

The Great Rescue

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the freedom we have to meet together as your people, to encourage one another, to be encouraged, and most importantly, to hear from your word. And we pray this morning that as we listen, you might give us minds to understand and hearts to live in light of what we hear.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Please take a seat. Amen. Well, when I mention the phrase, the great escape, perhaps for some of you, that great movie will come to mind with Steve McQueen and his motorbike hurling over the wire fence.

Let me tell you about another great escape. In 1998, a London newspaper called The Independent ran a story entitled The Great Escape. And it was an escape story about two Tamworth pigs.

Now, Tamworth is a breeder pig. Now, what happened was, while the pigs were being unloaded at the abattoirs, these two particular pigs made a break for it. And they crawled under a so-called secure fence and they swam across an icy river.

I didn't even know if swine could swim. But apparently they're good swimmers. Anyway, they managed to elude the authorities for six days. That's a pretty long time for pigs, isn't it? And in fact, when one of them was caught, he got away again for another 36 hours and had to be brought down with three tranquilising darts.

[1 : 23] Now, here are the pigs up there on the screen. The townsfolk, if you like your westerns, you'll like this, the townsfolk nicknamed the pigs Butch, Cassidy and the Sundance Pig. Yeah.

The celebrity pigs have been spared from the abattoirs and taken to an animal sanctuary. In fact, the BBC has since made a movie about them. On the next slide, it's called The Legend of the Tamworth II, Pigs on the Run.

Thanks, Graeme. You can just put on the next one. Well, today we come to another story, which one Bible commentator has actually called The Great Escape. And it has much to teach us about God, his actions, and what our response ought to be to him.

For example, it teaches us that God cares and keeps. That's point one on your outline. That is, God cares for his people and keeps his promises. Have a look there at your Bible passage at verses 17 to 22.

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them along the road to the land of the Philistines, even though it was nearby. In other words, it was shorter. Why? Well, because God said, the people will change their minds and return to Egypt if they face war.

[2 : 37] And so he led them, the people, around towards the Red Sea along the road of the wilderness. And the Israelites left the land of Egypt in battle formation. Verse 19, Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the Israelites swear in solemn oath, saying, God will certainly come to your aid.

Then you must take my bones with you from this place. And so they set out from Succoth and camped at Etham on the edge of the wilderness. The Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to lead them on their way during the day in a pillar of fire to give them light at night so that they could travel day or night.

And the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night never left its place in front of the people. Here's a great picture of God guiding his people, isn't it? Looking out for them and leading them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

But did you notice verses 17 and 18, God actually takes them the long way around. Did you notice that? Why does he do that? Well, it says because if they go the shorter way, they will face battle with the Philistines.

And God knows they're not ready for that. Even though at the end of verse 18, it says they went out in battle formation. You know, you might think they were dressed ready for battle. But it just means that Hebrew is literally by fifties.

[3 : 52] You know, they just went out in an orderly fashion. And even if they were wearing shields and swords, I mean, they'd been slaves for 430 years. Do you really think the Egyptians gave them time to practice?

Of course not. There's no way they were ready. And God knows this. He knows if they meet the Philistines, they'd run straight back to Egypt, screaming straight back to slavery.

And so he leads them the long way around. God is caring for his people, you see. He is with them every step of the way, leading them, protecting them and doing what's in their best interest. It's as though he won't let them be tempted beyond what they can bear.

But he will always be with them. Verse 22 is great. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night never left its place in front of the people. Great picture of God always guiding.

And sometimes in life, we may wonder why God is taking us the long way around, so to speak. Now, why life seems to be so hard sometimes? Why do we get sick? Now, can't we just live a healthy, nice, comfortable life?

[4 : 55] Isn't that the shorter, easier way? Why does God lead us a long way around sometimes? And here we must remember when that happens that God still has our best interests at heart. God still cares for us.

In fact, we know from the New Testament that God is at work in all things for our good, to make us more like Jesus. Not letting us be tempted beyond what we can bear. And promising never, ever to leave us or forsake us.

And those verses on your sheet are some of those verses that allude to those things. See, God cares for his people, you see, including you, including me. But God not only cares, he also keeps his promises.

Have a look again at verse 19. It's a strange little verse. It kind of interrupts the flow of the story. You could read from verse 18 to verse 20 and not skip a beat. But in the middle is this little verse that kind of interrupts the flow.

Where Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the Israelites swear a solemn oath, saying, God will certainly come to your aid, then you must take my bones with you from this place.

[6 : 01] Because it interrupts the flow, we need to ask, why has the writer put it there? It must be important. What's so special about it? Well, Joseph's words here are meant to remind us that something is happening.

