

WBS Talk: Exodus 13:17-15:21

Good evening/morning!

There are four truths about God, or Yahweh, that we are going to explore today in chapters 13-15 of Exodus:

1. The Lord is faithful (13:17-22)
2. He is passionate about his glory (14:1-9)
3. The Lord saves sinners (14:10-31)
4. He is worthy of praise (15:1-21)

I'll start by sharing that these are truths I personally need to be reminded of this week. In this current season, my faith has felt strained at times, and I've wrestled with God's goodness. Yet He remains faithful to His promise to use our weakness to reveal His glory. So let's be reminded of this together.

First, the Lord is faithful.

I want to set the scene for us. Last we heard the Israelites left in a hurry and were headed in the direction of Succoth (SE of Egypt). In verse 18 we see that they were *equipped for battle* but this doesn't mean they were ready for a fight. It might have meant they were in a military formation in the case of an attack. The Israelites were scared and would have turned back at the first sign of danger.

There were a few options as far as the direction they could go in. The fastest route would have been north, by way of the Mediterranean Sea through the land of the Philistines (mentioned in vs. 17) but this would have caused them to turn back to Egypt in fear. The other was ordained by God to accomplish his purposes...south and east by way of the Red Sea.

This might seem like an unusual path, asking them to turn back just to be trapped by the desert, the sea and Pharaoh's army. God's purpose in their journey wasn't just to get them from here to there but for them to put their trust fully in his wisdom, to rest in his promises, and to remember his presence with them.

Tony Merida writes in his commentary,

"God's purpose was not limited to manipulating a specific Pharaoh for one specific purpose...It demonstrates that the Lord is God over all chaotic and oppressive forces that rule the created world".

Remember also the words of Joseph to his brothers in Genesis 50:20,

"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

Even Joseph saw that what was harmful to him was God working his purposes to save his people. God is the one working all things for his glory and our good and we may not understand why.

We cannot know God's purposes but we can fully trust in his wisdom and sovereignty over all. God calls us to have faith, knowing that he is far greater than any challenge or hardship we may face and there is purpose in what we face.

Exodus 13:19 also reminds us that God fulfills his promises. Joseph's bones were carried out of Egypt as he said it would be. Even more than that, how many times did God promise to deliver his people from the hands of the Egyptians? How many times did he promise to destroy the Egyptian army? We see countless times in Scripture accounts of God's promises fulfilled.

Deut. 7:9 says,

"Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments."

God was faithful to deliver his people as he had promised.

And finally, God reminds us of his presence. Verses 21-22 are a powerful depiction of God's presence, going before and behind them. This wasn't simply a storm cloud but the actual presence of Yahweh with them. And this cloud would be moving through the desert with them for the next 40 years. God gave them a beautiful gift, a visible representation of his presence with the Israelites. He did not leave them, day or night. This sounds amazing, doesn't it?

God was *with* his people in the cloud but not *in* his people. As believers, you and I have the actual presence of God within us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

James Hamilton writes in his book *God's Indwelling Presence*,

"In the old covenant God faithfully remained with His people, accompanying them in a pillar of fire and cloud, then dwelling among them in the tabernacle and the temple. Under the new covenant, the only temple is the believing community itself, and God dwells not only among the community corporately (Matt 18:20; 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16), but also in each member individually (John 14:17; Rom 8:9–11; 1 Cor 6:19)."

We have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us! He is present with us at all times...even when we face the "Red Sea" moments in our lives. And we have a God who protects us and goes behind and before us. We must take courage in that!

I have often forgotten that I have the presence of the Lord dwelling in me and have always struggled to trust in the Lord. Back in the beginning of 2021 I had lost my job and wasn't sure what my future would look like. Fear began to creep in and I slowly went from "what's next" to "I'm going to be homeless on the streets". Silly, I know. But just like the Israelites, fear crept in and took the place of trust. I had forgotten all about his faithfulness up until this point in my life.

Come January, I applied for a short-term job at Samaritan's Purse working on the booklets for Operation Christmas Child. So, I headed to NC for a short 3 months. Not only was there a fear of what to expect (after all, I was moving to a new place, living with a family I didn't know, commuting through Charlotte, all during the year following the Covid shutdown) but what would happen after this job was done? What would I do then?

I was full of anxiety about my time there and was not sleeping well. I had a hard time finding joy in most aspects of the move and struggled with feeling alone. After the move, I felt restless and unsure, weighed down by fear, and I sensed Satan working through those fears in my heart. After the first 2 weeks I remember calling my dad and telling him how anxious I was and that I didn't know if I could stay, especially given my lack of sleep. Just like the Israelites, I wanted to go back to something familiar, even if it wasn't best for me. The fear of the unknown kept me from taking a step forward (one outside of my comfort zone). I had forgotten all I knew about the God who goes before and behind. Does this ring a bell for anyone? Is there something you want to go back to just because it's familiar, even if it's not the good that God has planned for you?

