

The Day of Salvation

Exodus 14:1-31

You have probably seen the image of Charlton Heston playing the part of Moses, holding up his staff so that the people of Israel could cross the Red Sea. The waters parted, and with the typical, traditional Hollywood flair for the dramatic, the scene was etched into the consciousness of a generation of movie-goers. By today's standards, it was pretty over-the-top. Even so, I don't want to focus upon that drama this morning, because the main point of this story is not the historical event itself, but rather what that drama represents in our our lives as Christians today.

Paul writes something quite astounding in,

1 Cor. 10:1 "I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 and all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ."

So the people of Israel were baptized into Moses in the sea! What strange language? So what does it mean? Baptism is a common symbol of our union with Christ, but in the Old Testament Christ was presented only as a type. A prophetic image, personified. The person of Moses is that type. So we read that the people of the Old Covenant were baptized into Moses. And Paul is willing to identify the spiritual reality behind that shadow. The spiritual reality is this, they ate the same spiritual food as we do! They drank the same spiritual drink! And it case that isn't plain enough, Paul makes it easy to understand what he means. He tells us. The rock was Christ. They fed upon Jesus.

Jesus was with them. Whatever they experienced, Jesus was

the source of their strength and help. And further in,

1 Cor. 10:11 "Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come."

So they crossed the Red Sea. As an example written down for our instruction! Amazing. And that instruction is easy to identify, for it is instruction about the most basic aspects of our eternal salvation. You see, as we read Exodus 14, God saved his people that day.

v.13

And, v.30

So do you want to learn about your salvation, the salvation which God accomplishes? Do you want to understand God's work of salvation? Do you want to study the doctrine of salvation? Do you want to understand what that really means and how it applies to your own life? Well, here we are to learn about it from Exodus 14.

So let me start with the big picture, the biggest picture possible. Namely God's purpose. What was God's purpose in the Exodus. No, let me ask that question in a larger context. What is God's purpose in the work of salvation? What is God trying to accomplish?

This is not a theoretical, doctrinal proposition, but it lies at the very heart of understanding God and honoring him appropriately. This has everything to do with your overall worldview, how you look at life, how you look at yourself. And, ultimately, how you look at God. The answer to this question will shape your understanding of the Bible and enable you to grasp what we could simply call biblical Christianity? The root of the answer to that question comes from grasping and embracing the right

understanding of God's purpose.

I. GOD'S PURPOSE: TO SHOW FORTH HIS OWN GLORY.

So often we get sidetracked by the question, "why?"

Sometimes we think God does some strange things, so very unexplainable things. Like what we read in,
v.1-2

That's a strange request, at least from the perspective of the Israelites. Remember that they had asked to be free to go on a three days' journey in order to offer their sacrifices of worship. Now, as one commentator writes, "the decisive step would have to be taken whether they would celebrate their intended feast and return, or march onwards by the head of the Red Sea into the desert, with a view to a final departure. They were already on the borders of the desert, and a short march would have placed them beyond the reach of pursuit, as the chariots of Egypt could have made little progress over dry and yielding sand. But... instead of pursuing their journey eastward with the sea on their right, they were suddenly commanded to diverge to the south, keeping the gulf on their left; a route which not only detained them lingering on the confines of Egypt, but, in adopting it, they actually turned their backs on the land of which they had set out to obtain the possession." (JFB)

This would mean that in turning back they were actually retracing their steps. "God deliberately led the Israelites to this location, setting the stage for them to be trapped by the Egyptians on one side with "the sea" on the other." And Pharaoh would clearly understand all of that.

v.3-4a

Now, the question is, "Why?" Why would God do that, having

just brought his people out of Egypt with the ten plagues, ending with the plague of death upon every firstborn in the land? Why would God want Pharaoh again to pursue the Israelites, as God had enticed them to do with his command for Israel to turn back?

I might just as well as the question, why would God do anything? Why does God do everything? And the answer, for his own glory!

v.4b

v.17

So here it is, and I have a clear answer to the question, "Why did God harden Pharaoh's heart?" To show forth his own glory!

A. God shows forth his glory by hardening Pharaoh's heart.

That is plain, isn't it? "I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host." Specifically, "the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord." We have seen that over and over in the plagues. God makes sport of Pharaoh. God demonstrates the absolute superiority of his power. And he shows himself to be the one who saves his people.

So what happened is exactly what God determined to happen.
v.5-9

Again, all of this is so that God could demonstrate the glory of his justice upon Pharaoh, contrasted with the great glory of his grace bestowed upon the people of Israel. And in case there is any confusion about all of this, we read in,

Romans 9:15 "For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to

Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” 18 So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. 19 You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” 20 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” 21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use? 22 What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— 24 even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?”

This is God’s glory, that he will show himself sovereign in the judgment and condemnation of the wicked. And this is also his glory, that he will show himself sovereign in redeeming his own special people to be his treasured possession. The key is in verse 22, “What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy.”

What if? Why, he has. That’s what we are studying in the book of Exodus. God is arranging everything in order “to make known the riches of his glory” to those whom he has chosen as the objects of his mercy. So he hardens Pharaoh’s heart. And he performs the work of salvation himself.

