

The Great Escape or RESCUE

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[0 : 00] But I wonder if anyone has seen or heard of this movie. A few people.

Of course you have. The Great Escape, yeah. Unfortunately for those online, we can't do the soundtrack, but it has a very distinctive theme song, doesn't it?

Of course, as it says there, it's based on a true story. In 1944, during the Second World War, there was a great escape from one of the prison camps in Germany.

More than 200 captured soldiers in that camp. They dug three tunnels under the fence lines to different parts of the tree around the camp. Three tunnels they named Tom, Dick and Harry.

And on the 24th of March, 76 of them took the opportunity that a moonless night gave them to crawl through a tunnel and escape with civilian clothes and forged papers.

[1 : 15] One of them included an Australian pilot from Perth, actually. The event, of course, was made famous by that movie. And the last surviving escapee passed away just in 2019, not that long ago.

On the next slide is a picture from the movie with a head popping up out of the tunnel, which is almost comical, actually, if it weren't for the life and death situation that it was representing.

Well, today we come to another story which one Bible commentator, one Bible scholar has actually called the great escape from another life and death situation that is from Egypt.

But as we'll see, it wasn't really an escape. It was more of a rescue. Which is why the sermon title has the word escape crossed out and the word rescue instead, because God does all the work and Israel does pretty much nothing.

But this great escape leads to God's glory and Israel to a reverent fear of God. So that's where we're heading. But it begins with God's care for his people and keeping his promises.

[2 : 28] So have a look at the first paragraph of your readings there. And when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter.

For God said if they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt. So God led the people around by the desert road towards the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt ready for battle.

Last week, we saw the final plague, the plague of the firstborn son, which prompted Pharaoh to do what he did here, to finally let God's people go.

And you might remember that this is what God said would happen. So as early as chapter four of Exodus, God said to Moses, tell Pharaoh that Israel is his firstborn son and that he had to let them go.

But he didn't. And so, as we saw last week, God killed Pharaoh's firstborn son. It was just judgment. But now, finally, Pharaoh has let God's people go.

- [3 : 30] But did you notice he doesn't take them the short way to their promised land? So on the next slide is a map. And on your left is Egypt. And top right is the land of Canaan.
- And we might go to the next slide, zoom in a bit, so you can hopefully see that a bit better. Canaan is, well, it's sadly where there's fighting at the moment, the Gaza Strip. But this was the promised land.
- And Goshen is where the Israelites were in Egypt. And they could have taken the top red line across through the Philistine country up to Canaan.
- But God takes them the long way. He sends them not east, but south, southeast. Why? Well, verse 17 tells us that if they face the Philistines, if they face war, they're not ready. They'll change their mind and go back to Egypt. Which makes the end of verse 18 seem a bit odd, doesn't it? The end of verse 8, God says, look, they're not ready for war.
- [4 : 35] But the end of verse 18 says, Israelites went up out of Egypt ready for battle. What's going on here? Well, the phrase ready for battle is a Hebrew phrase that could also mean in an orderly fashion.
- Or it could mean that they simply went out of Egypt with a sword in their hands, with a few weapons. But either way, their hearts weren't ready for war.
- And God knows that. And in fact, we'll see that later on. So God cares for them by leading them the long way around for their good.
- And God continues to care for them by remaining with them as he guides them through that long way. So verse 20 and 22, the third paragraph there. After leaving Succoth, they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert.
- By day, the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way. And by night in a pillar of fire to give them light so that they could travel by day or night.
- [5 : 37] Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. You see, God goes ahead of Israel by this cloud a day, fire at night.
- And I love how comforting verse 22 is. Did you notice? God never leaves his place. Guiding them, you see, every step of the way.
- Is that not a great picture of God's care for them? You see, sometimes in life it may feel like that God is leading us the long way around, so to speak. And we wonder why he's putting us through all this.
- Wouldn't it be easier, God, if you just answered my prayer my way now? Why this long way around? And sometimes it really does feel the long way around, doesn't it?
- But here we see that he leads us even the long way for our good because he knows us and our hearts better than we know them.
- [6 : 42] He sees the bigger picture. And what's more, he guides us and never leaves or forsakes us, but helps us, guides us through that long way around.
- Just like he does for Israel here. Even when we don't understand why. Of course, the way God guides us is not by a pillar of cloud or fire, but by his spirit and word.
- God really does care for us and lead us for our good. Even when it doesn't feel like it. But he not only cares for his people, he also keeps his promises. Have a look at verse 19, the second paragraph which we skipped over.
- He says, Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the Israelites swear an oath. He had said, God will surely come to your aid and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place.
- It's a strange little verse because it actually interrupts the flow of the story. I mean, I skipped over it before and no one noticed. It's just, you know, the story doesn't miss a beat, does it?

