

EXODUS #11 CH.14

The Great Sea Escape 11-24-13

Exodus 14:1-31

Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “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. 3 For Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, ‘They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’ 4 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. 5 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?” 6 So he made his chariot ready and took his people with him; 7 and he took six hundred select chariots, and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. 8 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 out boldly. 9 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. 10 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. 11 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? 12 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.” 13 But Moses said to the people, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. 14 The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.” 15 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. 16 As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land. 17 As for Me, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. 18 Then the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord, when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen.” 19 The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. 20 So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night. 21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. 22 The sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 23 Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea. 24 At the morning watch, the Lord looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and

cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion. 25 He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty; so the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from Israel, for the Lord is fighting for them against the Egyptians." 26 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen." 27 So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing right into it; then the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. 28 The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh's entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained. 29 But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 30 Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31 When Israel saw the great power which the Lord had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses.

An eight year old boy was reporting to his folks at Sunday dinner what he had learned in Sunday School that morning. "Boy, was it exciting!" he exclaimed to his parents. "Moses organized all the Hebrews into a resistance group. They planned real carefully and finally they broke loose from their Egyptian slave masters. They moved as fast as they could toward Canaan. They drove every kind of vehicle they could get hold of – jeeps, half-tracks, sixteen wheelers, everything. But Pharaoh's army wouldn't quit. They tracked down the Israelites with color radar. They exploded missiles all around them and shot at them from jet planes in the sky. When Moses and his people reached the Red Sea, they thought they were finished. There was raging water in front of them and Egyptians behind them. Suddenly though, the Corps of Engineers came to the rescue and built a pontoon bridge over the Red Sea and all the fugitives crossed over to freedom. Then, just as Pharaoh's forces were about to go across the bridge, the Hebrews blew it up with dynamite and saved all the people. Then they lived happily ever after in the promised land. What a terrific story!"

The youngster's parents were concerned about their child's overactive imagination and asked, "is that really what they told you at church this morning?" "Not exactly, the kid replied, "but if I told you what they told me you'd never believe it." (Dunnam's comment on Exodus p.158) It's probably good to start there. Let's admit it, this is a pretty unbelievable story. This is one of those stories that stretches our faith in the word of God, but for those who actually experienced it and for their children after them it was not a story which tested their faith but one that built their faith. They knew it happened and the parting of the Red Sea came to be regarded as the greatest miracle of the Old Testament, the greatest display of the power of God anybody had ever seen or heard.

We will begin our look at this chapter of Scripture by considering the context of God's miracle and the context for the miracle of God was the predicament of Israel. Someone said, "Our extremity

is God's opportunity." And Israel was certainly in an extremity. Are you in one of those today? They were in a tight spot to be sure. We have lots of different ways we could word this. Around the country folks express the same thing in different ways. In New England, if you are in a predicament you are in a kettle of fish. In the south you are between a rock and a hard place. We say you are in a pickle, or maybe in a jam. You are up a tree or in a corner, you are hard pressed, and it all means you are in a real mess. There are no pleasant options for you to choose. That's where the children of Israel were. They were between the devil and the deep blue sea. To be precise they were in a place called Baal-zephon which was a geological cul-de-sac, which is French for a dead end. Had they gone north they would have run into some of the greatest fortresses of Egypt, so a run to the north was out. Had they gone south they would have been in Egyptian desert - no protection there. To the west was Egypt and that is where they had come from and from whence now came the mighty army of Pharaoh. To the east, well, that was unthinkable because there lay the formidable Red Sea. In short, Moses and the people were boxed in. They had no place to go and the army of Egypt was bearing down upon them. This would have made a great plot for an episode of Batman. Remember those old shows? The Penguin or Joker would catch Batman in a trap and there would seem no way out, it seemed impossible for Batman to escape their evil clutches, at least until the next show or the next commercial when, to your utter amazement Batman or Robin, or maybe even Alfred the Butler would find a way of escape. That is the kind of drama we have here except it involves a couple of million real people instead of just one caped crusader and his boy wonder. What a great story this is! Somebody should make it into a movie.