Looking back I would still say that it was a challenging season of life BUT I know there was God's purpose in it and that God was faithful through it. My dad reminded me of God's faithfulness through challenging times and we prayed together that my anxiety would fade away as I placed my trust in the Lord to carry me through the next few months.

I remember so vividly that that night was the first night I slept well. I had placed my fears and anxiety into the hands of Jesus and trusted in #1) his wisdom (this job would prepare me for something greater), #2) his promises (that he would provide community & friendship while I was there), and #3) his presence (that he was with me in a place that felt foreign). God had called me to remain faithful to where he had placed me for a season. I learned new skills, found a church to attend, made a good friend, and had fun exploring the area. He even provided a job back in PA.

The road that we cross might not be what we expect. I imagine the Israelites never dreamed they would escape their captors by way of the Red Sea, but no matter the path we take, God is faithful to remain with us and to keep his promises to us. His wisdom is greater than ours and we can trust him with our journeys.

The second truth we learn is that the Lord is passionate about his glory.

Scripture is filled with stories pointing to God's unusual tactics to reveal his glory and power and this one is no different. Why would God call the Israelites to go back towards the Egyptians if not to reveal his own power and glory? Rationally in this situation we would be convinced that Pharaoh's army would destroy the Israelites given their location, military might, and power. And Pharaoh himself was most-likely convinced of it too. And yet, God used the very symbols of might and power in that day, the Egyptian chariots, to initiate the destruction of Pharaoh and his army by causing them to get caught in the path of the Red Sea. God's purpose for leading the Israelites through the Red Sea was to reveal his glory to the whole world, not just the Israelites.

Merida writes,

"The translation 'I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army' is, more accurately, 'I will be honored because of Pharaoh and all his army'. The Egyptians and the wider ancient world would hear of this display of Yahweh's power."

And how do the Israelites respond? We read in chapter 14 verse 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."

Later in chapter 15 the Israelites take delight in praising the God whose glory is shown through his glorious deeds,

"Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?"

The third truth is that the Lord saves sinners.

Genesis 15:13 says,

"Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years."

The Israelites had spent so long being enslaved that they would have rather gone back to what they knew than trust that God was creating a path of freedom for them (14:12).

How often do we do the same? Jesus has *secured* our freedom from bondage and yet we still find ourselves running back to the “sin that so easily entangles” us.

I have often struggled with the same sins and idols throughout my life. Maybe you can relate? Why is it that we run back to what enslaves us? I think for me, for the Israelites, and for us all it’s because we’ve forgotten the grace we’ve been shown and the promises of God’s faithfulness.

A few weeks ago and again this week I was wrestling with anger and frustration toward the Lord in some of my unmet desires. I didn’t care to hear what the Lord had to say to me. I boxed him out, doubting his good plan as the sin in my heart began to leak into interactions with others (as it often does).

A dear friend asked me how my heart was and well, I didn’t hold back—a lack of trusting in God’s faithfulness was at the forefront, the very first thing we talked about today. She didn’t try to fix the problem but pointed me to the story of Jonah when God says “does it do your heart well to be angry?” A simple question unveiled the true state of my heart.

Much like Jonah and his desire for Israel to be avenged, the need for my desires to be met superseded all else. And what was really going on? My heart was deeply rooted in my own selfishness and pride. My sin began to seep into my relationship with others and with God.

In his book *The Prodigal Prophet*, Tim Keller writes,

“Every time it seemed he [Jonah] had taken God and his grace to the very bottom, it turned out that he needed to go deeper. What does it mean to go to ‘bedrock’ in one’s heart? If you say, ‘I’ll obey you, Lord, if you give me that,’ then ‘that’ is the nonnegotiable and God is just a means to an end. ‘That’—whatever it is—is the real bedrock. It is more foundational to your happiness than God is. ...To reach heart bedrock with God’s grace is to recognize all the ways that we make good things into idols and ways of saving ourselves. It is to instead finally recognize that we live wholly by God’s grace.”

First of all, if you don’t have someone who will ask you how your heart is, I would encourage you to find someone trusted in your life. Honestly confessing our sin with trusted friends can remind us of the true state of our hearts and how much we need Christ’s redeeming work on the cross and that we are not in it alone! We need others to

help us see our sin, encourage us, and help us see how Jesus extends his grace toward us. And we also need to be that same sounding board for others!

Paul reminds us that we are made new and that we are called to glorify God with our whole being. He says in Romans 6:12 -14,

"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."

