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Sermon Title: *God's Great Salvation*

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Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end.

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God's Great Salvation

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me to our text for today, as we continue our series from Exodus, the Old Testament book about God's deliverance. Last Sunday we came to the heart of Exodus as we considered the last plague, that of the death of Egypt's firstborn. We also looked at the institution of the Passover meal, which Jesus superseded with the institution of his Last Supper, the celebration of our deliverance from sin through his sacrificial death. It was this tenth and final plague upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians that brought about his decision to allow the Israelites to leave their bondage in Egypt.

Today we remain in the heart of Exodus but now will look at "the climax to which the first 14 chapters of Exodus have been leading" (Enns, 268), the Israelites' crossing the Red Sea. This is the "central miracle of the Old Testament," where there are some 25 direct references to this event that defined the people of Israel as God's chosen and delivered people (Motyer, 158). Whereas the Passover was the event that pointed to the cross and shed blood of Christ, the crossing of the Sea foreshadowed the resurrection of Jesus, and as such is "the prime symbol of salvation" through Christ (Cole, 122). It's not hyperbole to say that the crossing of the Red Sea is "the most significant event in all of biblical faith next to the resurrection of Jesus" (Oswalt *CBC*, 383). As I read from this lengthy passage of Scripture, think with me what it says to us about God's great salvation.

Read Exodus 13:17-14:31

There's probably not a more important yet also more widely misunderstood word in our Christian vocabulary than the word "salvation." We can't blame unbelievers for misunderstanding the message of salvation, since it's something outside of their experience. But we who claim to have experienced and are still receiving the benefits of God's salvation need to be certain we understand and are genuinely experiencing this life-and-destiny-changing work of God in our lives. We need to examine ourselves as to the genuineness of our salvation (2 Corinthians 13:5), but also need to be able to clearly explain salvation to those who have yet to receive this experience of God's deliverance from the power of sin, Satan and death and into eternal life with God.

Jesus himself, particularly as recorded in John's Gospel (e.g. 5:24), alludes to passing through the Sea as expressive of the salvation he came to bring. And on the mount of his transfiguration, when his appearance was dramatically altered when visited by Moses and Elijah, Jesus spoke with them "about his departure, which he was to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). The Greek word for "departure" is "exodos," and refers to his imminent departure from his mortal life to the next, when he would re-enter his everlasting glory (Enns, 285).

Our salvation through Christ is a dynamic, life-and-destiny-changing experience that has a past, present and future dimension in Scripture. We who are in Christ speak of our having been saved, when we by grace through faith were made right with God and passed over from death to life (John 5:24; Ephesians 2:8f, etc.). Paul says that the exodus passing through the sea is a picture of our baptism, as we pass through the waters of baptism to show that we have passed from death to life in Christ (Wiersbe, 84; 1 Corinthians 10:1ff; Romans 6:1ff). We have been saved and are secure in Christ, yet we also continue to be saved, and are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). And we will finally be saved when we have passed through our earthly pilgrimage and arrive safely "on the other side," when our salvation is fully consummated and we are glorified with Christ (John 17:24; 1 John 3:2).

In other words, our salvation through Christ is not about getting a free ticket to heaven, about saying the right words that assure our going to heaven when we die. As we look at the Israelites' experience of passing through the Sea, we will have a more complete and realistic understanding of the greatness of God's salvation. Let's note first of all...

God's great plan for salvation

How God led the Israelites out of Egypt and across the Sea of Deliverance is representative of the way he leads us as his children, which...

Is often perplexing

God directed the route of the Israelites, avoiding the closest route to Canaan, which would have led them to a direct encounter with military opponents, for which they were unprepared. But then the Lord led them into a situation that was even more challenging than the first route, but was the way he chose in order to reveal his saving power. In fact, God chose a way so puzzling no one else could possibly devise (Durham, 187). God led them to a place that continues to baffle scholars and one that lured the Egyptian army into an eventual entrapment and that caused the Israelites to feel totally vulnerable to attack and certain death. God's chosen path was so muddled

looking that Pharaoh thought the Israelites were totally disoriented and were sitting ducks to be recaptured and returned to slavery in Egypt. So, with his heart once again hardened against God and his people, Pharaoh, having regretted the loss of the free slave labor of the Israelites, launched a full pursuit of these hapless children of God (14:1-9).

