

## The Lord Will Fight For You

Exodus 14:1-14

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Exodus chapter 14. Last week we did indeed begin our journey out of Egypt with Israel. It is an exciting story, and I hope to continue to bring to mind some things that you have missed in the past, though this story is very familiar to you. But most of all it's important for us to remember that this is not just exciting history, it's not just exciting Bible history, or history of redemption, it is a divine revelation from God meant for your instruction. We saw Paul stressing that last week when we looked at I Corinthians chapter 10 where Paul emphasizes that the whole exodus experience happened for us, that it was written down for our instruction, that it teaches us about Christ and that it also teaches us how not to respond to difficult providences.

And for all those reasons, Paul says it's important for us to contemplate the exodus experience. The exodus is the greatest redemptive event in the Old Testament times. It's repeated over and over in Psalms and in later stories as the defining moment for Israel. Israel is created in the exodus. Israel as a nation, as she is brought out of Egypt and across the Red Sea is brought into being. So, in Exodus chapter 13 verses 17 through 22, last week as we began to look at this story, we saw God's kind providence. God, in even the course that He was leading Israel out of Egypt was mindful of Israel's weaknesses and the challenges that she would face. So He took into consideration the circumstances and the condition of His people, even in the route that He led them out on.

We also saw last week that God kept His promise. The very picture of the bones of Joseph in his coffin at the head of the procession of Israel, was a visible reminder to the people of God, that God's word is worth trusting. Joseph had predicted, according to the promise of God, that he would be brought out of Egypt and that he would be buried in the land of promise. And seeing that coffin with the embalmed body of Joseph was a visible display to the people of God that He can be trusted.

Again we were mindful last week of the promise of God and the presence of God. He manifested Himself in the pillar of fire, and the pillar of cloud with the view to the comfort and the courage of His people, and especially we were mindful of how God took care to plan for the needs of His people in His providence. So, with

those words of introduction let's turn to Exodus 14 and hear God's word:

Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Tell the sons of Israel to turn back and camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you shall camp in front of Baal-zephon, opposite it, by the sea. "For Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, 'They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.' "Thus I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD." And they did so. When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people, and they said, "What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" So he made his chariot ready and took his people with him; and he took six hundred select chariots, and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he chased after the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going our boldly. Then the Egyptians chased after them with all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon. And as Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD. Then they said to Moses, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? "Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD that He will accomplish for you today for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. "The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent."

Amen. Thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired and inerrant word. May He write it's eternal truth upon our hearts. Let's pray.

Lord, calm our hearts before You tonight, that we may see Your salvation and praise You as we ought. This we ask in Jesus name. Amen.

Tonight Israel comes to a point where everything seems to fall apart. Last week they were at a high water mark, coming out of Egypt boldly in marshal array, confidently looking for the Promised Land on a peaceful trail. Now they are at a low ebb, now all the pieces of God's plan seem to be unraveling and Israel feels exposed to an unthinkable threat. Have you ever been there before? Are you there now? Have you at one point felt as if you understood God's purposes, His good purposes for you, and then suddenly you experience a string of setbacks and disappointments and blows of providence that made you wonder whether

you could go on, and whether the sun will ever rise again? Have you been so discouraged by a turn of events that you have been tempted to question God? Maybe you have questioned God? Maybe you've lashed out at His ministers. Have you found in yourself a growing bitterness and cynicism and distrust and anger enveloping your experience and outlook? If you've been there, is a passage for you because that's where the Israelites find themselves tonight, from the highs of their glorious departure they have plummeted now to the depths of despair, and Moses recounts it blow by blow, and we must learn from it.

First about God, and then about his designs. I want you to see four things in the passage before us. In verses 1 through 4 you are going to see a change of course and a web of providence. In verses 5 through 9 you are going to see a change of heart and the Egyptians pursuit. In verses 10 through 12 you are going to see a change of attitude and a complaint against Moses, and then in verses 13 and 14, you are going to see a strange set of directives and a bold promise from God. So, let's look at this passage together.

### **I. God sets the course for the journey.**

First in verses 1 through 4 where we see this change of course commanded by God. Having chosen an escape route with the peoples' needs in mind, here we begin to see God beginning to weave a web of providence that He tells us is for the display of His glory and the destruction of His enemies. Now, they are not aware of this, they are not nearly as aware of this as they ought to be. He's chosen an escape route with their needs in mind, with the peoples' weaknesses in mind, but now God commands an unexpected turn, and the major turn of events in this section begins with a word from the Lord to Moses in verse 1. He's going to let Moses in on His plan.

Now, as far as we know, Moses does not have the opportunity to inform the people of God what this plan is, only that they must prepare to see God display His plan. In verse 1 we are told that God is going to let Moses in on His plan. The Israelites are commanded to reverse their course. They take a different direction and they camp in an extremely vulnerable position. If anybody here has had military history 101 and you see verse 2 you're thinking, "No, no, don't camp there. That's the wrong way. You're trapped on the one side by Egyptian border cities and watchtowers, and on the other side by the sea, you have no place to go. That's not the place to be" and yet that's precisely where the Lord tells Moses to take Israel.

