

Exodus 14

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[0:00] If you're going to Exodus chapter 14, verse 14, and we're really looking at the end of chapter 12 to the end of chapter 14.

So who's the hero of the story? And who is the hero of the story? I wonder what you'd say if you thought of the book of Exodus. If you said Pharaoh, he's the hero of the story, well you probably need to re-read the story, don't you?

But we do have some candidates and unlikely heroes along the way. There have been some unlikely heroes, particularly heroines, throughout the story that we've seen.

There were those Hebrew midwives, wouldn't we, right at the start, who refused to carry out Pharaoh's command to kill the firstborn sons. There was Zipporah, Moses' wife, who stepped in just in the nick of time to rescue her husband from death.

However, my guess is most of us would suggest that the hero of the story is Moses. That he overcomes, doesn't he, his initial doubts, and then he confronts Pharaoh, and then he leads the people out of Egypt.

[1:14] Moses is definitely a strong candidate. But actually, if you know the Bible at all, you will know that the real hero of the story is something completely different. The real hero of the story, the hero of this book, is God.

The actual Exodus that we read up here, we read in chapter 14, but the story begins in chapter 12. The Exodus is this event which all the previous chapters have been leading up to.

This is the high points. They've been building up. The goal of these chapters is to show how unbelievably great and glorious and good and gracious God is.

Those four themes that we should keep coming back to. God is great, so you and I don't need to be in control. God is glorious, so you and I don't need to fear others.

God is good, so that you and I do not have to look elsewhere for our needs. God is gracious, so that we don't have to prove ourselves and justify ourselves.

[2:21] The fact is that God reveals himself to be great and glorious and good and gracious all the way through the Bible. But there are certain places, I think, where he pulls the curtain back.

Where he allows us just to see that, that little bit extra. To give us a fuller and stunning vision of who he is. And I think Exodus is one of those places. And so we're going to look at this story in order to think about the true hero.

And we're going to look at it three particular characteristics of the hero. The caring God, the saving God, the glorious God. The hero is the caring God.

When we left the story last week, God was at least the last of the ten plagues in response to Pharaoh's hardness of heart. Pharaoh's persistent refusal to let the Israelites leave.

And that plague would entail the death of the firstborn son. In every household in Egypt. But unless the blood of a lamb was shed. Unless it had been sacrificed.

[3:21] And its blood was brushed on the doorposts and on the lintels. Unless there was that, there would be the death of the firstborn son. Those who are sexually sheltered under the blood of the lamb.

Well, there would be no death in that. Well, there would be the death of a lamb in that house. But not the death of the firstborn son. So the final command that night to everyone who heeded. Those instructions were sexually used.

It was in. Stay in. The only safe place to be that night was inside. However, once the plague was over, the command quickly changes. And ironically, the command, the new command, comes from Pharaoh and not from Moses.

Look at verse 30 of chapter 12. And Pharaoh rose up in the night. He and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt. For there was not a house where someone was not dead.

Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, Ah, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel, and go. Serve the Lord as you have said.

[4 : 25] Take your flocks and your herds as you have said. And be gone. Go and bless me also. The Egyptians were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in his. For they said, we shall all be dead.

So the people took their dough before it was leavened. Their kneading bowls being bound up in their cloaks and on their shoulders. And the people of Israel had also done as Moses told them. For they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewellery and for clothing.

Now the command is not in, but out. Now is the time to get the steam. And there is not to be any delay. And earlier on in chapter 12, God was already given them instructions how they would dress. About their history departure. They would eat their Passover with their cloaks tacked into their belts. With already with sandals on their feet and a staff in their hands.

Because when the word came, they needed to go. Now you would think, wouldn't you, that the Israelites' departure, being with such haste, would mean that they would want to get away as far as they possibly could from Egypt.

[5 : 27] And they would take the most direct route. Ask the crow flies, keep your head down, boys, and just keep on going. And for the Israelites, they knew that they were going where they were going.

