

Exodus 14

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[0 : 00] What does the past, when does the past most threaten to haunt you? I presume it's a pretty common experience isn't it for people to revisit somewhere from their past and to have memories brought back that you thought were gone and you'd rather forget about them.

! So strong that even if the people are gone a place can haunt you. Often it's for people revisiting their school isn't it? If they've had a particularly bad time at school they go back even as adults don't they? And those memories still have power over you.

And you sort of go back into child mode don't you? You call the teachers there even if they're different sir or miss. Even if you're old enough to be their teacher. It's in the past. But are there people and places you dread seeing again? Because when you do things that were never quite dealt with at the time come back to haunt you.

The past can grip your present. It can haunt you. It's been great to look at the book of Exodus over these last few Tuesday afternoons. We've got one more week next week in that before Christmas and the week after that we'll have the carol service so I hope you can be here for that.

And as we've gone through Exodus we've got to the great part haven't we where God's people are finally released from the land of Egypt. Go, go, go, be gone Pharaoh said in Exodus 12 and about 600,000 of them we're told head out for freedom finally.

[1 : 56] After all the toing and froing, after all the letdowns from Pharaoh's false promises, after all the plagues, after all those 400 years, after all the weakness and failure of Moses, after all of that, it finally happens.

They're out. They're free at last to serve the Lord. They head out to camp in the wilderness, in the desert. It's all behind them, isn't it? It's all in the past. Such a relief.

But then have a look at verse 10 that we read. When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them and they feared greatly.

Moses, he slows down, doesn't he, in the narrative there, to describe the eyes of the Israelites. It's one of those slow motion moments, isn't it?

Where their eyes lift up and focus on the horizon. And it dawns on them, doesn't it? As they enjoy their freedom, in the distance are the hordes of the Egyptian forces.

[3 : 13] The past has come back to haunt them. The old taskmasters. The old slavery. The old abuse. All of the emotion of it all.

It all comes back. And their reaction, verse 10, they fear greatly. As you can probably guess, if you've been here these last few weeks, from how God has worked all throughout this book, there is, of course, a plan in this, isn't there?

To bring even greater blessing for the people of God than even they knew they needed. And the jewel in the crown of this passage is in verses 13 to 14.

Have a look there. 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 will never see again. The Lord will fight for you and you only have to be silent. In other words, the Lord will make sure that the past stays in the past.

[4 : 22] Your old slavery, your old way of life will be ancient history. And it will stay that way. You will never see it again. So, I'd like us to say a couple of things about this chapter.

There is so much we could say, but a couple of things. The Lord will fight for his people, firstly, when you can't keep the past behind you. When you can't keep the past behind you.

Now, they're serving the Lord, aren't they? And it's all new. It's all great. That Pharaoh is old news. He's history for God's people. They really do belong to God in the reality of life.

Pharaoh has no rights over them. Well, he never did, did he really? But he's had to accept defeat. But their past life, it comes back to haunt them.

Pharaoh comes back. Pharaoh wants them again, halfway through verse 5. What is this that we've done? That we've let Israel go from serving us? He changes his mind again.

[5 : 24] And we're told, repeatedly, just how powerful the past can be when it rears its ugly head for the people of God. The memories come back with great force.

Look at verse 6. He made ready his chariot and took his army with him. He took 600 chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over them.

So for Pharaoh, it wasn't an afterthought, was it? It wasn't a sort of, oh, let's just send one band of soldiers over and have one last ditch attempt to get them back. No. He dispatches everything.

His whole army is sent. He goes in person. He makes it his personal mission. It becomes all he cares about. He's consumed with it.

It's what he wants most of all, to get the people back into slavery. And isn't that so often how it feels to live the Christian life?

[6 : 26] In the book of 1, Peter, which I'm pretty sure we're going to look at after Christmas, actually. Peter puts being a Christian in terms of being brought from one land into another land.

It's that distinct. And in fact, why don't we turn there, actually. 1 Peter, chapter 1. It's page 1219. It's one of those smaller books at the end of the Bible that's harder to find.