[7 : 46] So why does the writer put it in? Because these words are signaling something significant is happening. It's like one year when I forgot my wife Michelle's birthday.

It was a Saturday morning and when she woke up, she smiled at me as though I was supposed to say something to her. So I did. I said, what? And then one of my kids came running in and said, happy birthday, mom.

And their words signaled something significant was happening. My wife's birthday and that I had forgotten again. Well, these words here signal something significant is happening.

They're signaling that God is keeping his promise. The writer quotes Joseph from the end of Genesis, which I think is on the next slide there, where Joseph says, look, I'm about to die, but God will surely come to your aid.

He will take you out of this land of Egypt to the land he promised. And so when he does, the yellow is the quote in our passage, take my bones with you.

[8 : 55] In other words, Joseph is so certain God would keep his promise of land that he wants to be buried there too. And our writer in our passage quotes Joseph to signal that it's happening now.

God is keeping this promise. And again, this is encouraging for us because God's promises can seem like they're taking a long time to be fulfilled, can't they?

They were for Israel a long time. And there was good reason for that. The Bible does give us reason for that. But the point here is that he does always keep them and to us too.

Well, this rescue begins with God who cares and keeps. But at the heart of the rescue is God who judges and saves. So at point two and chapter 14, verse one, the fourth paragraph there.

Then the Lord said to Moses, tell the Israelites to turn back and camp near Pyhrioth between Migdal and the sea. They had a camp by the sea directly opposite Baal-Zephon.

[9 : 59] Pharaoh will think the Israelites are wandering around in the land in confusion hemmed in by the desert. Now, we don't really know where these places are in verses one and two.

I think on the next slide is the map. So instead of going east up to the Philistine country, he's southeast. We think Succoth is about there. And Ethan, scholars and archaeologists, best guess, is around there.

And so after they left there, they went down to the top of the Red Sea and stopped there. Why does God do this? Well, verse three, he wants Pharaoh to think that the Israelites are wandering around in confusion hemmed in by the desert.

They don't want to try crossing the desert of Sinai. Then verse four, and I will harden Pharaoh's heart and he will pursue them.

But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army. And the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord. So the Israelites did this.

[11 : 04] You see, God tells Israel to turn back to provoke Pharaoh to change his mind, as Pharaoh does in verse five. And once Pharaoh does change his mind, God will harden or literally strengthen Pharaoh's heart to give him confidence to pursue Israel.

And now just to be clear, it's Pharaoh who changes his mind. He could have seen Israel wandering in the desert and thought, you know what? Let the desert kill them.

I'm not going to bother. I've had enough trouble with this nation already. After 10 plagues, I've had enough trouble. But he doesn't. What's more, God doesn't make Pharaoh do something that Pharaoh doesn't want to do.

Pharaoh never wanted to let the people go. He never wanted to concede that God is the true God. And so God is simply strengthening his heart after he changes his mind to do what Pharaoh wanted to do all along.

See verse five. When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, what have we done?

[12 : 18] We've let the Israelites go and lost free labor. So he and his chariot was made ready and he took his army with him. He took 600 of the best chariots along with all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over them all.

And then the Lord strengthened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites who were marching out boldly. And the Egyptians, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, horsemen and troops, pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi-Haroth, opposite Baal-Zephon.

See, Pharaoh changes his mind. God gives him encouragement to keep going and he does what he wants to do. He pursues after them with all his chariots, all his troops.

And now we're set for the big showdown. The might of Egypt versus the might of God. Whom will Israel fear more?

Well, when Israel sees Egypt's might, verse 10. As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up and there were the Egyptians marching after them. And they were terrified, greatly feared and cried out to the Lord.

[13 : 38] You see, Israel was not ready for battle, as God had said before. God was right. And if there had been any other nation, they would have turned back to Egypt.

But it's Egypt chasing them. In fact, look what they say in verses 11 and 12. They said to Moses, was it because there was 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?

Didn't we say to you in Egypt, leave us alone, let us serve the Egyptians? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert. I mean, it's an extraordinary comment to make, isn't it?

Is not seeing 10 plagues enough to trust God and his servant Moses? Is it not enough to fear God more than fearing the Egyptians?

But they say, you should have left us in Egypt. Sadly, they fear their situation rather than trusting God again and again in history.

[14 : 43] But before we're too harsh with them, we can sometimes respond the same way, can't we? Especially in the face of overwhelming odds. Especially when we cannot see a way out of our health situation, our job situation, our family situation.

Especially when our prayers are not being answered the way we would like. We can fear our situation rather than having faith in God, can't we?

Despite God caring for us in the past, despite him keeping his promises in Jesus. It is sometimes easy to fear the situation, sometimes hard to have faith in God.

And so Moses encourages them in verse 13 and 14, top of the next page there. Do you see what Moses is saying?

