

*Sermon prepared on Exodus 14 by Jonathan Shradar*

This week I was attempting to find an old list of goals that I know I made in a journal, in my mid-twenties. It laid out, for me to see, the plan I was making for my life. It had jobs I wanted to have, financial accomplishments, educational benchmarks. It was the strategy to my perfect life. Because goals are good! But I couldn't find that list, to see what I had accomplished.

What I did find though was another journal. With entries spanning from 2006 through the end of 2010. A lot of life lived in these four years, career shifts, marriage, a growing family, travel across the globe and wrestling with God, for increased faith and trust in him. As I scanned I saw in those words of the pages my plans, my expectations but underlying it all though, was the faithfulness of God, to execute his plan in my life and to bring me to the places he desired me to be, through the deep waters he purposed to bring me. That he would be glorified.

In our story today - in the Exodus - we see a pattern, not unlike my life story and probably yours, that will repeat itself in every story to come... a pattern of how God works and what he expects of his people. As we venture to see this pattern what we should go forward into life with is this:

**God can be trusted to fight for you.**

**Exodus 14:1-14** “Then the LORD said to Moses, [2] “Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. [3] For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, ‘They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’ [4] And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.” And they did so.

[5] When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed 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 ready his chariot and took his army with him, [7] and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. [8] And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the people of Israel while the people of Israel were going out defiantly. [9] The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

[10] When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD. [11] They said to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? [12] Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: ‘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] And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which

he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. [14] The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.” (ESV)

### **God can be trusted to fight for you.**

How we most often live, and frankly how we are trained from a young age, is thinking that it is all up to us. Our lives... our existence. And to a some extent that is spot on, its right. But what of eternity? Of relating to God? The deepest questions of our identity? We bring this same mentality to things of faith and it is our strategies for growth, for change, our plans that we demand to meet... but all of it actually plays into God’s plan, into his purpose.

Here, Israel has been freed, after the Passover, some 600,000 men plus women, children and a mixed multitude of believing Egyptians, are released and are now on their way to the Promised Land. The place of peace and prosperity that God covenanted with his people to give them. The God who has come to redeem them, still guides them. They leave Egypt in formation and follow the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night that is from the Lord to set their direction.

But they are not led on the quick and easy path. The shortest distance to Canaan is avoided and something else is at work. And here in maybe the best known story of the Old Testament, what is revealed is that God can be trusted, even and mostly when things seem beyond help.

As we walk through crossing the Red Sea in Exodus 14 it is the plan of God we want to notice, seeing what is required of the people (us), and witness how God fights for his people as we let the pattern of how God works apply itself to our lives today.

#### **1) God’s Plan**

We have already seen in the story of the Exodus how things don’t always go as the people expect. They hear of freedom and their workload is made impossible... and what any strategic mind would say could be accomplished by an uprising of the people turns out to be a series of miracles showing God’s power to the world, to control nature and bring his justice on those that reject him.

Now though, the exit has been made, at least part of the way. The burdens of slavery are gone and the people are on the move. They have brought with them Joseph’s bones to bury in the Promised Land and this massive camp of people and livestock walks toward the promise of God.

They are going at a good clip, following the direction of God, and then something unexpected. “Turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea...” Now we don’t know perfectly today just where these places were and there are a lot of opinions but we can understand from the people’s response and the miracle afoot that it is not an ideal situation.

Midgol, would be a name to describe a fortress or military outpost... so essentially God has told Israel, 'instead of going straight to the PL, turn here and situate yourselves between the impossible barrier of the sea and this Egyptian army base.

I want to be a backseat driver/navigator here and say 'no keep going don't turn here...' There must be a better way?!

What's more, God was waking Pharaoh up to what had just happened... in the stupor of grief at the death of his son, and all firstborn in Egypt, the king had sent Israel out with haste (as God promised), but now, sobered by it all, he looks around and wonders who will do all the work in the kingdom - 'why have we let these Hebrews go?! Reports came in that Israel was bumbling through the wilderness and could be easily overtaken. SO off they go - 600 choice chariots, the fighting machine of dominance, Egypt's army off to war.

Things are getting tight, it is a sticky situation with nowhere to go. Israel has gone out in formation, but not capable of war with elite soldiers... and they couldn't swim across the sea... God is putting the people right where he wants them... this is not an accident, it is all on purpose - that he would "get glory over Pharaoh and all his army..."