This is the way of God's plan for salvation—always baffling to us and beyond our understanding. His ways are indeed beyond our understanding (Isaiah 55:8f). This is true for his plan for our eternal salvation through Christ and his working in our lives to draw us to himself. No human could ever devise a salvation plan through a cruel cross upon which God would sacrifice his Son in utter weakness, which to the entire world looked like a failed plan. No doubt Satan was delighted to see the arrest, condemnation and execution of God's Son on a cross. And of course, even Jesus' disciples failed to understand this way of salvation, and it didn't become clear until after his resurrection, ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit. It would be through Jesus' receiving the wrath of God and the condemnation and punishment for our sins that he would accomplish our salvation.

And he works in perplexing and mysterious ways in our lives to bring us to faith and also to lead us in our faith pilgrimage. But God's great plan for salvation, as the Israelites were to discover...

Is always perfect

This route God chose for the Israelites, instead of delivering them to Pharaoh's army, resulted in their miraculous salvation. And we who are God's redeemed children can look back now and see that God knew what was best. This is true for his perfect salvation through the cross. The cross was no mere afterthought, but rather was in the mind and heart of God before the world was made (Revelation 13:8). And that is true for the salvation of his people, whom he has chosen before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).

It's great to know God has a plan, a perfect plan, for the salvation of all who come to him, and also for your life as well. In the perfect way and at the right time, God sent his Son to rescue us (Galatians 4:4). In my life, he led me to himself through a godly home and other witnesses and influences. For others who have come to faith, God allows to wander about in a wilderness of what appear to be wasted years. And in many cases, salvation appears only a remote prospect. But God seems to specialize in what seems unlikely, just as was his plan for our salvation. I hope that as you look back over your life, you can say with David, "He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (Psalm 23:3).

As one commentator noted, "If there had been any military strategists in Israel that night, they probably would have disagreed with the evacuation route God selected...." (Wiersbe, 78). We need to submit to God's wisdom and ways, in providing our deliverance and also in the specific paths he's mapped out for our lives, in our coming to faith in Christ as well as a life of following Jesus. We can actually "expect to be led occasionally on paths that seem unnecessarily long and circuitous." But we must trust that God knows what he's doing (Wiersbe, 79).

We see also...

God's great power in salvation

The Israelites were being pursued by the greatest military power of the time, with the feared light chariots, which were the world's most advanced fighting machines (Durham, 193; Enns, 277). They found themselves trapped between this advancing army and the "deep blue sea."

Your study Bible likely says the translation of this body of water, in Hebrew "Yam Suph," is Sea of Reeds. No one knows this exact location, but likely it was a northern extension of the Suez waterway, perhaps a large lake (Ryken, 392), a term often interchangeable with sea. For example, the large Lake of Galilee is often referred to as the Sea of Galilee. In our text, liberal scholars attempt to give a naturalistic explanation of the crossing of what they picture for us as a swampy marsh rather than a formidable lake or sea (For an example, see notes on 14:2, 21-29, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, New Revised Standard Version).

I love the story Philip Ryken tells about a liberal minister preaching this passage to a congregation of "an old, Bible-believing African-American church. At a certain point in his sermon the minister referred to the crossing of the Red Sea. 'Praise the Lord,' someone shouted. 'Takin' all them children through the deep waters. What a mighty miracle!' However," says Ryken, "the minister did not happen to believe in miracles. So he said, rather condescendingly, 'It was not a miracle. They were in a marsh-land, the tide was ebbing, and the children of Israel picked their way across in six inches of water.' 'Praise the Lord!' the man shouted again. 'Drownin' all them Egyptians in six inches of water. What a mighty miracle!'" (396).

We can trust that, whatever the location, it was a formidable body of water that confronted the Israelites with an impossible obstacle, needed the miraculous intervention of God Almighty. As on this day of deliverance, so with his salvation of us, God...