And not too long ago, it was my wife's birthday. When she woke up in the morning, she smiled at me as though I was meant to say something to her. And so I did. I said, what? And then Tim, our eldest son, came running into the bedroom and said, happy birthday, mum.

And his words reminded me of what was happening and how I'd just forgotten my wife's birthday again. Well, Joseph's words here are supposed to remind us of what's happening here.

They're supposed to remind us that God is keeping his promise, you see. You don't have to turn to this, but you can. Genesis 50, the last few verses of Genesis, the book of Genesis, we read this.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, I'm about to die, but God will surely come to your aid and bring you up out of this land, the land that he swore or that he promised to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.

[7 : 11] So Joseph made the Israelites swear, saying, when God comes to your aid, you shall carry up my bones from here. And Joseph died being 110 years old and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

You see, Joseph asked that his bones might be taken out of Egypt because he knew God would rescue the Israelites from this place and take Israel to a new land, a new place.

And that's where Joseph wanted to be. And he knew this because God had promised it back in Genesis 12 to Abraham. Remember, God had promised to take Abraham's descendants to a new land.

And so when the writer back in Exodus quotes these words of Joseph, it's as though the writer is reminding us that God is keeping that promise. God is leading the Israelites from this place to the promised land.

That's what we have to remember. God is keeping his promises. Well, God not only cares for his people and keeps his promises, but he also judges and saves, point two. And I think this is the big point of the passage.

[8 : 11] God judges the Egyptians and he saves the Israelites. Now, at the start of chapter 14, there are lots of names of places that Lucille did very well to pronounce.

I was hoping to show you a map, but the more I looked into it, the more I realised that people aren't exactly sure where these places are and they don't know exactly where Israel crossed over the Red Sea or camped by the Red Sea.

But what we do know, what is clear from the text, is that God is deliberately enticing Pharaoh to his doom. Did you notice that? Have a look again at chapter 14, verses 1 to 3.

The Lord spoke to Moses and said, Tell the Israelites to turn back and camp in front of Pi-harholoth, between Migdal and the sea. You must camp in front of Baal-zephon, facing it by the sea.

Why? Well, because Pharaoh will say then of the Israelites, they are wandering around the land in confusion, and the wilderness has boxed them in. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will pursue them.

[9 : 13] Then I will receive glory by means of Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord. So the Israelites did this. You see, God is making the Israelites wander around, you know, turn back, look like they're lost.

Why? Well, so that Pharaoh will be enticed to come out and chase after them and meet his doom. In fact, God will harden Pharaoh's heart, verse 4 said.

Of course, as we saw a couple of weeks ago, it's not as though God is doing something to Pharaoh that Pharaoh doesn't want to do himself. For we read in verses 5 and 6, When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their own minds about the people and said, What have we done?

We have released Israel from serving us. And so he got his chariot ready and took his troops with him. You see, God hardens Pharaoh's heart, yes, but Pharaoh also changes his own mind.

God doesn't make Pharaoh do something that Pharaoh doesn't want to do. Both are true. And so we can't blame God for Pharaoh's actions. Pharaoh chooses to. And so in verse 7 and 9 we read, Pharaoh took 600 of his best chariots and all the rest of his chariots in Egypt with officers in each one.

[10:27] The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he, that is Pharaoh, pursued the Israelites who were going out triumphantly. The Egyptians, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, his horsemen and his army, chased after them and caught up with them as they camped by the sea beside Hariof in front of Baal Zephon.

And then the Israelites, in the next few verses, see the Egyptians and are terrified. Moses says, stand firm. And let's pick it up over the page, verse 16. God speaks to Moses and says, as for you, lift up your staff, stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.

I'm going to harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them and I will receive glory by means of Pharaoh, all his army and his chariots and his horsemen. The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I receive glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.

And so the angel of God who was going in front of the Israelite forces moved and went behind them. The pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and stood behind them. It came between the Egyptians and the Israelite forces.

And the cloud was there in the darkness yet it lit up the night so neither group came near the other all night long. And then Moses did stretch out his arm over the sea and the Lord drove the sea back with a powerful east wind all that night and turned the sea into dry land.

[11:47] It's incredible, isn't it? So the waters were divided and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground with the waters like a wall to them on their right and their left. The Egyptians set out in pursuit all Pharaoh's horses, chariots and horsemen went into the sea after them and then during the morning watched the Lord look down on the Egyptian forces from the pillar of fire and cloud and threw them into confusion.