I was reminded that my anger was a reflection of my idols, ones I so deeply desired, more than Christ himself. It was such a sweet gift to me. To have a sister hear about the inner workings of my sinful heart and meet me with grace AND truth. And how much more does Christ do this for us?

We don't need to "run back to Egypt". God has promised us freedom through Christ and we can live in such a way that glorifies him as we step out in faith. And we've been given the gift of the Holy Spirit to walk with us on the path to freedom. We can take that next step because God has secured our way and given us new life through his son Jesus.

Something else I want to bring to our attention is that the Israelites didn't just escape. God had to completely destroy the Egyptians to reveal his power and glory. This picture we have of the crossing of the Red Sea is one that reveals the transformation from death to life.

John 5:24 says,

"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live."

Much like the Israelites, we haven't just escaped sin and death. Jesus has FULLY destroyed it so that we would be saved and that *He* would be glorified.

Our tendency is to work for it, right? We want to earn our salvation (even though we can't) but Moses reminded the Israelites and reminds us that we need only be silent.

Psalm 46:10 says,

"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

Our salvation is not dependent on our diligent work to swim to the other side of the sea or our ability to outmaneuver the enemy. We are only required to be still and silent and watch as the Lord reveals his glory through his grace toward us, just as he made a way for the Israelites. A gift that is given to us freely and cannot be earned. And it is God who goes behind and before us.

Just as the Israelites had a mediator, Moses, so God sent his son Jesus to be our mediator. Just like the Red Sea, there is only one path and that is through Jesus Christ and his death on the cross for our sins. Jesus is the one that created a way for us. He's the one who brought us from death to life and this wasn't because of our works but because of his grace and mercy toward us. How awesome is our God?

Lastly, the Lord is worthy of praise.

The 3 truths we've talked about thus far should lead us to the only natural response to the miracles we've seen, praise and glory given to God, just as the Israelites responded in chapter 15.

Alec Motyer writes,

"Praise is the natural response from those who have experienced God's grace."

This song of praise is the first blueprint for those yet to come and is meant to give us a poetic picture of what's happened, not necessarily literal depictions. We see other songs and prophecies throughout Scripture with similar responses of praise and glory. Hannah's song, Mary's song, and Zechariah's response to the birth of John the Baptist all highlight God's strength, power over his enemies, his glory, and the salvation and redemption of his people.

It's important to note that the first verse of this song reveals that the Israelites weren't just accounting for what happened or even taking credit for their new freedom. They begin with "he has triumphed gloriously", attributing all victory over the Egyptians to the Lord. Where might you and I take credit for our victories instead of rightly praising the Lord for what he has accomplished in and through us?

Verses 2-6 remind us of God's power and might. He is the ultimate warrior who defeated the Egyptian army.

Verses 7-11 show us that God is unique and is deserving of all glory and honor. "Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?" There is no other (little g) god who can do what Yahweh can do and the whole world is now witness to that.

The last set of verses point toward their future and what the Lord has promised them. Verse 17 says,

“You will bring them in and plant them on your mountain, the place, O LORD, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established.”

This is a reference to Mt. Sinai, where the Lord would meet them and dwell with them in the tabernacle and Mt. Zion, where David moved the tabernacle to after conquering Jerusalem. God would remain with them, just as he promised he would.

This song also points us to the only one who can redeem us. Verse 13 says,

“You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed.”

This verse is a foreshadow of what's to come; the ultimate redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Douglas Stuart says,

“A grand theme of Scripture appears at this point in the song. Even though God has graciously come at various times and ways—most fully in Christ—to the place where we live, it has always been God's plan that his people should, because of the work of Christ, eventually join him where he lives. The story of ancient Israel mirrors this. God called them out of where they had been born and had been living (Egypt), bound them to himself in a covenant (at Sinai and again in Deuteronomy), and then led them to his holy dwelling (Israel/Jerusalem/the temple). The same sort of thing happens in Christ, yet on a greater and more lasting scale. God calls those who believe in him out of where they have been born and are living (earth), binds them to himself in a (new) covenant (by believing in Jesus as Savior and Lord), and then leads them to his holy dwelling (heaven).”

This brings us to the final verse of the song: *“The LORD will reign forever and ever.”* These powerful words, first sung by the Israelites, point us forward to the day when we will all join in singing praises to our holy, majestic, and worthy God who is sovereign overall and reigns forever.

Let's close in prayer with the words of Psalm 72:

“May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun! May people be blessed in him, all nations call him blessed! Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen!”

Worship Song suggestions:

[Worthy of it All](#)

[Holy Moment](#)

[Forever and Ever Amen](#)

[Who Else](#)