Confronts our doubts and fears

He will put us in a position to make us acutely aware of our total powerlessness to save ourselves. The Israelites stood helplessly between an unconquerable army and an impassable body of water. Only God could deliver them. And that's what everyone outside of Christ needs to understand. He alone can save us from the power of sin and the penalty of death and give eternal life, forgiving our sins and transforming us into the re-born children of God.

God leads us to the place where we must admit our inability to save ourselves. He will also make us realize that our lives are hopelessly lost without his saving grace. Perhaps he will make us stare into the depths of our soul and square into the face of death itself, causing us to fear as never before. But grace then calls us to take our eyes off ourselves and the enemy of our souls and instead look in faith to Jesus. Jesus commands us to stop fearing and look to him in faith, as he did the disciples in the storm (Mark 4:40).

When the Israelites realized their apparently deadly dilemma, they cried out that they would have been better off serving as slaves to the Egyptians than to die in the desert. Moses' subsequent challenge is translated a bit weakly, and is more of an angry rebuke than a word of comfort and encouragement. Instead of saying "Stand still," Moses more likely said, "Shut up!" (Enns, 273), which is the way *The Message* paraphrases verse 14:

“God will fight the battle for you. And you? You keep your mouths shut!”

The Lord alone has provided for our salvation and calls us to look to him alone, to stop our whining and cease our fearful fretting and place our trust in him alone. Faith is simply responding to God's word and promises, taking our eyes off our fears, our questions and our objections.

No one has ever expressed it better than the great preacher C H Spurgeon (1834-92), who shared his testimony of conversion as a response to a substitute lay preacher, who pointed his finger to him, who was seated near the back of a sparsely attended Free Methodist Chapel in London. The preacher quoted from Isaiah 45:22 (KJV), and then said, “Look to Jesus, young man!” Spurgeon said, “I only looked,” and in simple faith received what Christ had done for him, was forgiven and his pilgrimage with Christ began that day in earnest (649ff).

After we have come to faith in Christ, we continue to live by faith in him, surrendering to him our fears and looking to him as our faithful deliverer (Colossians 2:6). We need to be reminded, when we begin to fret, whine and fear, to “shut up!” and trust the Lord and the promises in his word. As we see with the Israelites, God in his great power in salvation...

Delivers us to the “other side”

God's delivering presence was with his people as an angel in a pillar of fire and a cloud, which separated and protected them from Pharaoh's pursuing army “all night long” (14:20). The Lord had appeared in a theophany to Moses at the burning bush, and now his presence is in a pillar of fire and a cloud. The Lord then directed Moses to wave his hand over the water, which brought the wind of God to powerfully divide the waters and dry the ground for the Israelites to pass over to the other side. When the Egyptian army pursued them into the sea bed, the waters returned like a powerful tsunami, engulfing and drowning them in a terrifying death (14:23-28).

So the crossing of the sea becomes a graphic picture of God's great power of salvation, more powerful than any tsunami to ever hit the shores of Indonesia or Japan. Paul says that we are saved through faith in Christ Jesus by an even greater power of God—the working of “his incomparably mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion....” (Ephesians 1:19ff).

We have no earthly idea about the power required for our salvation—the ineffable suffering of Christ, his atonement that accomplished salvation for all who believe, and the power of God to overthrow the long-held dominion of Satan and his grip upon the souls of mankind. And what mighty power it took for God to give Jesus the victory over sin, Satan, death and the dominion of darkness and raise Jesus from the dead and then give him power and dominion over the universe as the reigning King of kings and Lord of lords! And that power of God is what delivers you from sin, guilt and condemnation and carries you over to the other side, the side of safe entry into the Kingdom of God.

Paul draws on this imagery of the crossing of the sea to picture our salvation portrayal of baptism (1 Corinthians 10:1f). And baptism, a visible testimony of believers immersed under water, is a picture of a burial and a resurrection, by the power of God, to live a new life (Romans 6:1-4). We who are saved and being saved by grace are living in the resurrection power of Christ within us.

And we have the presence of the Holy Spirit, of Christ in us, the pillar of fire and the holy cloud of God. Just as the Lord accompanied his people through the fire and cloud (13:21f; 14:19f; 24), so he is always with us, even within us, to the end of our pilgrimage (Matthew 28:20). Despite the sins and repeated rebellion and unbelief of the children of Israel, God remained a faithful, guiding and providing presence with them, all the way into Canaan.