God is going to do all the work. The Lord will fight for you. You're going to see the deliverance of the Lord. This is not a great escape. Israel contributes nothing.

[16 : 09] They don't dig any tunnels or forge any papers or fight any Egyptians. All they're to do is to stand firm and be still in trust in their hearts.

Not stand firm and be still with their feet, because they're actually told to move with their feet towards the sea. So verse 15. Then the Lord said to Moses, why are you crying out to me?

Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch it out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.

I will strengthen the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army through his chariots and his horsemen.

The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen. Now in verse 15, it seems like Moses complained to God about Israel complaining to him.

[17 : 12] But God says, stop it, move on. For God is about to work through Moses to part the Red Sea for Israel. And he's about to strengthen the Egyptians hearts to follow.

But not before he gives the Egyptians one more chance to go home. You see, in verse 19 and 20, the third paragraph there, there's this calm before the storm.

This pause before the judgment. The angel of the Lord in the pillar of cloud moves between Egypt and Israel. And for the whole night, Egypt has darkness while Israel has light.

And neither side goes near the other. But why this pause? Why not just part the Red Sea now and go through now? Is it because God needs time for the east wind to kind of blow back the waters?

In verse 21, he certainly uses all night for the east wind to blow back the sea. But he's God who created the world. He didn't need all night. Or was it because Israel wanted to cross through the Red Sea early the next morning?

[18 : 24] As the sun was coming up, it gives them a bit of light to see where they're going. Well, of course not. They had the pillar of fire so they could travel by night. Rather, I wonder if God is giving Egypt one last warning to go home before he strengthens their hearts to chase Israel into the sea to their doom.

You see, what was the plague just before the terrible judgment of Egypt's firstborn sons? The ninth plague. Can anyone remember? I've got some chocolates.

I had to look it up too. Plague of darkness. There's a lot of darkness. There's a lot of darkness. Where Egypt was in darkness and Israel had light. And then the terrible judgment came next.

In fact, even at the cross, what happened for three hours across the land before the terrible judgment fell on Jesus and he died? What was it? Darkness. Darkness. And here it is again.

It wasn't that long ago that Egypt was in darkness before. And I wonder if God is saying, look, what came after darkness last time? The terrible judgment. It's going to come again.

[19 : 33] This is your last chance. So in verse 21, Moses raises his staff and the wind blows. They were told again, it's the Lord who drives back the sea.

It's his work. And in verse 22, Israel crosses on dry land with a wall of water on either side, kind of like the picture on our title slide there. And the Egyptians, well, let's pick it up at verse 23.

The Egyptians pursued them and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. During the last watch of the night, that's early in the morning, crack of dawn, the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and the cloud and the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion.

He jammed the wheels of their chariots so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, let's get away from the Israelites. The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.

It's a bit of black comedy there. The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt. Have you not realized that already? Was 10 plagues not enough for you?

[20 : 40] But they continue verse 26. Then the Lord said to Moses, stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen.

Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and at daybreak, the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing towards it and the Lord swept them into the sea.

The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived. But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

That day, the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. It's a great rescue for Israel, but it's a terrible judgment for Egypt, isn't it?

I mean, God entices Pharaoh to change his mind. And once Pharaoh does, he strengthens Pharaoh's heart and the Egyptians' heart to follow in. He makes their chariots difficult to drive and he confuses them so much so in verse 27, the Egyptians actually flee towards the sea, not the shore.

[21 : 56] And all who chased after Egypt, all who did not heed the darkness warning, were drowned, their bodies washed up on the shore. It's pretty full on, isn't it?

And our natural reaction is sometimes that, why is God's judgment so extreme? Or why does he hammer them so hard? Three quick reasons. Firstly, it's actually just judgment deserved.

As we saw, this is the nation who had abused God's son, Israel, for years. This is the nation who refused to let God's people go.

This is the nation who opposed God and drowned the Israelite infants in the Nile. And so now God justly drowns their army in the sea.

God hammers them because they deserve it. It's just judgment. But second, he does it to save Israel. That's what verse 30 seems to say. Do you notice that?

[22 : 57] It says, That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians. Not the other day, previously, but that day. You see, it's not until this moment when there is no more chance for the Egyptians to change their minds again, that Israel is fully and finally saved from them.

And so like last week, we see that their salvation comes through judgment, doesn't it? Israel's salvation through Egypt's just judgment.

But third, the main reason the passage gives is so that God is glorified as people come to know him as the true God. We saw this on the next slide repeated three times in our passage.

I will gain glory for myself and they will know that I am the true God. And so, yes, God judges them because they deserve it.

Yes, he judges them so they are saved. But he also judges them to gain glory for himself. But isn't that a bit kind of selfish? I mean, imagine I decided to change the name of Holy Trinity to St. Andrews.

