

EXODUS, PART 16: The Midst of the Sea | Salvation and Judgment

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I recently saw a conversation on Facebook where one of my friends, who is an agnostic, said if there is a god, he wouldn't look anything like the God of the Bible. And I find this an extremely interesting sentiment, and one I have heard many times in our culture today. Yet there is this crazy paradox happening. Here we have people who claim to have come to a knowledge and definite understanding of what a divine god would look like, then with that info they have weighed and measured the evidence of the God of scripture and found him wanting.

They know what God looks like, and it doesn't look like our God. And the paradox is never have we claimed to know so much about God while simultaneously knowing so little of ourselves! We cannot with clarity say that what we think is wrong is objectively wrong. We cannot say with clarity that I am a man, and you are a woman. Most of this uncertainty is tied to something really important: history.

Our culture is doing more than alter history, it is disregarding it. Morality though historically present is presently intangible. Gender though historically objective, is presently a fluid concept. Where true historians alter history by gauging the historic misinterpretation of facts, our current culture tries to define themselves as if history doesn't exist. We can look around and see this happening even in politics: is there a historic aspect of religious liberty, states rights, conservative economics and values which should be preserved, or is the past wonderfully irrelevant to the future.

What we are seeing is that the further we distance ourselves from our history, the less defined we become as people. That's because history is important. History is important because God is important. And our God writes history.

There is not one thing which happens in this world which God hasn't purposed. Everything points to God. Inside of that category of everything we see an even more specific facet of human history: the Bible. In the Bible God has recorded, through men, specific portions of history which are divinely inspired and graciously given to help us make sense of who we are and what we are to do as man.

Today we are going to look at a very popular story in terms of Biblical history: the crossing of the Red Sea. And yet rather than seeing this as a story disconnected from our reality, we need to bypass culture's view of history and instead see this story as the story which defines and diagnoses our own role, our own value, and our own perception.

Today we want to find meaning through divine history: **The crossing of the Red Sea helps us understand our present and our future by revealing the two sides of history: God's Salvation and God's Judgment.** Pray. So we have a lot of text to get through today so what I'm going to do is walk through the text pretty quickly but we are going to look at it through the two lenses of history.

First we are going to look at the story through lens #1: **The Glory of God in Salvation.** As we wade through this I want you to listen for those two themes: glory and salvation.

Let's start: **13:17-22.** So there are two things which are important in this text which frame the rest of the story. The first is that God hasn't viewed their Exodus as complete yet. He knows that is isn't until they reach the

Promised Land that the people will be fully delivered and because of that he takes them on a weird course. He knows that if they run into the Philistines, they will see war and become disheartened. Even though they people are ready for battle, God knows their hearts. So God in his mercy spares them. So this takes them away from the quick route and brings them down south. **Map1, Map2.**

The second thing I want us to see is that God himself is leading the people **13:22**. God is physically present before the people as both their leader and their light. Life post-Egypt is not life post God. He has promised to remain with his people.

So we continue with the story: **Exodus 14:1-4**. This is really an astounding text here. Because God, the sovereign, almighty, loving, powerful Yahweh has led his people into a death funnel. Here God has purposely moved Israel into a spot where on one side is the Red Sea, the other side is the mountainous wilderness, and behind them is the only spot of retreat. And God said he is going to fill that spot with the armies of Egypt!

Why? **14:4**. God has led Israel into a trial in order to show his power and glory over Egypt. God isn't done with the armies of Pharaoh. God's not done with the enemies of his people. God will get glory through the triumph over the enemies of his people.

Now in regards to history here we see something really important. God is expressing his will. God is speaking his plan for history and now look and see what happens: **Ex. 14:5-9**. God speaks history into motion.

I want you to know that today. As you encounter trials, blessings, hardships and everything in-between, it is God who controls the hearts, locations and activities of men. This means that the only way to make sense of whatever it is which is going on in your life is to know the God who controls it. In that knowledge, in that understanding we will find a peace in God's providence despite what circumstances may seem. History doesn't wage war against God, it plays his harmony.

One more quick note on this passage is we see the heart of Pharaoh and his nation hardened. And he brings the hammer. Remember, Israel, though they went out prepared for battle, they have no army. They were brick workers, farmers, fathers, mothers, and children. They have no formal military training, no access to military technology of the day. And yet Pharaoh brings the entire weight of the Egyptian army on them. Why? Look back: **Ex. 14:8**. The people went out defiantly. The Hebrew word for this literally means to elevate the soul of someone, to be raised over someone. Pharaoh is bringing his full wrath because God so mightily delivered his people that they did not leave Egypt as refugees, they left as conquerors.

So here we have the people of God who have just seen ten marvelous wonders, saw the Egyptians surrendering their wealth to them, left Egypt as a defiant people led by the mighty hand of Yahweh, and now they are encountering again Pharaoh. How will they respond? **Ex. 14:10-14**.

The people of Israel thought they could handle themselves. They left equipped for battle, but when the battle comes to them, they realize they have no might in themselves. They reject, rebel and complain against the Lord who promised to deliver them. And they begin to long for captivity.

We too find ourselves too often in the role of Israel. Being promised the provision and salvation of God we run into obstacles and fold into the false comfort of our old life. We say in our old life we didn't have such opposition, in our old life we didn't have the premise of such effort. But we fail to realize that in our old life we were captives. And the only thing which can shake us out of this deception is the thing which Moses is about to affirm this fickle people with.