His glory even when it seems hopeless. The odds makers are having a heyday - the impossibility of the circumstances. As if we are hearing the story of the demise of Israel.

Then the people catch a view of Pharaoh's army in hot pursuit. And they feared greatly. When they can't see the solution, they strategize a way back as if it is merely their tails that on the line... They cry out to the Lord... Couldn't we just have died in Egypt with full stomachs... 'we never wanted to leave in the first place, it would have been better to stay as slaves than die in the wilderness...'

True color comes shining through... God has brought them to the edge and they can't see beyond it, they are helpless.

Key here to our understanding of the story is that this is not Israel's plan, it is Yahweh's plan. The One that creates and directs the events of life, the One in whom we live and move and have our being, has purposed for their life to unfold that it would bring them to the water's edge. To the brink.

But the plan doesn't end at the brink.

**Exodus 14:13** "And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. (ESV)

Let God work. Let him plan and execute his purpose. Trust him.

## 2) People Trust

**Exodus 14:14** “The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.” (ESV)

The call to Israel is this, take it all in, see the circumstance, have a full view of what is at play. See Egypt encroaching, see the water of the sea and your lack of boats. And remember who is on your side.

Fear not, stand firm in the promise you have been given and witness what God will do in saving you. He will work for you today. And the objects of your fear will be no more.

Israel, your part is to be quiet, stop the complaining and watch Yahweh do what he has said he will do. They are to trust him - his plan, his purpose and his power to do it.

And in that trust, move. **Exodus 14:15** “The LORD said to Moses, “Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to **go forward.**” (ESV)

Take up all your stuff, get your family to their feet and walk. Follow me past the edge! You shall walk on dry ground, make your exit and I will defeat the enemy.

It is not their walking that parts the water, but they have to step out to be between the walls of water - to experience the miracle. To go through the water.

This is their salvation, promised and being delivered in the pangs of hopelessness, when there doesn't seem to be a way. When they are tempted to return to slavery... the breakthrough comes. They trust as God will fight for them.

“It was just then that God saved his people, right when it was obvious there was nothing they could do to save themselves.”

## 3) God Fights

**Exodus 14:16-31** “Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground. [17] And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. [18] And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.”

[19] Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, [20] coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night.

[21] Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. [22] And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. [23] The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. [24] And in the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, [25] clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians."

[26] Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen." [27] So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the LORD threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. [28] The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained. [29] But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being 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] Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses." (ESV)

The enemy of the people is handled not by their own scheming but by God's power. "This is one of the mysteries of God's sovereignty. He is able to use the world that he has made, and even sinful human beings, to accomplish his saving purpose."

All part of the plan. Pharaoh's hot pursuit, the vast desert, the very wet sea. That his glory would be revealed and his people saved. And this story is meant to increase our trust in this God that fights for his people.

One danger in our day is reading and hearing these old, old, stories and thinking they didn't really happen as described. That the drama is hyped up for affect and that coincidence is made to look like miracle.

No matter how you look at it, crossing the Red Sea was a miracle. One pastor tells the story of a liberal minister preaching in an old Bible-believing 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 the minister did not happen to believe in miracles. So he said, rather condescendingly, "It was not a miracle. They were in 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. “Drowin’ all them Egyptians in six inches of water. What a mighty miracle!”

It is the miracle-working God we need and are invited to know in his Word.

This fight results in fearing the Lord, revering him, honoring him and believing in him. “Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.”

“God was fulfilling his grand purpose of saving a people for his glory. For that to happen, his people had to trust him and worship him. Notice the order here: God did not wait for his people to trust him before he would save them. If he had waited for that to happen, they would never have been saved! Instead God took the initiative. First the people saw their salvation, then they feared and believed. This is the pattern and the purpose of salvation. First God delivers us from danger, saving us when we cannot save ourselves. Then we respond with faith, trusting God and worshipping him.” -Ryken

A beautiful pattern - all of God, his power, his glory... his plan that works for the benefit of the people.

Pastor, that is all well and good for Israel. But will God fight for me?

If we are honest, a lot of life feels like this predicament in the wilderness. What rock and hard places do we find ourselves between? What armies and water surround us? Deeper still in our spiritual reality, how can we ever overcome the roots of sin that strangle us... the history of disregarding God that we could even know him and hope in him... trust him.

How can he transform me after all these years? I am too damaged, too corrupted, too self-centered. Each step out of something, brings me to a new edge of the abyss.