Let's look at the account of God's deliverance by looking first at how the people of Israel got in this predicament, this pickle, this jam, this kettle of fish. How did they wind up in this place? Was it poor leadership by Moses? Was it bad planning or a faulty compass? No, it was none of those things. The Hebrews were where they were because God led them there. Now, we hear all the time, people saying that God led them to do this or that or go here or there. God gets blamed for more stuff than even George W. Bush. Now, you need to know, God does lead people, and normally He leads through His word, but there are other ways too. God does lead us, but there are a lot of people claiming divine leading as an excuse. We have to be careful not to hide behind that line. To say, "God was leading me" is not enough. We may need to know why you concluded that God was leading you. Many claim that who are not led of God. But, if you were in the company of Moses you had it easy. How did these Hebrews know where God wanted them to go? 13:**21-22** *The Lord was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by*

night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. 22 He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people. This is the cloud mentioned in 14:19. God graciously led his people where they should go via a daytime cloud and a nighttime fire. There were no tough judgment calls. They didn't have to sit around like our elders examining different options about how to lead the church and spend the Lord's money. They simply played *follow the Leader* and the Leader here was very visible. The presence of God was made visible in the cloud and the fire. Neat! But if you think that following God will keep you out of trouble - think again! Sometimes God, not just our own foolishness, sometimes God leads us into tight spots and hard predicaments. So, if you find yourself in one of those spots today, if you are between a rock and a hard place at work, or in a relationship, don't worry, the God who brought you there knows what He is doing.

But why? Why did God box Israel into a corner like this? Two reasons: He had something to teach Egypt and He had something to teach Israel. 2-3 *“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. 3 For Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, ‘They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’ God is setting a trap for Pharaoh isn't He? He wants to make things look easy for Pharaoh so he would come running after his slave force 4 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.”* You see what God is doing? Pharaoh couldn't see it. The Hebrews, except for Moses, couldn't see it. To the naked eye it looked like Israel was trapped, like the bad guy was going to win, like Batman would be killed, but, in reality, who was being trapped? Proud ole Pharaoh. Don't let appearances deceive you. In spite of how things seem Romans 8:28 is true 28 *we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.* And when He does the enemies of God's people will see and fear and honor the Lord who reigns on high. Egypt learned who is God. You can be sure the idol business in Egypt took a serious downswing after this. And the effect of God's deliverance went well beyond Egypt. The news of what happened at the Red Sea spread all over the near East. In Joshua 2, as the people prepared to enter Canaan and fight with Jericho, forty years later they find a woman in that pagan city who says this Joshua 2:9-11 *“I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. 10 For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did*

to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. 11 When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. You see, God wanted to make a statement to the Gentiles in His miracle.

Secondly, God had something to teach Israel. The Lord had newly formed this congregation of Israel. He had shown them His mighty hand in their deliverance from Egypt and once again He wanted to confirm them in faith. He wanted His people to understand what a great and awesome and faithful God He is. He wanted to show them that His presence would be sufficient for every trial and that no matter how bleak things would appear they could trust in Him. The New Testament assumes that Christians are going to face trials. The New Testament assumes that we will be persecuted. The New Testament says to count it all joy when we encounter various trials because whatever doesn't kill us, by God's grace, makes us strong. Diamonds are formed under pressure. So remember, next time you're up against the enemy, that God is working on you, not to destroy you but to perfect you. *When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie my grace all sufficient shall be thy supply. The flame will not hurt thee I only design, thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.* Who led Israel into this mess? The Shepherd of Israel did it. God did it.

However, because our ancient friends had never heard me preach on this, they didn't respond like trusting sheep. They had not learned to live by faith yet. They still put a lot of stock in their eyes and what they saw scared them out of their sandals. 10ab *As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened.* Ah, you gotta be careful what you focus on. You focus on the opposition and you'll get in trouble. These dear people looked and saw desert on one side, fortresses on the other, a sea on another and an army coming from the fourth direction. How would you have felt, out there in the wilderness? 10 *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.* Good, that's good. These people are learning! Back in Exodus 2 it said they cried out. Now it says they cried out to Yahweh. Their crying out had some direction this time. It has become more than desperate groans it is now what could be called prayer. How spiritual this is I don't know. Almost everybody prays these kinds of prayers. I heard an atheist recently say, "I don't believe in God and I only pray to Him when I'm in really big trouble." There are no atheists in foxholes. It's amazing, isn't it, what a predicament will do to an independent spirit. It's remarkable how you can walk along with real swagger and strut your way through life like some human peacock until suddenly

you come to the end of your rope - then you look up. Then you cry for help. When I am bemoaning the lack of prayerfulness in the church I sometimes pray, "Lord, find a gentle way to get our attention, to get us to cry out to you, but do find a way, gentle or not." You forget about the Lord and He will often get your attention in a way you may not like.