The great salvation of God in this exodus of his people is more *deliverance to* somewhere than *deliverance from*, even as was discussed by Jesus, Moses and Elijah at his Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36 and see my introduction re: “exodos,” from Enns). I like the way one scholar describes Yahweh, the great I Am of the crossing of the Red Sea, as “the companionate God,” one who is our faithful companion, having brought us into a personal relationship with him and who remains with us forever (Motyer, 156ff).

I have a GPS navigational system in the pastor’s car that was installed soon after my arrival as your pastor over 7 years ago. Technology has improved since then and these GPS’s are not only better, but also cheaper, and whenever mine malfunctions, Nancy reminds me that I need to get a new and more up-to-date one. Often my only GPS software isn’t up-to-date on new road construction, but as long as it usually gets me where I need to go, I keep using it. But God’s guidance system is absolutely perfect, and his “software” is always current and he knows exactly where we need to be each step of the way. As we live by faith and with trust in his Word as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105) and follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 14:25f), we will get where he wants us to go.

It’s good to reflect upon and testify to our salvation experience regarding what happened to us in the past; but we need to emphasize what God is doing in us now and also include where he is leading us—to complete Christ-likeness. This is through the great power of God, his mighty wind that divided the sea, and the mighty Holy Spirit, who has blown upon us and who works his unseen hurricane wind for our good and his glory.

Finally we see in our text...

God’s great purpose through salvation

At the heart of God’s great salvation of his people is his purpose: to gain glory for himself (14:4), which came to him through the overthrow and judgment of Pharaoh and his army as well as through his miraculous delivering of his people. One pastor says the theme of Exodus is “Saved for His Glory” (Ryken, 383).

Glory (Hebrew “kabod”) means the weight, value, substance of something. Only an undervaluing of God would cause anyone to wonder why he should desire glory for himself. “Isn’t that a rather selfish thing for God to desire and demand his own glory?” they ask in total ignorance. God alone, as Creator and Redeemer, who alone is perfect love, power, majesty and holiness, is the only one worthy of glory, praise and honor (Oswalt, 148). As his creatures, it’s our role to glorify him, and our worship and adoration of God actually makes us more human. We are then doing what we were made to do; and God is fulfilling his purpose for his creation. Because he is God and is fulfilling his purpose, not only *should* he be praised—he *must* be praised (Durham, 198).

We see God's great salvation purpose giving him...

Glory through his righteous judgment

God told Moses he would gain glory for himself through the overthrow and destruction of Pharaoh's army (14:4). And indeed, after the deliverance of the Israelites and the destruction of Pharaoh's army, as the children of God saw the dead bodies of the Egyptian soldiers on the shore and "saw the great power of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant" (14:31). They glorified God for his righteous judgment. Now they knew they were really saved (Motyer, 165).

Scripture tells us that God is glorified in either his judgment or salvation. When his will is spurned and his offer grace is rejected, then God's judgment will bring glory to himself. Paul explains to us that Pharaoh was raised up, even in his rebellion during the plagues and the Red Sea pursuit, for God to display his power and proclaim his name in all the earth (Romans 9:17). Whether we harden our hearts against God or submit to his will and receive his grace, God will not be robbed of his glory, the honor that is due to him. God's perfect justice will prevail in his judgment of unrepentant sinners, to his glory. Just as the Egyptians drowned the Israelite babies in the Nile, so God drowned Pharaoh's army in the sea (Enns, 272).

The Book of Revelation shows that God will receive glory even from the destruction of this fallen, unrepentant, Christ-hating world (18:1ff). Paul tells us that on the Day of the Lord's appearing, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, even the tongues of the unrepentant, who will admit his lordship with everlasting regret. And their confession, even as the condemned, will be to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10f).

And God receives...

Glory through his transforming grace

What we see in these closing verses is the work of God in making these fearful, complaining and unbelieving Israelites into worshipers, who at this point at least, fear God "and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant" (14:31).