He caused their chariot wheels to swerve and made them drive with difficulty. The Hebrew literally there is either the wheels fell off or they got stuck. Either way it would have been difficult to drive, wouldn't it?

He made them drive with difficulty and then they said let's get away from Israel the Egyptians said because the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt. The last bit of verse 25 there it's kind of black comedy a bit of irony here have they not realised this already?

Do they only now get it that the Lord is fighting against Egypt? Haven't the ten plagues convinced them of that already? Well, of course it's all too late. For in verse 26 the Lord said to Moses stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back on the Egyptians on their chariots and horsemen.

So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and at daybreak the sea returned to its normal depth. While the Egyptians were trying to escape from it the Lord overthrew them in the sea. The waters came back and covered the chariots and horsemen the entire army of Pharaoh that had gone after them into the sea well, none of them survived.

[13:12] But the Israelites had walked through the sea on dry ground with the waters like a wall to them on their right and on their left. That day the Lord saved Israel from the power of the Egyptians and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.

It's a great story of rescue for Israel isn't it? But it's a terrible story of judgement for Egypt. I mean God entices the Egyptians hardens their hearts makes their wheels fall off or whatever drive with difficulty and as they're fleeing away from Israel back towards the sea water closes in over them and so they're drowned.

It's pretty full on isn't it? And our natural reaction well certainly my natural reaction is to ask isn't God being just a little bit harsh here? Why does he hammer them so hard?

Three quick reasons firstly to save the Israelites fully and finally that's what verse 30 seems to say. It says verse 30 that day the Lord saved Israel.

You see it's on this day when there is no more chance that the Egyptians changed their minds and coming after Israel again that Israel is fully and finally saved you see. And so we see again as we saw through the plagues and the Passover that salvation comes through judgement.

[14 : 34] There's a cost to be paid but second God did this to judge the Egyptians as we've seen before. This is the nation that had abused God's son for over 400 years. This is the nation who refused to let God's people go.

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

God hammers them because they deserve it. Such was the seriousness of their crimes. And if that still doesn't sit well with us I wonder if that's because we've sometimes underestimated how serious it is to oppose God.

I mean I don't always take sin seriously in my life and society certainly doesn't seem to think opposing God is serious but it is. Opposing God is serious and so are the consequences.

I mean look at the Egyptians. It is serious which is why we need to keep praying for our non-Christian family and friends. Our community around us.

[15 : 37] There's going to be a prayer meeting at the end of this month 21st of June I think it is. Join us. Pray for our community and what's more take any opportunities that come to share something about church or Jesus so that the people around us might not find themselves lying on the shores of hell.

But thirdly the main reason the passage gives for God's actions here is so that God can gain glory for himself. Look back for a moment at verse 4. Verse number 4 it says I will harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will pursue them then I will receive or gain glory by means of Pharaoh and all his army and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.

Over the page again verse 17 and 18 I am going to harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them and I will receive glory by means of Pharaoh and all his army and his chariots and horsemen.

The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I receive glory through Pharaoh his chariots and his horsemen. See God does all this for his glory that people would honour him and that the Egyptians back home would hear that he alone is the true God.

Not the Egyptian gods, not Pharaoh the so-called son of God but Yahweh. God pours out his judgment here ultimately to gain glory for himself you see. But hang on a second isn't that a little selfish?

[17 : 05] I mean no one likes people doing things for their own glory particularly us Australians. Imagine now that there are two Andrews here at Holy Trinity we decided to let's forget the name Holy Trinity let's call it St Andrews.

And then at the front on the welcome sign we put welcome to our church and underneath is a big cheesy picture of Andrew and I. You know big cheesy grins.

And then everything good that happened here we get you know we'd claim the credit for yeah that was us we're good how would you feel if that happened? Incensed I hope. The point is no one likes a glory hog but here is God acting to gain glory for himself.

Here he is trying to do things to gain glory for himself I mean who does he think he is God or something? That's it though isn't it? He is God and so he does deserve the glory honour respect and so he does have every right to act in a way that will bring glory for himself he has every right you see to defend his name as the one true God so that people would glorify him as such see God hammers the Egyptians here not only to save Israel not only because the Egyptians deserve it but ultimately so that he is rightly justly glorified as God and I wonder whether when we think about God are we sometimes more interested in what God can do for us than on how we can glorify him you found yourself doing that?