[24 : 13] And then on the welcome sign down there, I put a big picture of my face with a cheesy grin on it. And underneath the words with welcome to St. Andrews, you've come to the right place because I'm here.

I kind of shudder even thinking about it. But we don't like glory hogs, do we? Particularly in Australia. But this is what God is doing.

Judging because Egypt deserves it, yes. Judging to save Israel, yes. But judging to gain glory for himself. I mean, who does he think he is? God or something? That's it, isn't it?

He is. And so he does deserve glory. He has every right to gain it for himself. To defend his name amongst those who oppose him. That they might know and confess, even unwillingly, that he is the Lord, the true God.

And that Israel might rightly fear or revere him as the true God. Verse 31. And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord.

[25 : 27] And put their trust in him and in Moses, his servant. Seeing what God had done to rescue them changed them, didn't it? Before they feared Egypt.

Now they fear God. Trusting in him and Moses, his servant. We'll see another response they have next week. But for this week, this is to be our response too.

For we have been rescued in an even greater way, haven't we? We have heard this in our second reading on the next slide. That God has rescued us from a greater danger.

The dominion of darkness. That is slavery to sin, which leads to judgment in hell. He's rescued us from a greater danger. And through a greater person.

Not just a servant like Moses, but his very son, Jesus. Ours is a greater rescue. But like Israel, we contribute nothing to it.

[26 : 26] And like Israel, we are saved through judgment. For at the cross, Jesus was drowned in judgment. Not for his own sin like Pharaoh was, but for ours.

And as Jesus willingly bore hell in our place, he not only brought us salvation, but he brought God glory. On the next slide, Jesus prays to the Father.

He said the hour has come. That is the hour for him to be crucified has come. Notice what he says, glorify your son, that your son may glorify you. That people will come to know God, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he sent.

The cross brings glory to God as people are forgiven and come to know God as the true God. And seeing what God has done to rescue us, the judgment we deserve, but that Christ took, it ought to lead us to fear God.

To put our trust in him and Jesus, his son. And so have you done that? Have you come to realize as Israel did that no other God has done anything like this for you?

[27 : 47] Have you put your trust in him? And for us who have, then we're to continue to fear God as God, which means continuing to trust in him, even when he takes us the long way round in life, as we saw before.

Even when we have to wait for his promises, as we saw before. But fearing God also means standing in awe of his greatness. Earlier this year, there was this BBC headline on the next slide, Boris Johnson in awe of pandemic parents, parents who are homeschooling their kids during the lockdown.

I don't know what's with his hair. Does anyone know what's with his hair? I don't know. Or on the next slide, just last Friday, Barty, Ash Barty, world's number one, in awe as extremely dangerous young gun plots to usurper.

That's Coco Guff on your left there. Both Boris and Barty were in awe of these people who did great things. How much more so ought we be in awe of God who has rescued us from the judgment we deserve through his son, when we did nothing to earn it.

But to fear God also means we're not to treat God flippantly, but seriously, reverently. And I wonder if this is something that younger generations have lost a bit of.

[29 : 14] Yes, God is our Heavenly Father. We can approach him anytime in prayer. He loves us deeply, but he is still God. And I wonder if we reverently feared God a little more, and then perhaps we take his name in vain a little less.

I've heard many Christians today kind of say, oh, God this or God that. It's, you know, oh my God, it's even an acronym now. It's OMG, and you see it on the TV all the time.

And our younger people are getting flooded with it. But how flippant is that? To treat the God who rescued us from a terrible judgment with an acronym. A swear word.

Or if we reverently feared God a little more, we'd forget him a little less during our week. I must confess, when I was on leave, I found it all too easy to go a day without sending up a prayer, or reading his word, or even thinking of God until at night, as I was drifting off to sleep, when I said sorry.

Have you ever found yourself doing that? But again, how flippant is that to forget the God who rescued us from terrible judgment we deserve? Or if we reverently feared God a little more, then we'd fear our overwhelming situations a little less.

[30 : 32] After all, he is much mightier than whatever we have to face, isn't he? To paraphrase one right on our last slide there, she writes, We're to replace what we fear with the fear of the Lord that stands in awe of his bigness.

For when we do, our fears begin to shrink by comparison. See what they're saying? When the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses, his servant.

When we see the mighty hand of the Lord displayed at the cross, we are to fear the Lord and put our trust in him and Jesus, his son.

Let's pray we continue to do so. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for this well-known story, for the way it points to our greater rescue in the Lord Jesus.

Father, we pray that as we see your mighty hand displayed at the cross, where Jesus took our judgment in our place, we might be in awe of you, we might fear you and continue to trust in you and Jesus, your son.

[31 : 54] We ask it in his name. Amen.