1219. 1 Peter. And right from the beginning, in chapter 1, verse 1, he addresses the Christians as the elect exiles of the dispersion.

More on that after Christmas. Then look at chapter 2, verse 11. He calls them sojourners and exiles.

Now, he hasn't got his geography mixed up here. What he is saying, isn't it, that being a Christian, to follow Jesus and to trust in him, it is just like being the Israelites.

[7 : 42] They've been led by Jesus, out of slavery, from serving other gods, and are now the Lord's holy people. He says, once you weren't a people, now you are a people, the Lord's people.

So being a Christian, following Jesus, it's like moving from one land, ruled by one king, to another, ruled by God, becoming citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

But you see, the problem is that as citizens of heaven, we still live on earth. And there is a crossover of those two kingdoms. And so you see, the life that I once had, the habits, the sins, the temptations, the desires, the things that used to drive my life, the things that used to prevent me from listening to the Lord, and wanting to live for him, those things are in the old land, in the old life. But they can come back, to haunt me, from time to time. That's why he goes on, in chapter 2, verse 11, in 1 Peter, I urge you as sojourners, and exiles, to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

The flesh, it's just the old life, before they became Christians. those things, can come back, and wage war against you.

[9 : 18] And he finishes the letter, by warning them, of the work of Satan, the adversary, who prowls around, like a big predator, seeking out someone for dinner.

When you're a follower of Jesus, the stuff that you used to live by, the master of that life, of Satan, will make it his personal project, to drag you back there.

The past, that old stuff, that maybe you're now ashamed of, it can come back, to haunt you, to catch up to you, to try and claim you again, and place deep doubts, in your mind, as to whether you do belong to God.

Just like Pharaoh, and his chariots. It was really great, to see a friend, in university, who slowly began, to understand, the message of the Bible.

It's great to see it. And eventually, he became a Christian, so he trusted, in the Lord Jesus, and wanted to live for him. And it was a great moment, it was really exciting, for us to see, that change in him.

[10 : 32] He was very excited as well. But I remember, a couple of weeks, after this all happened, what he found so difficult, was that afterwards, some of the old habits, and those old wrong desires, came back.

He struggled to see, that those things, would take a while to change. And it didn't mean, that he was no longer, a member of God's people. Our past, can come back, to haunt us.

But the Lord, will fight for you, Moses says to the people. Just flick back to Exodus. We're going to stay, in Exodus now. Exodus 14, and verse 19.

So the angel of the Lord, 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. Verse 20. Between the host of Egypt, and the host of Israel.

So do you see, how the Lord here, he moves his presence, doesn't he, in between the Egyptian army, and the Israelites. He steps in, as the chariots approach.

[11 : 44] And he puts himself there, as a barrier, to the things that threaten them. You see, he continues, doesn't he, to protect the people, even after the rescue, in Egypt.

It's not a one-hit wonder rescue, is it? He doesn't rescue them, from there, and then sort of say, well, get on with it, you know, fend for yourselves. That's not what it is, to be rescued by Jesus. No, his presence remains, with his people, to protect them, from the threats, of the past. He says, doesn't he, the Lord Jesus, in John's gospel, my sheep, hear my voice, and I know them, and they will never perish, and no one will smash them, out of my hand.

The Lord will fight, for his people, when you can't keep, the past behind you. But secondly, he fights, for his people, when the past, is too easily forgotten.

When the past, is too easily forgotten. I may have, told you this story, before, but I can remember, a meal out with friends, it was probably, a couple of years ago now, and the subject, of sports came up, and you know, what it's like, with us blokes, we exaggerate, don't we, with our sporting achievements.

[13 : 09] I was talking about, how I used to run, the 100 metres at school, and I talked, about how I, came second, I was second fastest, in my year, I boasted, and I did go on, about it really.

