 4:40).

When the Israelites realized their apparently deadly dilemma, they cried out that they would have been better off serving as slaves to the Egyptians than to die in the desert. Moses' subsequent challenge is translated a bit weakly, and is more of an angry rebuke than a word of comfort and encouragement. Instead of saying "Stand still," Moses more likely said, "Shut up!" (Enns), which is the way *The Message* paraphrases verse 14:

"God will fight the battle for you. And you? You keep your mouths shut!"

The Lord alone has provided for our salvation and calls us to look to him alone, to stop our whining and cease our fearful fretting and place our trust in him alone. Faith is simply responding to God's word and promises, taking our eyes off our fears, our questions and our objections. After we have come to faith in Christ, we're to live by faith in him, surrendering to him our doubts and fears and looking to him as our faithful rescuer (Col. 2:6). We need to be reminded, when we begin to fret, whine and fear, to "shut up!" and trust the Lord and the promises in his word. As we see with the Israelites, God in his great power in salvation *delivers us to the "other side."*

The crossing of the sea becomes a graphic picture of God's great power of salvation, more powerful than any hurricane. Paul says that we are saved through faith in Christ Jesus by an even greater power of God—the working of "his incomparably mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion...." (Eph. 1:19ff).

What power it took for God to give Jesus the victory over sin, Satan, death and the dominion of darkness and raise him from the dead and then give him power and dominion over the universe as the reigning King of kings and Lord of lords! And that power of God is what delivers us from sin, guilt and condemnation and carries us over to the other side, the side of safe entry into the Kingdom of God.

The great salvation of God in this exodus of his people is more *deliverance to* somewhere than *deliverance from*. One scholar describes Yahweh, the great I Am of the crossing of the Red Sea, as "the companionate God," one who is our faithful companion, having brought us into a personal relationship with him and who remains with us forever (Motyer). We are still being and will be finally rescued.

We were impressed to see photos and videos of rescuers carrying storm victims through deep and treacherous waters. So also, our salvation/rescue isn't through

our baptism or church attendance or praying a pre-formed prayer with an evangelist. It's simply giving ourselves over to the rescuing arms of the crucified, risen Jesus, and letting him carry us all the way through our mortal life into eternity.

It's good to reflect upon and testify to our salvation experience regarding what happened to us in the past; but we need to emphasize what God is doing in us now and also include where he is leading us—to complete Christ-likeness. This is through the great power of God, his mighty wind that divided the sea, and the mighty Holy Spirit, who has blown upon us and who works his unseen hurricane wind for our good and his glory. I confess to you that, though I was saved many years ago, I still need to be saved, and delivered from my sinful nature by the powerful wind of God. And, just as the ocean and gulf waters came surging back to shore, and as God sent the waters surging over the army of the pharaoh, so has God's grace, mercy and full forgiveness washed over our past, washed away all sin, guilt and shame, giving us a new start and hope for a glorious eternity.

What we see in these closing verses is the work of God in making these fearful, complaining and doubting Israelites into worshipers, who at this point at least, fear God “and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant” (14:31). When we realize Christ has defeated and forever broken sin's power over us, we're free to live for God a life of joyful obedience. Using the language of passing through the sea, Jesus says that whoever hears his word and believes the one who sent him “has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has *crossed over* from death to life” (Jn. 6:24).

So, are you being rescued, saved, carried by Jesus?