They were going to the land that God had promised them and came to them. So naturally, if you look at those little maps at the back of your Bible, that would mean going a coastal route. Through the land of the Philistines.

But God has got other plans. Look at chapter 3, verse 17. When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead up by way of the land of the Philistines. Although that was near. Although it was near.

Now I don't know about you, but if I was one of the Israelites, and if I could have seen the coastal road straight in front of us, by the pillar of clouds and smoke, and taken a right-hand turn by the sign that said, the road's to nowhere, I'd have been going slightly crazy, wouldn't you?

I don't know if you use Google Maps. I love Google Maps. On your phone, you know, it kind of works it out by satellite, doesn't it? And it says, you notice on Google Maps that if you change that way, it will be six minutes shorter.

[6 : 36] You know what it's like, isn't it? It's one of the joys of driving through London. When you're driving with someone and you're in the passenger seat, and they show you a shortcut. And you say, I never knew about this. And your whole world likes it. And my comment of Egypt would have been, but that way is quicker, isn't it?

Why can't we go that way? And there is no indication here that God told Moses or the Israelites why he was rerouting them. But as the readers, we get to know.

So look at the second half of verse 17. For God said, rest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt. But God led the people round by the way of the wilderness towards the Red Sea.

He takes them on the longer route. Why does he do that? Because he is the God who cares for his people. And God, the one who declared earlier in Exodus, that Israel is my firstborn son.

Israel is the people that I love. Israel is the people that he cares for. Deeply. And he knows how easily his people, those Israelites, will lose heart and give up.

[7 : 47] And he knows what they can take. And he knows what they can't take. And his biggest concern is that they will keep on keeping on. And they will not turn back. And he knows that it's not going to happen if they take the coastal road and they come face to face.

The Philistine army and the Israelite army. So God decides he's going to take them on a longer, but a better route. Now the reality is this. When those kind of detours happen in your life and in my life, you don't really like it, do you?

And we get very frustrated. But we can see the straight path have gone from A to B to achieve our goals. And when we have to go via C and D and E and all the way to X, Y and Z, sometimes we don't like it.

And God does not usually give us specific reasons. But actually, in the end, you and I don't need to know the reason why. What we do need to remember, what we do need to know, is that the one who is rerouting our path is the God who is in control of all things.

Who is great and glorious and good and gracious. A God who deeply cares for his people. And in the end, we realise that is what you and I really want.

[9:06] Actually, what you and I really want is not kind of foreknowledge of what the route is going to be. That actually, if we knew what this week lay ahead, it would put us in more of a fix, wouldn't it?

But not knowing. What we really want to know is that there is a God who is in charge of my life and who loves me. And we don't understand.

And we will never understand. We will not even understand in eternity many of the things that happen to us. Certain things at certain times. And we normally think that the shorter route would be the better route.

But the God who cares for us has the bigger picture in view which we cannot see until he reroutes us. Alex Mateo, he's a brilliant little comedy on actually that says this.

There are dangers and menaces unknown to us from which God is guarding us. Do you know that? Deliver us from evil.

[10:09] Just praise. Do you know God has delivered you from evil this week that you don't even know about? Deliver us from temptation. God has delivered you from temptation that you don't even know about. What he's saying there is the fact that in every one of our lives there have been problems and there have been tests and there have been trials that in different stages lay ahead of our paths which we knew nothing about.

However, from which we are saved because God cares and loves. And he's seen us in a different direction to avoid those problems that we weren't even aware of. However, I think you and I would be wrong to think that when God puts up a diversion sign on the road, when God takes our lives away from particular dangers, that God somehow is going to make everything just an easier route. And we just saw, didn't we, that God leads the people towards the wilderness and the Red Sea. It's not the path that they would have chosen. But they are surely thinking this isn't the route that we thought we were going to go, but God must be taking us on a simpler and calm route.

It's not the route we would have chosen, but, well, God is in control, isn't he? It's all good. It's all good. But just when you think you've got God figured out completely, he surprises you.