The grace that has saved us has also judged our sin, so that we too can see the corpse of our old sinful nature drowned in the sea and washed up on the shore of God's forgetfulness. We are indeed buried with Christ in baptism (Romans 6:4) and are to count ourselves, picture and realize ourselves, as dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (6:11). When we realize Christ has defeated and forever judged and broken sin's power over us, we are free to live for God a life of joyful obedience. Using the language of passing through the sea, Jesus says that whoever hears his word and believes the one who sent him "has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has *crossed over* from death to life" (John 6:24).

God's great purpose in his salvation is that he is glorified in the lives of his people, not just in the New Heaven and Earth when we die, but right now, right here where we live. We are called to glorify and honor God in our bodies, in our physical lives (1 Corinthians 6:20). We are to worship him not just in corporate worship, but in everyday life, as we focus on and honor him and make

him central and make him known to others through our life and words. Jesus declared that this was the Father's purpose, to seek after worshipers (John 4:23).

As we worship him, we follow him in a love and trust relationship, remembering that as with the Israelites, sometimes our Lord leads us along "perilous paths" until we experience our final victory over the Beast and arrive in the Promised Land (Revelation 13, Maclaren, 57). But what's important is that he's with us all the way, and works in us and through us, working all things together for our good and for his glory (Romans 8:28f).

As Moses and the Israelites passed through the Sea to the other side, so Jesus, who is greater than Moses, passed through the waters when he, the Crucified, passed through the walls of death and hell and came through on the other side, leaving the tomb behind (Hebrews 3:3). And because we are in Christ, so we also have passed through the Sea and have already come out on the other side into the Kingdom of Heaven (1 Corinthians 10:2; Romans 6:1ff).

Conclusion:

The writer of Hebrews spoke of the salvation provided through Jesus as superior to that of angels and of Moses. In the midst of this discussion he asks, "How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3). This great salvation is offered to all who will believe. Today you may pass through the Sea of sin and death and be carried by grace to new life in Christ. You're invited to join others who will pass through the waters of baptism on Easter Sunday morning, who will declare that they have experienced and will continue to experience God's great salvation.

We who have come to know Christ are warned to hold to him and to continue following him as Lord and trusting him as the Savior who has delivered us through the barrier of sin, away from the death grip of Satan and into eternal life. To turn away from Christ is to endanger our souls' everlasting destiny as well as to dishonor the One who has saved us through his blood. And if we remain as believers, but ignore the blessings of walking with Christ and living in his will and full fellowship, we can expect the judgment of his discipline to draw us back to himself (Hebrews 12:5-13).

We have a great salvation, God's great salvation. The greatness of our salvation calls for the totality of our gratitude and commitment. We need to appropriate the fullness of very blessing that is ours in Christ. We have the privilege and glad obligation to live by the power of the Red Sea and the Resurrection our new life in Christ. We should also be eager and faithful to share the message of this great salvation with all who will hear it. Let's live, celebrate, and speak to those around us the great salvation of God.

Thoughts and questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. Define “salvation” in light of this passage about the exodus.
2. How has this passage about the Israelites’ passing through the Sea spoken to you? Read Ephesians 1:19-21. What do these Scriptures say to you about the greatness of God’s saving power in your life?
3. What does this saving power of God say to you about the most hardened unbeliever that you know?
4. God led the Israelites in a very roundabout direction that probably made little sense to them. Think about times in your life when God’s leading and his will for you was mysterious, confusing or even disappointing. If you’re comfortable in doing so, share these experiences with the group.
5. The Israelites followed and were protected by the pillar of fire and cloud. How does God guide us today, and how can we be sure of his presence with us? What difference does the assurance of God’s presence make in your life?
6. God’s purpose in destroying the enemy and in delivering his children was to display his glory. Why is it right that God seeks glory for himself? In what ways are we to glorify him?
7. Read Hebrews 2:3. Who do you think are the ones who ignore God’s great salvation, and what is the judgment they can expect?
8. Spend some time in prayer thanking God for his salvation in your life and committing yourself to grow in the grace by which you are being saved (2 Peter 3:18). Pray also for those in your circle of influence who are in need of God’s great salvation.

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