So, they saw Pharaoh coming. They were terrified. They prayed. Did God open the earth and swallow the armies of Egypt? No. So, they figured, "hey, we tried prayer. That didn't work. Now let's try complaining. Yeah!" 11-12a *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? 12 Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'?"* Now that's a nice set of questions for Moses. They aren't questions at all are they? They are bitter complaints and accusations against their former hero. 12b *For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."* Man, leadership is a roller coaster ride if there ever was one. Now, you're a hero, now you're a goat. Hey, if you want to lead you gotta be able to hear from God. He knows you aren't so great or so bad as some suggest. But this is typical isn't it? When we have trouble we always want to find somebody to blame. We seek an outlet for our anger and the leader is usually a convenient target. Watch yourself on this one. Be careful not to play the blame game. Play the trust game instead. The Hebrews cried to God and blamed Moses. Instead, you to cry to God and fix your eyes on Him.

How did Moses respond to the complaints? Did he get self-defensive and retaliate against these absurd charges? No, Moses was cool as a cucumber. Mr. Moses gets an A for his handling of this situation. 13-14 *But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. 14 The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent."* Moses plays the man. Moses acts like a true leader. He doesn't respond to their wicked words, he responds to their needs, to their fears. He tells them to do four things. The first thing to do is to relax. He says, "Fear not." ® Of all the things God says not to do in His word He says this one the most. Do not fear! Telling somebody that is not a cure-all but I find it does help. When someone tells me not to fear it makes me think more deeply. It provokes me to contemplate the reasons for confidence. It reminds me of how costly and how useless fear is. It helps me get hold of my self. But when you have a good reason to fear like the Hebrews did you need more than this, and Moses gives it. His second counsel is to stand still. Stand still. A lot of good that is going to do huh? But it sure beats running around like a chicken with its head cut off. His third word is to watch, to be alert in order

to see the salvation of God. God had told Moses what His intention was here. I can't know that Moses wasn't afraid here, but at least He had heard from God. He didn't know how God would save but He believed God would. Then fourthly, he said to be quiet. *14 The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.* "Relax, stand still, watch and be quiet. Now that's easy enough to do isn't it? No, not when you are in spot like this! In fact, there may be nothing harder than to be still like this. The natural reaction isn't to relax, be still, watch and keep silent, the natural response is to worry, run, fight and make all kinds of noise. Standing around waiting on God is hard on the flesh, especially when you have the devil promoting all kinds of fear-based nonsense.

The devil likes to catch you in a tough spot like this. He seizes the opportunity; and while God is saying, "Trust me" he says to you, "Despair! Cast yourself down, lie down and die. Do some drugs, drink some booze. Destroy yourself now. There's no hope anyway! Despair!" And if that doesn't work Satan will suggest that you surrender. "Give up. Run up the white flag. Turn yourself in. Choose the easy way. You've tried this Christianity gig and it is just too hard. Better to be a slave in Egypt than a free man in danger." Some of you have chosen this very course. Some of you are described by the parable of the soils. You are like that ground that receives the seed of God's word with joy. You like this salvation business. You like the heaven talk, but when the sun of persecution comes out, when it gets a little hard to be a Christian then you are ready to fold and go home. You would rather take the easy road, the broad road. You'll take safety over salvation. You'll take a risk-free bondage over a precarious freedom. Your faith has no staying power, no guts. Will that be your story? I pray not. I pray you would choose to stand firm in faith and wait on the salvation of God. Yet another hiss of the old serpent is the suggestion of a faithless activism. The evil counselor cries, *Don't just stand around praying, do something! Something or other must be done!* I want you to understand that this is an appeal to your pride. It tempts us to think that somehow, *I can solve the problem, I can save the day.* It's what I call the messianic complex. I struggle with this. It's the notion that if I just hustle a little more, just think and work a little harder, that I will be able to solve the problem. It's a lie from the pit. As much experience as I have, as many books as I might read, as much time as I might spend I can't build the church. Only Jesus can build the church! Only Jesus can save your kids, only Jesus can meet your needs. There are times when He says to stand and watch and to do anything else means you just get in His way. Sometimes God commends to us a positive passivity. Sometimes He bids us to stand by and see the salvation of the Lord.