And as the story progresses, it all starts to go drastically wrong. The battery's running out. You might want to plan your own PC.

[11:45] You might think, well, this is the route that God is taking us on. This is an easier route. But that's not the case at all. Because the God who cares for these rights leads them right into a geographical cul-de-sac.

It is called Baal-Zephon. It's right by the Red Sea. And you can almost hear an Israelite shouting from the back of the minibus, Moses, Moses, what are you doing?

This can't be right. You know, it's like, isn't it, when there's a group of you, kind of, lots of taxi drivers, lots of people who think they know the way. Militarily, this is the most vulnerable place they could be.

There literally is nowhere to go if things go wrong and things are about to go wrong. It's like, you're watching a movie and there's a high-speed car chase and the car being chased turns into a dead-end street and the pursuing car is right behind it.

And it's pivoted. It's over. Humanly speaking, from the Israelites' perspective, it looked like the stupidest decision in the world. The Israelites are stuck in the dead end of this cul-de-sac.

[12:57] And the Egyptians can't believe their luck. Because once Pharaoh had them there, what he's got?

Pharaoh got out his calculator, he got his economic advisors and he started to work out how catastrophic it would be for the national economy in Egypt that the slaves left, the Israelites. And immediately, the order goes out, get them. And he goes with them to try and capture them to bring them back. And once he sees the Israelites are stuck in this cul-de-sac, he thinks it couldn't get any better.

We've got him now. So he gives the command, hit the Israelites with everything we've got. 600 of the best chariots and all the chariots of the land. All the horsemen and all the troops and all the

king's horses and all the king's men go out to get Israel back to slavery again.

And here's the reaction which opened the Israelites. As Pharaoh approached the Israelites, they looked up and they saw the Egyptians moving after them and they were terrified. Look at verses 10 and 11 of chapter 14.

[14:06] When Pharaoh turned near and the people of Israel lifted up their eyes and behold, stop, look, what's happening, the Egyptians are marching after them. They feared. Great thing. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, they said to Moses, it is because there are no graves in Egypt that you've taken us away to die in the wilderness.

It is possible there's times like this where you wonder how bad would the coastal road actually have been. Wouldn't that have been a better option, Lord? Just a one word written over in this road and that word is disaster.

And from our perspective, when you bring in the New Testament, we might ask, how does a situation like this fit with God's promise?

You know God's promise that he won't give us more than we can handle. Have you ever heard that verse quoted at you? It's supposed to be comfort, isn't it? Now I don't think anybody said this to us. If you said this to us when a few years born, don't be too offended. But a number of people said this was, you must be really special people for God to entrust Phoebe to you.

[15:14] God only gives children with disability to special people whom he loves. I don't know, I didn't really find any comfort in that. And I don't know there is any comfort in that.

But when you're going through a horrific time, people say, well you know, God must think you're really strong because he never gives us more than we can handle. I've often wondered how that works, this works for Christians who are watching their loved ones being massacred or beheaded or shot in the face.

13 million people in the world are currently facing modern day slavery. The 2 million children in the world are in the sex traffic trade. God must really love you because he wouldn't give you more than you can handle.

You must be a really strong person because God never gives you more than you can handle. Well I have some news for you. There is no such verse in the Bible. There is no such verse in the Bible. Many people think there is, but here is the verse to which they're referring. 1 Corinthians 10 verse 13 where it says this, God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted more than what you can bear.

[16:26] That's a very, very different thing from what he's saying. Paul's focus there is when you and I are tempted to sin, when you and I are tempted to disobey God, in those situations God always gives you a way out.

You can never say to God, I have no choice but to be tempted and fall into sin. There is always a way out from temptation. That's exactly what God was doing with the Israelites on that route there. Actually it's more than that. God doesn't wait for temptation. He anticipates the temptation would be too strong for the Israelites but the temptation would be too strong for them and head back to Egypt if they encountered war.

But God never promises to give us no more than we can handle. God doesn't promise that. God does give you more than you can handle.