A while ago a Christian friend at the university I was at was going through a tough time I won't say exactly what but the people around us including myself prayed rightly I think that God would help her that God would resolve the situation for her that God would do something for her they're good things to pray but then she prayed and she said this she said Father may your name be glorified out of this mess and I thought yeah it's not all about us it's about God and it's a good challenge for me to think about whether my view of God was too you know me centered if you like too much about what God can do for me rather than how I can glorify him and what are all the Israelites doing amidst all this well nothing oh sorry that's not true they were doing something they were grumbling that's what they were doing come back with me to verses 10 to 15 which we skipped before as Pharaoh approached the Israelites looked up and saw the Egyptians coming after them then the

[19 : 41] Israelites were terrified and cried out to the Lord for help they said to Moses is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the wilderness or what have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt isn't this what we told you in Egypt leave us alone so that we may serve the Egyptians it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness they say what about grumbling verse 13 Moses responds he said to the people don't be afraid stand firm and see the Lord's salvation he will provide for you today for the Egyptians will see today you will never see again the Lord will fight for you you must be quiet and then the Lord said to Moses why are you crying out to me tell the Israelites to break camp and so it goes on now verse 15 there sounds like Moses gets in trouble for complaining just after he told Israel to stop complaining that's what it sounds like doesn't it but I think God is speaking to Moses as the representative of Israel just as the

Israelites cry out God says why are you crying out you see even after all that God has done and demonstrated during the plagues Israel still does not trust and so Moses tells them in verses 13 to 14 just stand firm and be quiet that's all you have to do all you have to do is stop your whinging God will do everything else and God does to the point of protecting Israel from Egypt during the night by the pillar of cloud and fire and then drawing back the waters of the Red Sea allowing Israel to pass through and then preventing Egypt from capturing them you see in the end this is not actually an escape it's not the great escape it's the great rescue see I started off by saying that this Bible commentator says the story of Exodus here is the great escape he says but an escape usually involves people doing something to save themselves doesn't it I mean even the two Tamworth pigs did more to save themselves than the Israelites did here all the

Israelites did was grumble it's not the great escape it's the great rescue which is why I crossed out the word escape on your outlines the Israelites are saved not by their own works that they may boast but by God's grace towards them you see and the climax of this rescue comes at the end of the chapter where the Israelites finally get it have a look at verse 31 it's the only verse we haven't looked at yet verse 31 when the Israelites saw the great power that the Lord had used against the Egyptians the people feared the Lord and trusted or believed in him and his servant Moses finally they understand who God is and in response to him rescuing them they finally fear him and trust him in fact in chapter 15 which we'll look at next week they sing a long song to God praising him but here they finally get it they finally respond rightly by fearing God and trusting him and this is the beginning of their worship of God I mean that's one of the big reasons why Israel was being rescued from Egypt remember how Moses kept going to Pharaoh he kept let my people go so that they may come and worship me that's what

God was telling Pharaoh to say and Moses to say over and over again and this is the start of their worship to fear God and trust in him of course thousands of years later God performed the greatest rescue ever which brings us to our final point see while we grumbled God gave his only son so that we might be rescued from slavery not slavery to Egypt but slavery to sin and death and it's a greater rescue because Jesus didn't deserve to die like the Egyptians did yet out of his amazing love Jesus willingly went to the cross and at the cross he was drowned in God's judgment that we deserve so if we simply trust in Jesus we will be saved that's the greatest rescue story as Paul writes on Colossians which is on your outlines says God has rescued us from the domain of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of sins and so the question is how are we responding to that rescue firstly have you been rescued

I don't know everyone here I don't know where you stand between God have you put your trust in Jesus have you decided to follow him or are you still thinking that it doesn't matter how you treat God in life if that's you then look at the Egyptians it does matter but for those of us who have been rescued by simply trusting in Jesus then are we continuing to trust him are we continuing to try and live holy lives just as God is holy as we heard from our first reading living lives in reverent fear not that God is a tyrant but rather he is a loving father but even my son Tim knows there is a line that you don't cross I'm pretty sure I'm not a tyrant home not usually but there is a time where Tim will know if I use that particular tone of voice he better do what I say he knows that he knows I love him but he also has this fear of me which tells him that he can't treat me any way he likes so do we have that fear of God that deep sense of respect and reverence or have we kind of domesticated

[25 : 17] God so that he's more like a tame pet whom we can call on in prayer when it suits us or like a girl I once met who said I'll give God just one more chance do you like that as though she was in charge of him God is far from a tame pet he is the awesome and powerful God who ought to be glorified and whom we ought to fear with reverence and awe of course he's not just an awesome God but he's a loving father who continues to forgive us when we don't fear and trust him as we should and the fact that he does that only makes him even more worthy of our praise doesn't it let's pray so I