In His plan, in his purpose, in his power, his way is working and he has fought for you. Where Moses held up a branch and the waters parted, the *better Moses* put himself on a tree to part the waters that separated you from God. Saved, secure, promised transformation and eternity with him.

“The same pattern we find in this story holds true for our salvation from sin. Satan is pursuing us, but instead of running away, all we need to do is stand and see the salvation of our God. Christianity is not about something that we can do to become better people; it is about what Christ has done through the cross and the empty tomb. Jesus has accomplished everything necessary for our salvation. He is the one who has atoned for sin, who has turned aside God’s wrath, who offers perfect righteousness as the gift of faith, and who has gained entrance into resurrection life. When people ask, “What do we have to do to be saved?” the answer is that we don’t have to do anything. Jesus has done it! We just need to look to him for salvation.” -Ryken

And when the question comes of how then do I live, the answer is the same, by looking to Jesus, seeing his power, his Spirit at work in us and around us, trusting his plan for his glory... that we would believe the LORD and trust his servant Jesus.

When we are caught between the desert and the sea, all we need to do is be still and look for God's salvation.

**God can be trusted to fight for you.** It is all he ever does. In his love for you, in Christ he fights for you.

“Israel’s passage through the sea is not primarily intended to teach us what to do when we are in spiritual trouble, any more than it serves as a how-to lesson on what to do when we come to a large body of water. Rather, it is meant to teach us about coming to God for salvation...” for life, for meaning and purpose.

Whether today we are at water’s edge, with an army bearing down on us; or in the midst of the water, amazed by what is happening but still waiting for the other side; or we have come through the water witnessing God’s goodness toward us and living to see more of his purpose and power unfold... we can hear the words of Jesus and meet the God who fights for us.

**John 5:24** “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (ESV)

**John 14:1-7** “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. [2] In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. [4] And you know the way to where I am going.” [5] Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” [6] Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. [7] If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” (ESV)

**Mark 5:36b** “Do not fear, only believe.” (ESV)

“What happened at the Red Sea ought to help us clarify our relationship to Christ. The only “Red Seas experience” that really matters is the one that Jesus had when he passed through the walls of death and came out victorious on the other side. This means that Christians have already had their “exodus experience.” We had it at Calvary and in the garden tomb, because when Jesus died and rose again, he did it for us. We were included in these saving events when we were baptized into him (identified with him), and now we are safe on the other side. All that remains for us to do is what the Israelites did: fear God and trust him as we go forward.”

How might we **respond** to the story of crossing the Red Sea?

This story and all the others to come are a witness to us of God's power to save, his purpose of glory and his better plans for us. Directed not by pillars of smoke and fire, but his Word and cloud of those that have come before, we learn to trust and move forward.

**Hebrews 12:1-2** "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." (ESV)

Trust Jesus. His plan. His power. And know that he fights for you.

"When did the Israelites cross the sea? At a time when only God could open up the way to salvation. Today every sinner is in the same situation. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. Until God's Spirit changes our minds and hearts, we will never come to Christ. Nevertheless, God commands us to repent and believe. If that seems impossible, the thing to do is to cry out to God for mercy, and he will save us."

No one is too far gone that they are beyond the reach of his grace. Come to him, come to the waters of his salvation and drink from the refreshing pool of his love for you. Turn from the life of slavery, the life of self and "go forward" with Jesus.

Believer, keep going. Keep trusting. God's plan is unfolding for his glory and your good. Look to Jesus. When the desert and the sea trap you, when the enemy pursues you, trust in the divine warrior who has won the victory on your behalf. Be reminded of his fight, remind yourself and trust him with your life. Surrender your plans for his. Let his saving work generate in you a total commitment to him, right here, right now and for the rest of our lives.

Don't go it alone. God did not bring an individual through the Red Sea, he brought a people... meant for community. To tell each other to look to Jesus, to show the captives around us the way of freedom.

Trust Jesus with the church! I know a church that was brought to the brink... I also know a church that has learned to trust Jesus and his purpose, his power, his fight for us. Let's "go forward" together, lifting Jesus high for all to see and believe.

Thinking again of that journal I found on my shelf... if it has been a decade before maybe the story would have seemed too far gone. That the character describing life and his desires, his pursuits... would have been too lost in his slavery to see the hope of what is beyond the water. But God fights. His purpose wins. His glory happens.

God has written and is writing millions of exodus stories - yours is meant to be one, that you would trust the Lord and believe. Hear what he has done. Be forever changed and believe in Jesus, his plan, his power, his fullness, for all of life.