Then in verse 3 God tells Moses exactly what He's up to. He wants Pharaoh to think two things. He wants Pharaoh to think that Israel is wandering aimlessly, and He wants Pharaoh to think Israel is trapped. God, we're told in verse 4 plans to use this to harden Pharaoh's heart and to entice him to his own destruction. He has however, a grander purpose and that purpose is revealed in verse 4. God

intends to do this not merely for the liberation of Israel - by the way, isn't it interesting that the liberation of Israel isn't even mentioned in verses 1 through 4? - The grander reason that God intends to do this is for the display of His glory. He plans to use Pharaoh and his army as the instruments of His glory so that all the Egyptians will know that He is the Lord.

You know, it goes all the way back to the beginning of this story when Pharaoh uttered those words, "The Lord, I've never heard of the Lord. Who is the Lord?" And it comes right here to this point and God is saying, "Pharaoh you're going to know who I am. Your people are going to know who I am. The world is going to know who I am." The people of Israel are the beneficiaries of God's mercy, but they are caught up in a much larger plan than simply their own liberation.

The story of the exodus as the story of redemption is all about the revelation of God's glory. He has the purpose of displaying His glory, the purpose of revealing Himself to be the Lord. You know the situation from here on out becomes real, because the people are inside of it and they are in a panic. All they see is everything unraveling. They see impending doom, but from the outside and from the distance of the future and with the benefit of God's revelation and with the benefit of God's providential explanation to Moses, we have an entirely different viewpoint on this. We're standing here watching what's happening in verses 1 through 4 saying, "The Lord is drawing the Egyptians into some sort of trap. They have no idea what they're walking into and their pride is going to be their destruction." That is not Israel's attitude.

You need to understand Israel is in an entirely different place than you and I are tonight. We need to be careful about being too hasty to judge their response, for how often have we been untrusting in the midst of our own difficulties, but we see something up here, God has a plan. Moses has shown us this, and that's what we see in verses 1 through 4. This story, which is unfolding is about God getting glory for Himself, the side benefit is the liberation of Israel.

## **II. The Egyptians change their minds.**

The second thing I want you to see, you'll see in verses 5 through 9, not only a change of course or a web of providence being laid, but a change of heart and a pursuit by the Egyptians. Having released the Israelites from captivity, Pharaoh now changes his mind and he pursues them. In verse 5, the scene switches. It's like the movie camera, you've been watching the camp of Israel, you've been seeing this encounter between God and Moses and now it's "meanwhile back at the ranch," and you go back to the royal court of Egypt, and a discussion is going on. Basically Pharaoh is looking at his trusted officers and he is saying, "What have we done? We have just let six hundred thousand able bodied, totally cheap labor people leave the country. We must have been out of our minds. What are we going to do about this?" And they have a change of heart. When the report of

the exodus of Israel is given to Pharaoh, once again he changes his mind.

And again, it's surreal for us because we're looking from the outside and we're thinking, "What is it going to take for this man to learn not to monkey with the God of Israel? He's already got a country in shambles." So, Pharaoh mobilizes his chariot cavalry and his army in verses 6 and 7. And in verse 7 makes it clear that this is not some sort of minor desert police operation. This is the bulk, perhaps the totality of the forces of the most powerful army on earth being marshaled against a people that don't know how to shoot a bow and arrow. It ought to be a slam-dunk. It ought to be fifty-two to nothing, but again in verse 8 it is made clear that it is God acting here. It may look like this is Pharaoh's idea, it may look like Pharaoh has all the cards in his deck, but this is God's plan. God is, as usual in this story, clearly behind it and in control of all the events, and so when Pharaoh gives chase, you realize Pharaoh is chasing right where the Lord has ordained him to chase.

In verse 9, the Egyptians catch up with the Israelites. They come within sight of the camp of Israel, near the place where God had commanded Israel to camp. Though this seems an utter disaster for Israel, and though it seems like a godsend for Egypt, yet God's plan is working out just as He said. God is using the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and He is enticing him into conflict for the purpose for revealing His glory.

### **III. The hearts of the people change and they complain against Moses.**

And then we go to verses 10 through 12. The scene shifts again. We first see Moses hearing what is going to happen from God, then we have seen God in the purposes of Pharaoh to display His glory. And then we turn to the people of God and they are in the camp and they've now caught the sight of the dust of the chariots making their way towards them. When Israel finally catches sight of their pursuers, their confidence falls apart. They're panicked, they cry out to the Lord. There is a total change of attitude, and then they turn on Moses. Having shown joy and trust in God, the Israelites in the face of danger fall apart, they lose faith, and they blame Moses. It's not the first time, and it won't be the last time. All the way back in Exodus chapter 5, you remember what happened in verse 21. Moses had sought to bring about the liberation of the Israelite that resulted in greater oppression, and the people of God turned to Moses and they said, look what you gotten us. All you have gotten us is more severe oppression. Leave us alone.

