

Through the sea

Intro

Good morning. I'm going to be looking at the next in our series of studies in Exodus. Today we are focusing on Chapters 13 to 15 and the climax of the Israelites escape from slavery in Egypt as they cross through the sea to freedom.

How do you celebrate momentous events in your life, those things you don't want to ever forget? I think the contemporary way is to take a photo, perhaps a selfie to post on social media or a group photo to put on the wall. In the past great victories have been celebrated and remembered with monuments and statues. In Exodus chapter 15 we see that the Israelites celebrated crossing the Red Sea, and their rescue from slavery, with a song of worship. This is not a Hollywood blockbuster version where they celebrate their personal rescue and freedom but a song of worship wholly focused on the victory of their Almighty God. God has fulfilled what he promised to Moses (Exodus 6:6) and he has stretched out his mighty hand to lead the people he has redeemed out of slavery and through the sea and out the other side (Ex 15: 12-13).

As we examine the story of the great and marvellous deed of our Lord God Almighty what can we learn about God's righteous ways? In our current state of uncertainty and change what does it mean to follow a God who is unchanging, and who is victorious?

Exodus story so far

This biblical narrative of the exodus of Israel from Egypt is a gripping story full of detail. They escape in the middle of the night (Ex 12:31), accompanied by many others, probably Egyptians (Ex 12:38), they leave with material wealth (Ex 12:35-36), and Joseph's bones (Ex 13:19), and they are accompanied by God's presence in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night (Ex 13:21-22).

However, there is just one big obstacle in their way. God has led them the long way round, by the desert road, to the Red Sea (13:18). To be truly free from slavery under Pharaoh, they must pass through the sea. In our modern lives where we

have bridges, tunnels, large ferries, and even planes it is difficult for us to realise the significance of this body of water. Through the entire old testament there is no single reference to bridges. In the biblical landscape waters divide and water represents judgment.

Starting with Genesis we see that the waters above are divided from the waters below. To descend to the depths or ascend to the heavens we must pass through water. Crossing through water to a new reality is a repeated biblical theme. Noah passes through the flood to a new world, Jacob fords the river Jabbok to be given his new name Israel, Joshua crosses the Jordan into the promised land, John baptises people in the Jordan so they may enter a new kingdom.

When Moses raised his staff and stretched out his hand over the Red Sea as God instructed him (Ex 14:21), God intervened with a supernatural act. Through the mighty miracle of God dividing the waters the Israelites walk through the sea on dry land.

God's actions

This physical creation of dry land (Ex 14:21-22) is an echo of creation in Genesis (Gen 1:9). God drives back the water with a wind. This is the Hebrew word *ruach*, the same word used to describe the holy spirit, and the spirit of God hovering over the waters in Genesis 1:2.

This picture of God as the true creator set against Pharaoh the anti-creator has been with us since the beginning of Exodus. As John reminded us last week God sends the plagues to reveal to Pharaoh, and to the Israelites, that he alone is the Almighty Lord. God is the creator and sustainer of all creation and he alone can conquer chaos and bring life out of death.

Pharaoh hasn't learnt his lesson, his heart is hardened again, and he tries to follow the Israelites through the water with all the latest technology of battle, an army, horses and chariots (Ex 14:23). But just as God can command the waters to

divide in an act of creation so he can also pull apart creation and bring chaos and destruction with waters of judgment.

Israel crosses the Red Sea at night but walks in the light of God's cloud into their freedom from slavery. Egypt crosses at dawn, just as their god of the sun Ra should be rising to save them, but they are destroyed by the watery darkness.

The battle of the gods is over and Yahweh the Lord is victorious. Moses and the Israelites proclaim "Who is like you, O Lord, among the god's". Almighty God alone is worthy of worship.

Promise of a new thing

Israel's story of passing through the waters of the Red Sea, and being led to freedom by God, is their foundation narrative. It is central to their knowledge that God is faithful to his covenant promises, and is their redeemer. It is also a theme that resounds through the whole biblical narrative.

Through the psalms (Ps 66, 78,106,136) Israel is reminded of what God did for them when he parted the seas and led them on dry land. But in the prophets, in particular Isaiah and Jeremiah we see a promise of a new thing. A new exodus is coming, God is coming in judgment and waters of death but he comes with a "new thing" an act of recreation and redemption.

Paul in I Corinthians 10 and Romans chapter 6-8 retraces the redemption of God's people out of slavery in Egypt and proclaims it fulfilled in Christ. Jesus is baptised in the water of the Jordan, passing through the waters of judgment as a picture of his death and resurrection to come. Jesus himself refers to his death as a baptism in Mark 10:38.

On the cross, the waters of judgment, engulf Jesus in their chaos and the land is covered in darkness. Creation is undone in order to bring new life. On the third day, Jesus rose again and God brings life out of death, light out of darkness, freedom from slavery, salvation from judgment. The exodus is completed once and for all in the person of Jesus.

If you proclaim Jesus as your Lord and Saviour you too have entered the waters of death and passed through to new life. You stand with judgement behind you on the Eastern side of the sea as a free person.

Standing on the other side

So, is that it? The exodus from Egypt gives us an amazing picture of our Almighty God's redeeming power to rescue Israel from slavery. We too have been freed from our slavery to sin and now we are free to go our own way. I think that the exodus story we see in chapters 13 to 15 is far more challenging than that. Yes, we are set free from slavery to other god's but it is not possible for us to live lives where we serve no-one. We are made to worship, and all too quickly we will find another master to serve. As Paul reminds us in Romans 6:16 "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?".

Israel was set free from slavery (Hebrew word *aboda*) under Pharaoh so that they could properly enter into service and worship (same Hebrew word *aboda*) of Yahweh. Israel's problem is not that they are slaves and ought to be free but that they were under the authority of the wrong master and needed to be restored to their true Lord.

The same challenge applies to us now. We are redeemed by the death and resurrection of Jesus not so that we can do whatever we want and serve who we choose but so that we submit to God as king, walk in his ways, love him, serve him, obey him (Deut 10:12) and give him all our worship.

Joining in the song

Moses and all the Israelites stand on the eastern side of the sea and respond to God's redeeming act of liberation with a song of worship to their victorious God. In the book of Revelation chapter 15 after a prolonged battle where Christ is victorious all God's people stand on the far side of a sea and sing the song of "God's servant Moses and of the lamb".

Right now, we may be feeling like God has led us the long way round. We've found ourselves on the desert road, beside the Red Sea, and we have an obstacle in our way. Perhaps we feel the power of our enemy closing in behind us and there seems to be no way out.

If we put our trust in Christ as our redeemer and saviour we can hold onto the promise that God is our strength and our defence and has become our salvation. We have crossed through the sea on dry land and we were not overwhelmed by the water of judgment. We can stand as free people on the far shore because our God is victorious. So, now we are called to join the song of all God's people, and worship the God of the exodus, the great unchanging I AM, whose mighty hand parted the waters and led his people out of Egypt. He alone is our God and we will praise him.

Let's finish in prayer with the words from Exodus 15:1-3:

*"I will sing to the LORD,
for he has triumphed gloriously;
he has hurled both horse and rider
into the sea.

² The LORD is my strength and my song;
he has given me victory.

This is my God, and I will praise him—
my father's God, and I will exalt him!

³ The LORD is a warrior;
Yahweh is his name!"*

Amen