B. God shows forth his glory by accomplishing the work of salvation for himself.

If anything is obvious at all, it is this, God saves his people.

God does it. They don’t save themselves by their own effort or their own good works. God does it by his own power in such a way to make it obvious that he gets all the glory.

And that is his purpose. First, to show forth his own glory. And then, second, related to that,

II. GOD’S PURPOSE: TO SHOW FORTH HIS OWN POWER.

It is all about power.

v.31

Just look and see how,

A. God saves his people by the strength of his own power.

v.14-16

Such a foolish plan, isn’t it? You have to wonder what the people of Israel were really thinking? Is that the best idea you have, Moses? But look what happened?

v.21-25

God clogged their chariot wheels! They got the equivalent of a flat tire. It might even mean that God knocked their chariot wheels right off the chariots.

v.26-28

God did it, by the strength of his own power. How cruel, some might think. But no, how just. How righteous was God’s judgment upon the wickedness of wicked men. “I will get glory,” says God. “All the glory.” “And the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.” “In the exercise of my justice!”

And it was in that justice that he brought about salvation for

his own special people.

v.29-30

One more thing about God's power before we move on to the applications to our own lives, and that is this,

B. God saves his people by his own direction.

Don't miss,

v.19-20

Amazing, isn't it. One commentator describes the scene this way, "[The pillar of cloud] was an effectual barrier between them and their pursuers, not only protecting them, but concealing their movements. Thus, the same cloud produced light (a symbol of favor) to the people of God, and darkness (a symbol of wrath) to their enemies."

God actually stood between his people and their enemies. He gave light to his people and held his enemies in darkness. How great is his faithfulness. And what was the response of the Israelites to all of this? What was their attitude? What was their state of mind? That's an easy question to answer, too. They were grumbling.

C. God saves his people despite their own grumbling.

Remember everything that God has done. All the plagues. All the ways in which he distinguished Israel from the Egyptians, setting apart his people under his protection. God showed his power, and what do the people do? They complain. Such a horrible sin.

v.10-12

What an absolutely stupid thing to say! But we can say stupid things, too, can't we, especially when a grumbling spirit takes hold

of you. They actually told God, "I told you so!" "Is not this what we said to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'?" The sarcasm just drips off those words.

And then, so amazingly forgetful they were, "For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." There was certainly no Patrick Henry among them, "Give me liberty or give me death." They were pathetic. Cowardly. Ungrateful. You think they could at least come up with, "Well, thanks anyway for trying."

No, they resorted to grumbling and complaining.

Let me read a little bit further in,

1 Cor. 10:6 "Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." 8 We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9 We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, 10 nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. 12 Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

"These things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did." That's pretty clear an application, isn't it? "We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did

and were destroyed by the Destroyer.” That’s pretty clear, too, isn’t it?

“Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction.” Thus the warning to us all, “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.” That is the application of all of us. Take heed, lest you fall to grumbling and complaining as well. What a terrible load and weight upon the health and vitality of any church, when the spirit of grumbling takes over. “Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”

Now, having said all of that, the point is that God saved his people anyway! That was his purpose, and he would accomplish it.

III. GOD’S PURPOSE: TO SHOW HIMSELF TO HIS PEOPLE.

And to do it in such a way,

A. That we might believe.

v.31

That is what was supposed to happen. That is what ought to happen among us today. Dear friends, behold the great power of God. And fear the Lord because of that power. Fear him in the honor of reverence, and believe. “They believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.” Don’t grumble, believe.

John 20:30 “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

And so I preach to you from Exodus 14, for that same

purpose, “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.” You who already believe, I preach to you from Exodus 14 so that you will see the power of God at work in your salvation, that you might fear him. Honor him. And worship him.

And, one more thing,

B. That you might trust him.

I saved the chief application for last. Look at, v.13-14

You have to be silent. To be quiet. Still.

You have to put to death all remnants of that rebelliousness with which you strive after your own goals and objectives in life. You have to put to death all the sinful, self-reliance with which you try to handle all the problems of your life. Sometimes, often, you simply can’t fix it yourself. So be still, before God.

v.14

That doesn’t mean you are always passive and inactive, doing nothing as you simply wait for God to act. But it does mean that whatever you are doing, you are waiting for God to act! It does mean that you cease striving. It means that you cease the attempts to rely upon your own wisdom or strength to respond to whatever comes to your life. It means that you cease complaining, and cease worrying. That you put away anxiety and live without stress. It means that your mind and your heart are clear. God is God, and you trust him.

So when you consider the troubles of your life, they are no doubt a very painful thing. But look at this encouragement from Exodus 14. Look at what the Lord has done to save a people for himself. And realize that as he did for Israel, “the Lord will fight

for you.”

“You have only to be silent.” That’s the application. That’s the personal response to this great revelation of the glory and power of God. “You have only to be silent.” Yet that can be the hardest thing of all. But God says so plainly, “Be still, and know that I am God.”

I’ll end by reading from,

Psalm 46:1 “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.”

That Psalm continues with these glorious and encouragement words,

Ps. 46:8 “Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth. 9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire. 10 “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” 11 The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”

And so I declare these things to you.

v.13 “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today.”

v.14 “The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.”