

ROOTS
God Makes a Way

We are in the midst of our ROOTS series and in case you're new or visiting, back in August we launched the ROOTS series and week by week as a church we are walking through The Jesus Storybook Bible. So sometime spring of next year, we can look back and know that as a church, we've walked through most of the bible. So where are we? Last week Jerry introduced us to a man named Moses and his run in with God through a burning bush.....so we're going to fast forward a bit in Moses life and we find him in quite a different place from his days as a shepherd. So grab your bible or your phone or you can follow along on the screens as we look at today's text.

Exodus 14:10-31

As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, "Was it because there were 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!"

Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. I will harden 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."

Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided,

and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

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 the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at 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."

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 toward 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. And 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.

Churched or not, we are all either familiar with this story or have, at the very least, heard of it. Moses and the Crossing of the Red Sea. When we first read or hear this story, it's difficult to see or focus on anything other than the miracle of the parting of the sea. It's hard not to wrestle with the nitty gritty of that. How did the sea part? Was it really the sea or maybe a little river? Maybe it was just a shallow part of the sea and they were able to wade across. Come on, how is that possible. I'm right there, I still wrestle with those questions and I have to be honest, things like this don't help – **TEN COMMANDMENTS CLIP –**

If somehow you're not familiar with that clip, it's from the movie The Ten Commandments. We often focus on the miracle of the sea crossing and neglect some of the other things that are happening in this story. We make the story somewhat insignificant when we focus on the water. So this morning, we're going to take a step back and look at some of the other pieces of this story.

So as we saw last week, Moses was chosen to set the Israelites free from slavery in Egypt. Moses tells Pharaoh to let the Israelites go, Pharaoh says no and we know what ensues. 10 plagues which seemed to increase in severity, culminating in the 10th plague, the plague on the first-born, the Passover. This is significant to our story this morning.

This is the straw that broke the camels back, this is what sent Pharaoh over the edge and led him to say to Moses, get out, take your stuff and go.

Moses leads approximately 2 million Israelites out of Egypt, into the desert, and they don't get to take the short road through the Philistine country. God leads them through the long and winding road because he feared that if they were confronted with war, they'd just turn back to Egypt. So Moses is leading 2 million people through the desert, not the easy way, but the hard way, 2 million! Have you ever been with a group of about 8 or more and try to make decisions. Better still, what did it take you to get to church this morning? My daughter Emma is 6 years old and it's not an uncommon occurrence as we're getting ready in the mornings for me to say to Emma, Emma get your shoes on.....Emma get your shoes on....5 minutes later and about 30 more Emma get your shoes on and it still might take once more for shoes to physically be on her feet and even at that point, they could be on the wrong feet. We're talking 2 million people.....By day God went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them and by night a pillar of fire. I want us to keep this verse in mind, we'll come back to it in a bit:

Exodus 13.22 – Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

After several days, Pharaoh realizes that this is a mistake, that he's lost his workforce, 2 million slaves that were the backbone of their infrastructure and economy. So what does he do, he rounds up every chariot in Egypt and loads them with soldiers and goes after Moses. Now even though Moses has a head start, it won't be hard to catch up to 2 million wandering Israelites and it definitely won't be hard to spot them. And this is where we picked up this morning. The Egyptians are closing in on the Israelites. The Israelites see the Egyptians coming over the hill and the Israelites immediately pile in on Moses...

Were there not enough graves in Egypt that you brought us out into the desert to die? What have you done to us? It would've been better to live as slaves in Egypt than to die free in the desert. At least we had food to eat in Egypt....

2 million people, afraid, hungry, looking over their shoulder and seeing nothing but impending doom. Looking over their shoulder and seeing something approaching that scares them to death, something that thought they had already defeated. They're afraid and begin questioning if they ever should have left in the first place. Now let me say something here, let's not be quick to judge the Israelites, let's not be quick to say, 'Oh come on guys, get it together, stop your whining' Their fear, their reluctance, their frustration and their anger is coming out of a place of walking by faith. The Israelites are taking a step of faith in following this shepherd out into the desert; they're walking by faith toward the idea that there is something "better", a promised land. Often times when we walk by faith, often times when we follow God, we find ourselves scared, we find ourselves afraid, we find ourselves being pursued by the thing we thought we had

defeated. If you've never experienced that, maybe it's because the enemy has no need to chase you, cause you're right where the enemy would like you to be. Don't be quick to judge the fearful, the timid, the scared, the nervous, the ones who are crying out in confusion because it is easier to live in the predictability of slavery than it is to live in the uncertainty of freedom. That's an important part of the Exodus story, it's easier to live in the predictability of slavery than it is to live in the uncertainty of freedom.

If you follow Jesus, or in the Israelites case, if you follow God. If you follow him long enough there will come a time where you'll wonder even if you don't say it, 'I think my life might be better off without God.'. In those moments like we see in verse 12, in those moments where we can see the chariots coming over the hill, the moments when we've been following and obeying and something goes horribly wrong, in those moments where we meet death or hurt or cancer or heartbreak, in those moments we can find ourselves wondering if we may just be better off without God, because surely he's not in this, surely he's not with me when I really need him right now.

So in verse 12 this is what Moses is dealing with, the Israelites are giving him the business and then we see something unique.

Moses, this man of insecurity and inadequacy, a shepherd who struggles to speak says something fairly eloquent in verse 13.