After he said these things to the people, Moses cried out to God for help. I like that. He stands before the people as Mr. Together but then goes to God and says, "Help!" Now if that's not in your Bible just read between the lines of verse 15. I know Moses did that because God says to him, 15b *Why are you crying out to Me?* Alright, God is beginning to move. First, He tells the people to move forward. They were headed toward the Red Sea. He says, "Keep going, straight ahead." God had to say that because the next thing He would do is move His glory, the fiery cloud, from before the people to behind them so as to shield them from the Egyptians. Then God did the big one. 21 *Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided.* God could have done it more quickly I'm sure but He used natural means to pull off a supernatural work. He formed two walls of water and dried up the river bed over night. Forget all the stupid explanations you've heard. This was either a miracle or it didn't happen. God split the waters and set His people free! But once again, like it was on the night of Passover, salvation for Israel meant destruction for Egypt. As the Egyptians pursued God sent confusion among them. The Egyptians knew they were in trouble 25cd *the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from Israel, for the Lord is fighting for them."* Indeed He was and when Moses stretched out his hand the sea came roaring down upon the armies of Egypt so that no one remained.

Romans 15:4 *whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.* The story we read today is true. The names remain the same to protect the innocent and the story is given to strengthen your soul, to give you the invaluable gift of hope by understanding two things. #1 is that God has a great purpose in your predicament. The mighty craftsman knows how to shape men under the pressures of the impossible. It just seems to take tight spots to grow us up. That's why some of you are in the jam you're in right now. God put you there to teach you a lesson in trust. God put you there to show you His power. The great thing about Red Sea experiences is that there is no escape to the north, south, east or west, the only way to look is up. In other words, those situations bring us to an end of self, so we are free to say, "Hey, Lord, there is nothing I can do." You know the old saying from the book of Ponderations, "God helps those who help themselves." That's not what the Bible teaches. God doesn't help those who help themselves, He helps the helpless and He helps them when they realize their helplessness. There was a man doing some work on top of a tall house when he lost his footing and slid off the roof, catching himself on a gutter, just before he fell. And there he hung with no one around to help him. All he could do was

hang on for dear life, and although he was not a religious man he started to pray, and he looked to heaven and said, “is there anyone up there who can help me?” Sure enough he saw a cloud move right over where he was hanging and a deep voice came from the cloud saying, “Believe and let go.” The man looked down and then he looked up again and said, “Is there anyone else up there who can help me?” That guy wasn’t to the end of his rope yet was he? Maybe you’ve done that. Maybe you have called on God and He said, "Trust me and let go of that relationship. Trust me and let go of that security blanket. Trust me and let go of that pleasure you’re clinging too.” But you refused and asked again for another voice. Hey, it’s time to face fully your predicament. Only God can save. Only God and God alone. You cannot do it. The first of the famous 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous is a great spiritual truth. That step is to admit that you are powerless over alcohol, over your sin, and that your life is unmanageable. Tight spots, pickles, jams, corners, predicaments often show us how puny we are and that’s good. That’s so good because as long as you think you can save yourself, you will not see the salvation of God. Take hope. God has a purpose in your predicament.

The second lesson is, "Hey, God is awesome!" ® Can you imagine being there on that night and watching God part that Red Sea? How many nights of history can rank with this one. This is awesome! What a display of the power of God, a God who not only creates but who acts in history! And acts with power on behalf of His people. **31** *When Israel saw the great power which the Lord had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses.* Nothing is too great for God!® And if you are His child all His power comes to your defense. Romans 8 means so much to me where it says **35** *Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Those are all tight spots aren’t they? These are the things that try men’s souls but look at what Paul says for us* **37** *But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us* ® We don’t just survive. The Hebrews couldn’t figure out how they would survive, while God was planning to give them a great victory. In all the hard things of life we are *hupernike* is the Greek, *super-conquerors* through Him. And why do we conquer? Because we are linked to Jesus. What God is teaching Israel here and what God is teaching us is that He will fight for us. Remember the little boy’s story I told at the beginning? He had it all happening through the brilliance of the Hebrews but that’s not how it happened is it? The Hebrews didn’t split the waters. The Hebrews didn’t confuse the chariots. The Hebrews didn’t drown the Egyptian army. God fought for them. The song of Moses in chapter 15:**1-3** *Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the Lord,*

and said, "I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted; The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. 2 "The Lord is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will extol Him. 3 "The Lord is a warrior; The Lord is His name. Take hope in this. Don't despair, don't surrender, don't panic, remember that our God is an awesome God. ---- (Our God is Awesome God.)