You know that. And he purposely does that. And his purpose in giving you more than you can handle is that he wants to bring you to an end of yourself so that you will trust on him and you will rely on him and not on yourselves.

[17:36] But when we attempt it he always gives us an escape route. And the Israelites here are in a situation which they cannot handle. And they are stuck between Pharaoh and the deep blue sea.

And this is going to be curious isn't it? This is why they turn to Moses and they start griping and moaning that he brought them out of Egypt. As if Egypt was some kind of club med resort where they had been staying in all those years.

Sun, sea and sangria. And that is exactly where God wants them. Because the God who cares is about to reveal himself to be the God who decisively saves.

Look at what God says in verses 13 to 14. And Moses said to the people, fear not, do not be afraid, 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. The Lord will fight for you and you only have to be silent. And again that isn't there, there, don't worry, be calm and long your eyes

in the end.

[18 : 50] It is actually a very impatient command on Moses' part. That we might bear the chance it, would you all just be quiet? Or even more strongly, would you all just shut up?

In other words, stop your griping and watch your God who is going to deliver you. Which is exactly what God then does. And as we notice with the plagues, what happened with the plagues can be explained naturally in a sense.

We have to acknowledge that, that God is able to work through natural mechanisms. But you and I would be simply failing to do justice to the text with what is written here. It is simply phenomenal. Look at verses 21 and 22. God it. Again echoes of Genesis 1 and 2 and the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground and the water has been a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. It's God who finds the sea and gives them this pathway. It is God who jams the wheels of the Israelite chariot so they can't drive them.

It is the Lord who stretched Moses to stretch his hand the second time over the sea so that the water just pours back over the Egyptians. It is God who so confuses the Egyptians that they rush into the water as it's sweeping over them.

[20 : 22] And the Israelite surely felt this is more than we can handle. And they were right. But this whole episode is like every other episode in the story where God is in complete control.

And God is moving the pieces like a master chess player but he doesn't so much protect Pharaoh's next move as force the move himself like a master chess player.

God induces Pharaoh to move his king into checkmate and Pharaoh doesn't even realise it. And that was checkmate. But God had saved the Israelites and he'd done it all on his own because God is not only the God who cares but he's the God who saves.

Now here's the very cool thing. Fast forward your minds to the tongue of Jesus and to one scene in particular. Let's go to the Mount of Transfiguration. And Jesus is there with Matthew and Mark and Luke.

Jesus is there and Matthew and Mark and Luke tells about it. And Jesus brought Peter, James and John and his inner circle of disciples to pray. And Jesus is there talking with Moses and Elijah from the Old Testament.

[21 : 28] But look at what Luke tells us that we discuss in Luke 9 verse 21. They spoke about Jesus' departure. which was about to be brought to fulfilment in Jerusalem. Sounds like three of them sitting in an airport gate doesn't it?

And Jesus is waiting for the boarding call. But that isn't what it's talking about. As you've probably guessed it what is interesting is the Greek word that is translated there as the Patriot is the same word as the Exodus.

And Jesus was talking to Moses about the Exodus. Because Jesus understood that what he'd come to do was to be the greater Moses to achieve the greater Exodus. Now what does that mean? Moses' rescue was great. I mean it was unbelievable. But Moses' rescue was just really a social and physical liberation for one people group.

But Jesus came as the greater Moses to deliver people like you and me and anyone from anywhere who will trust him. And he delivers from sin and death itself.

[22 : 33] So Moses liberated people at the risk of his life. But Jesus liberated at the cost of his life by dying on the cross. His Exodus was leading us from death to life from despair to hope from darkness to light.

But one of the reasons I think the word Exodus is used here because at the Mount of Transfiguration his rescue was achieved in a very similar way to that of the Israelites from Pharaoh. Pharaoh. Just as Pharaoh thought that Moses and Israel had no idea what they were doing so the devil thinks that Jesus had no idea what he was doing. But here is God standing and he has allowed himself to be backed into this cul-de-sac.