But as the chap, on the opposite side, of the table, got chatting, it came up, that he was training, for the Ironman competition, and as he described this, I have to say, I was put, in my place, yes he says, it all starts, with a two mile swim, around the south coast, of England, followed immediately, by a 20 mile, cycling race, and to round it off, we run a full length, marathon, I'd walked into, the restaurant, thinking I was, Mo Farah, and in a moment, I'd found out, that I was more like, Wilma Flintstone, it was very embarrassing, it's terrible, isn't it, to have an overrated, assessment, of yourself, and you know, as well as, protection, from the things, that we know, are still a problem, in our lives, the Lord, fights for the Israelites, against the things, that they don't realise, are still a problem, they've got, an over, exaggerated, assessment, of themselves, and the Lord, needs to deal with, the things that are, lingering on, from their past, before they became his, we can so easily forget, our weaknesses, and impurities, the things that the Lord, still needs to deal with, so I hope we can see this here, just flick back a page, in Exodus, to the end of chapter 13, we didn't get time, to read this, but have a look, verse 17 there, so they're just heading out, for the first time, as rescued believers, and it says, when Pharaoh, let the people go,

God did not lead them, by the way, of the land of the Philistines, although that was near, for God said, lest the people, change their minds, when they see war, and return to Egypt, see God knows, their limits, doesn't he, it's quicker, to go through, the land of the Philistines, but he avoids that, because he knows, they're not ready, for battle, but look at verse 18, God led them, by the way, of the wilderness, to the Red Sea, and the people of Israel, went up, out of the land, equipped for battle, now, they disagree, don't they, the Lord says, you're not ready, for battle, you're going to avoid it, we're going to steer clear of it, but they get kitted up, for battle, have they forgotten, just how vulnerable, they are, the excitement, of being rescued, maybe, has gone to their heads, they can do anything now, they're believers, but God knows, their weaknesses, he knows, that their past, hasn't been dealt with yet, have a look, at verse 8, of chapter 14, as well, the Lord hardened, the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he pursued, the people of Israel, while the people, were going out, defiantly, confidently, with a spring, in their step, it's a great image, isn't it,

God's people, are marching out, defiantly, but the past, has been, too quickly, forgotten, their past, is right on their heels, isn't it, to drag them back, they are still, vulnerable, to the things, that were so familiar, before God, rescued them, and so, what happens, in verse 2, well, God says to them, doesn't he, turn back, do a U-turn, in your travels, and he puts them, in a position, geographically, where they will be, forced, to see God, dealing, with those things, they will have, to stand still, and see the Lord, fight for them, as he brings, the water, over the Egyptian, armies, now just imagine, being in the, in the, the kind of, procession, just imagine, the feeling, when Moses announces, that they have to, turn back, on themselves, they be thinking, well, he's lost, or,

God doesn't know, what he's doing, we're going backwards, Moses needs to read, some books, on guidance, doesn't he, but the guidance, couldn't be more, clear, could it, they're being led, by a massive, pillar of fire, and smoke, and cloud, guidance, isn't the issue, the issue is, that following, God's guidance, doesn't always mean, finding the path, of least resistance, sometimes, God guides, his people, into difficult things, because, there are still things, that need, dealing with, from the past, from their old life, it's what the Bible, calls testing, when he refines, his people, when the past, of our old habits, and our old desires, the flesh, as Peter calls it, is too quickly, forgotten, when we think, that we're more, sorted, than we really are,

[18 : 42] God sometimes, leads us, into difficult things, so that we can, see him, fight for us, the Israelites, realize the threat, don't they, in verse 10, they greatly, they greatly fear, it says, but have a look, at verse 30, the Israelites, see, the Egyptians, dead on the seashore, they saw, the power of the Lord, so the people, feared the Lord, and they believed, in the Lord, see God, showed them, the real threats, of their old life, of their old slavery, he taught them, to fear, what really, made them vulnerable, and then he dealt, with it finally, and clearly, before their eyes, so that they might, fear him instead, you only, have to be still, and see the salvation, of the Lord, that the life, you used to live, before Jesus, rescued you, cannot, and will not, touch you, in the end, he makes sure, that the past, of their old life, stays in the past, and there comes a day, when the Lord, fights for them, to make sure, that the past, will never haunt, them again, just as Peter, ends his letter, after you have, suffered a while, the God of grace, who has called you, to his eternal, glory in Christ, will himself, restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you, let's pray, as we close,