Don't be afraid, stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. (takes some guts to say this, the Israelites can see the Egyptians and Moses says) The Egyptians you see today, you will never see again. (You know Moses has to be thinking, please God back me up on this, please, these chariots are big, full of soldiers and they look pretty rough. Just a quick side note....Moses and the Israelites are face to face with the Egyptian army and you know what weapon Moses has in his hand while he's giving this pep talk right, it's a stick, not a special stick, its not significant, its a shepherd staff. And the Egyptians have the best chariots Egypt has to offer and the text goes even further and says 'and all the others', so there, before the Israelites are all the chariots in Egypt, the Cadillac's and the hoopedys, they're all there and Moses has a stick) Moses says, 'The Lord will fight for you, you need only be still.'

Some of you may have this last part hung somewhere in your home. I've seen it placed in our homes as an encouragement that God is close, he's here to fight for us, we need only be still. Its powerful, its eloquent coming from Moses, but its also wrong or at the very least incomplete.....this is why its important to get context, to observe what's happening, to not grab a verse and latch onto it without knowing what its really saying. Moses gives his pep talk, its great, its powerful but God gives his counter to Moses in verse 15 and you gotta love this.

Why are you crying out to me? The Lord will fight for you, you need only be still and God says, 'Why are you looking at me?' Get going, tell the Israelites to MOVE ON. I think that's important for us this morning. We have a tendency to stand still when we

ought to be moving on. Its possible to be on the right path that God has in store for us but what good is a path if we aren't willing to take a step. Now, there is a flipside to this, there are times when we stand still, when we ought to be moving on, but there are also times when we're moving when we ought to be standing still. We often scramble about stuff we ought to be still about and we stand still about things that we ought to be scrambling toward. We often ask God to DO the stuff that God has given us to Do and we often DO stuff in our own strength that only God can do.

----- FIRST LEARNED TO DRIVE -----

I think God has a hope for us to be able to hit the gas and the brake at the same time....this is what I mean. Maybe Moses' command to 'just be still' isn't wrong, maybe it just wasn't complete. Maybe the key here is, is that we are able to be still on the inside while we're moving on the outside. Have peace on the inside while making progress on the outside. We struggle with being still, with being quiet, with being peaceful. We struggle with moving on things that we know God is nudging us toward. So before we move on, I want us to spend a minute in quiet, a minute being still, being peaceful and I want us to think about what it is that God might be moving us toward, moving you toward, moving ZPC toward.

This pillar that has been leading the Israelites, this pillar that as we have seen (remember Exodus 13.22 – the pillar hasn't left its place IN FRONT OF THE PEOPLE) hasn't left its place, it's led them every step of the way. All of a sudden it moves from in front and stands behind the Israelites. All of a sudden the very thing that God had provided to lead Moses and the Israelites leaves, you can imagine the people feeling even more afraid and more desperate as the only visual that they've had of God's presence is no longer leading them....but while its not leading them, it is protecting them.

I think there is a lesson for us in that, sometimes God says "follow me, I'll be right behind you." Sometimes God says 'follow me, I'll be right behind you"

God tells Moses to raise his staff and stretch his hand out over the sea. I wish we could've seen that, the hesitation, the feeling of absurdity, the feeling of letting everyone down because your only hope is me holding my hand out over the water with this stick.

Well....the rest is history, the waters part, the Israelites cross and the waters crash in on the Egyptians, not sparing even one the text says.

So the Israelites escape the Egyptian army and are free from slavery. Now what? I was thinking about this story a lot over the past several weeks and I couldn't help but wonder how an Israelite might describe the experience of the Exodus. Think of what an

Israelite would say on the way to Canaan, having come out of the Red Sea and experienced all that they've experienced to this point. Here's what I think an Israelite might say: If you asked them, 'Who are you?' they might say, 'I was in a foreign land under the sentence of death, in bondage, but I took shelter under the blood of the lamb. Our mediator led us out, and we crossed over, and now we're on our way to the Promised Land. We're not there yet, but he's given us his law to make us a community. And he's given us the Tabernacle because you have to live by grace and forgiveness. And his presence is in our midst, and he's going to stay with us until we get home.' God made a way when there seemed to be no way out.

If you're a Christ follower this morning, how might you describe your experience? Who are you? We might say, we're foreigners wrestling with sin and the slavery that it can put us in, but we're protected by the blood of the Lamb, by the blood of Jesus. He, as our mediator, saved us from our sin, from ourselves. He's established His church because we should live in community by grace and forgiveness. His presence is in our midst, through the Holy Spirit, and he's going to stay with us until we get home. God made a way when there seemed to be no way out.

As I mentioned at the beginning, we have a tendency to make this story insignificant when we focus on the miracle of parted waters, we have a tendency to see things as insignificant. Moses staff, his stick, was seemingly insignificant when compared to the Egyptian chariots full of trained soldiers. We have a tendency to see ourselves as insignificant, but this morning, God is reminding of something, He is reminding us that we have an amazing potential for significance; not significance for our own sakes, but for His sake, significance in His story, not our own. He is reminding us that we have a significant part to play in his story. He's reminding us that through Him, a stick, something small and insignificant, could crush an entire army, that through Him an inadequate, insecure, murderer (Moses) that begins to walk in faith can lead a people out of slavery into freedom, that through him there is restoration, redemption, healing, grace, forgiveness, second chances, salvation, love and the list goes on and on and on. We have a significant part to play in God's story, ZPC has a significant part to play in God's story. May we never hesitate to follow, May we move when you would have us move, May we do so with a peace on the inside, a stillness, while making progress on the outside....Amen.....

Thank you Jesus, Son of God, Creator of all things, Savior of the world, thank you for Your amazing grace and for the ways in which you weave us into Your story.

May we seek you.

May we be more compelled by the uncertainty of freedom than by the predictability of slavery.

May we seek you in hopes of discovering our place in Your story.

May we, as your church, continually discover where you are moving and may we never hesitate to jump on for the ride.