And here again they grumble against Moses and they ask three very biting questions, and the first one is full of satire. It would be humorous were the situation not so great. They say, Moses, have you brought us into the wilderness because there weren't enough graves in Egypt? Now, graves to Egypt are as coals to New Castle. There were plenty of graves in Egypt. There, pyramids were

graves; they had been building graves in Egypt. Egypt was 'grave central,' it was grave depot. If you wanted a grave, Egypt was where to have one. The people say to Moses, "Did you bring us out here because there weren't enough graves in Egypt?" It's biting, it's bitter, it's angry. The satire is stinging, but these questions really get to the crux of the exodus unwittingly because here the question being asked, "Why have you dealt this way? Why have you brought us out of Egypt? Why have you brought us here?"

That echoes in each of the three questions and that my friends is precisely the question that God is going to answer, and the answer is, I brought you here to see My glory, that's why I've brought you here. I haven't brought you here for your comfort. I haven't brought you here because it's easy. I haven't brought you here because it's not going to demand every ounce of trust in you. I've brought you here to see My glory.

That's why God saves us, my friends, to reveal to us His glory. He doesn't promise us that He's not going to take us into the wilderness and put our backs to the sea and bring the Egyptians upon us. He promises when He redeems us to show us His glory, and that's what He's going to do here. The one spiritual advance that we see in all this for Israel is that, whereas all the way back in Exodus 2, when they had felt their oppression and they cried out to god, generic god, *eloheim*, now, now at least they know the name of the god they ought to cry out to. And they cry this time to Jehovah, to Yahweh, to the Lord, the covenant God of Israel. That's the one spiritual advance that we can see, and then finally you look at verses 13 and 14.

#### **IV. God's bold promise.**

We see these strange directives and this bold promise. In the face of this apparently pending disaster, Moses announces that Israel is about to learn something big. Israel seems to be thinking more about Pharaoh's intentions and Pharaoh's plans than they are thinking about God's intentions and God's plans. Now, let me stop again and defend the Israelites for a moment. They have been slaves for four hundred and thirty years. The only thing they have known in their experience was Pharaoh's intentions and Pharaoh's plans. No wonder they are consumed with "What in the world is he going to do to us now." These people had the mindset of slaves. They had forgotten how to hope. They saw a dark cloud beyond every silver lining. They were confirmed pessimists, and isn't it glorious that in verses 13 and 14, Moses has nothing but a word of encouragement, and it's a word in which he directs them to do nothing. I demand, he says, that you stand there and do nothing.

Now, think again my friends, you've been slaves for four hundred and thirty years. You've been serving a tyrant who has abused you. He has sucked the life out of you, and he has used your labor for his purposes. And now the God who

has set you free, He's redeemed you and He's more sovereign than Pharaoh ever was says, "Now here's my command for you today Israel, you must do absolutely nothing, I'm going to take care of this."

Now, I want you to look at the three things that Moses says. First, do not be afraid. Do not fear. How often does God visit and the first words out of His mouth are, do not fear? The Puritans used to put it this way, "Fear God and you have nothing else to fear." God was going to show them today that He was the only thing worth fearing in this world.

Secondly, Moses says, stand where you are and get ready to watch. That's what he means when he says, "Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord." Stand right where you are and get ready, not to fight, not to defend, not to deflect, not to run, not to maneuver, but to watch. Stand right where you are and watch.

Finally look at the end, "the Lord will fight for you while you keep silent." There is the third thing. Oh yeah, one more thing, "Say and do nothing." God is going to handle this; you're going to contribute nothing.

You see, Moses wants the people of God to understand that two things are going to come out of this. First, they are going to find out what a Savior looks like. They knew what a redeemer looks like, they had already been purchased out of Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb, now they are going to learn what a Savior looks like, and the Savior does it for you.

Secondly, they were going to learn that the Lord God Himself was willing to stoop to be a warrior in their place to protect them. Now, you see, their perspective on this is entirely, entirely different than ours. We're preparing to see some grand thing that God is going to do and it's going to be grand in deed, they're preparing for doom. But my friends, when you're working in situations where you have no Bible church, or Bible reference to go to, where you have no promise explicitly in the Scripture that you're going to come out on the other side, something that you can't make sense of, isn't your tendency to expect impending doom, to question what God is doing, to think that He's not there? Moses says to them, "Here's your one job, stand there, do nothing and watch what God is going to do."

My friends you can't conceive of a more cataclysmic unilateral depiction of God, in His grace, saving His people, than this, except for one thing. The Savior of the world on the tree at Golgotha vanquishing the forces of death in hell on your behalf. Now, is that picture emblazoned on your mind so that there is nothing that you can fear, or do you still need to learn the lesson that the Israelites are going to learn on this day? May God enable you to trust Him, even when nothing makes sense, and to stand still and seek the salvation of the Lord. Let's pray.

Oh Lord, Your salvation is by Your power and grace alone. We contribute nothing to it. Help us to learn that truth, to live that truth, to take comfort from that truth

and to praise You for it for the rest of our days. In Jesus name. Amen.

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