Fear not, stand firm and see the salvation of God. For the Egyptians you see today, you will never see them again.

The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.

To resist sin, to fully enter the realm of salvation, we have to see the salvation of God in stunning clarity. So let us look and see, in vivid detail, the salvation of God given to the people of God: **Ex. 14:15-29** (God's response, fire and cloud)

Israel left Egypt thinking they had it made, that they were sufficient, that they had it from there, that they could protect and deliver themselves, but it was God who needed to fight their battle. We will all face many battles inside of our salvation, battles against sin, battles against the flesh. But the battle for our salvation is one we can only participate in as an active witness. We must respond to the salvation of God in fear, faith and worship.

You cannot save yourself. Our God is the God who went to a captive people, purchased them with the blood of a firstborn, plundered the captors and safely brought his people through the waters of death and set them on the path to the promised land. God gets his glory through the gift of our salvation.

So here we see glory and salvation, but that is only one half of history. The other half is what we will turn to now: **The Salvation of God through Judgment.**

One thing I have seen in the church is that often we have an insufficient view of salvation. Most people can articulate that they were saved because God loved them. They were saved to eternity with him. They were saved to a life of joy. But what this story puts up very plainly is that the other half of history is God's Judgment. God's salvation exists because judgment exists. We can't be saved from something we don't need saved from.

This piece of redemptive history is the real life model of what God does for us in Jesus. It is the dress rehearsal for the cross. It is one of the more prevalent themes repeated in scripture.

And of the majority of the times this story is mentioned, whether it is in the Old Testament or in the New Testament, what is emphasized is the aspect of God's judgment on the Egyptians.

God saved Israel from death, but what's amazing isn't that God saved Israel from the Egyptians, it's that he saved Israel from the waters. Time and time again we see God in scripture working military victories for an underequipped Israel. We even see this in the scope of history in general. But never have we seen a people saved from waters like this.

The thing which was feared most in this text wasn't the armies of Pharaoh, but the waters of the sea. For even though Israel was terrified of Pharaoh, look at the cries of the Egyptians: **Ex. 14:25b**. Egypt feared the one who held the waters.

God's judgment was more ominous and real than man's weapons.

The plot of the Red Sea isn't Egypt vs. Israel, but Egypt against God, and God for Israel.

Did you see the distinction which flowed through this text? It highlights salvation for Israel and judgment for Egypt in a way which is unavoidable. In vs. 20 we see the cloud and the darkness. On one side is the Egyptian army, covered in darkness by the power of God's presence, and on the flip side we see the people of Israel illuminated by the fire of the same presence. And the light and the darkness never came near each other.

In verse 16, 21, 22 and 26 we see God emphasizing that Israel was to walk through the sea on dry ground. Yet look at what happened when the Egyptians tried to cross the same path: **Ex. 14:25a**. Clogged with mud! What quickened the people of God to safety, slowed the Egyptians to their own destruction.

And here we see the clearest picture of the distinction: **Ex. 14:27-28**. Egypt was brought into the midst of the sea and they perished. But look at Israel: **Ex. 14:22**. Israel went into the midst of the sea and they were saved.

Two people groups. One sea. Two stories. From the book of Exodus on the sea always stands as synonymous with the judgment of God. And here is the reality of all history: everyone passes through the sea. The difference is how you come out. There is not one single person who avoids the judgment of God, for man will give account to the Lord who wove the hearts of man and creates the tapestry of history.

Look at the stark reality of judgment: **Ex. 14:27-31**. The exodus ended here when the threat of Pharaoh was eliminated through judgment, and the people of God were saved from judgment.

No more would Israel look over their shoulder, for the bodies on the shore assured them that their greatest threat was finished.

For those who stand on this side of redemptive history we see the cross as the point where our Exodus ended. On the cross Jesus killed death and sin through his own death. The judgment of Jesus brought us safely through the water of our own sin.

No more do we fear, no more do we need to doubt. For we have something greater than the Red Sea, for we have someone greater than even Moses.

In the Exodus the people of God avoided judgment because God went through the water before them. In new exodus, the gospel of Jesus, the people of God avoided judgment because Jesus went into it instead of them. Jesus did what dry ground and Moses couldn't. He appeased God perfectly. He finished sin ultimately. This means our hope comes not from a seashore scattered with corpses but from a tomb without one.

Let us join with King David and see this history as our history. Let it makes sense of our life in the same way it made sense of his life in **Ps. 66:5-6**.

Church do not be deceived: this history is your history. And you will either see yourself as defined by God's judgment or God's salvation. The difference between the western coast littered with the Egyptians and the east coast occupied by the Israelites is a hope and faith in God.

The God who sent his son to absorb our sin, to pay our debt, to ransom our lives, to kill our slave master, to recreate through the waters of judgment a post-judgment people. A people who can look in clarity at the judgment which should have been, but instead sees the salvation which was freely given.

I encourage you, look and see the salvation of God. I pray that in this room God soaks your heart in the waters of judgment so that you might feel the weight of your sin against God. But then I pray you may pass through that by the sacrifice of Jesus. There we find the promise of new life, and a new definition of history.

As one historian said, "I think history is one of the best tools you can use if you want to try to make your point. It says look back. This is what we've done. This is who we are."

At the Red Sea God made his point, at the cross God made his people. Look and see the salvation of God. Find your place in history.