He has allowed himself to be handed over to sinful men who stripped him and beat him and end up crucifying him. And on the cross Jesus is so vulnerable and seemingly helpless that Satan must have thought I got it.

That Satan must have thought I got the upper hand. Now I will press it all the way to death and he presses it all the way to death just as Pharaoh had done with the Israelites and that was Satan's fatal mistake.

[23 : 44] Because the whole thing was a ruse. The Red Sea was not a defeat for Israel it was a victory at the cross. The cross is not a defeat it is a victory.

Because by dying for our sins Jesus was able to gain eternal victory over sin and over death and over Satan. Jesus is the greater Moses who rescued all who put their hope in him.

And in this greater exodus of crossing us all from death to life the greater Moses attacks. Now some of us may be here and you think well that's great but I don't know if I've got enough faith to make the cross sick.

I don't know if I've got enough faith to make the cross from death to life. I expect that there were many people who crossed that sea in different ways than they.

Some crossed it as if they were out for a Sunday afternoon stroll that it wasn't a big deal at all. They were just walking through the sea and went it was a big deal but they were okay with it. There were others who were moving very briskly because they thought the wall of water could collapse in every second.

[24 : 58] There were those who were covering their heads and closing their eyes because they were sure that the sea would come down. There were those who were having to be dragged along screaming but which of those three or four groups were the most saved?

The ones who went through with a breeze or the ones who were a little unsure or others? Well they were all saved equally weren't they? Because it's not the amount of our faith that matters it is the object of our faith that matters.

So how small your faith is or how big your faith is is where your faith is focused and their faith was focused on the God who was delivering them. And so you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and what he has done and that's what matters.

It's not how big your faith or how small your faith is. When you come to the table of the Lord take your eyes off himself. But fix your eyes on Jesus Jesus paid it all all to him I owe.

That if you believe in him you cross over from death to life because it is the God who not only cares but saves. God is the hero of the Exodus.

[26 : 13] He is the God who cares and he is the God who saves. And just in case we're not absolutely convinced he is the hero he makes it explicitly clear here why does God ultimately do it this way?

Why does he rescue the people of Israel? Why does he achieve the rescue through the heart in the Pharaoh's heart? Well here is the answer thirdly he is the glorious God. So look at Exodus chapter 14 and verse 4 and I will harden Pharaoh's heart and he will pursue them and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his hosts and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.

Just in case you missed it but it goes to Psalm 18. 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 hosts and his horsemen and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord when I have gained!

Glory! The reason God rescues Israel in the way he does is for his own glory. That's not just the kind of thing God says in Exodus.

You find it throughout the whole of the Bible. I'm doing some work in Isaiah at the moment. I came across it this week in Isaiah 43.7. He says everyone who is called by my name whom I created for my glory whom I formed and made.

[27 : 32] It's one of the huge themes of the Bible. That God created you to bring glory to himself. That is everything we are. That everything we are and everything we do is ultimately to make God look good for his glory.

Just keep that in mind while I give you this. I just want to encourage you every one of you of us to realise that when we obey God we are not doing it for God.

I mean that is one way to look at it. We are doing it for ourselves. Because God takes pleasure when we are happy. That's the thing that gives him the greatest joy this morning. So I want you to know this morning just do good for your own self.

Do good because God wants you to be happy. When you come to church and come to worship him you are not doing that for God really. You are doing it for yourself because that is what makes God happy.

End quote. Now there's a word for what I just read to you and it is the word heresy. Let me give you two words. It is heresy and it is idolatry.

[28 : 35] And for the sake of disclosure those are the words of Victoria Osteen who is the wife of Jonas Osteen the kind of leading TV preacher. There's a lot of people watch the Osteen and a lot of people buy his books.

And I'm suggesting to you in the strongest possible terms not to watch him and not to read him. Because what I'd write to you is nothing short of her article. But when we come here to worship it is not for yourself it is for God.

Everything that we do is for God. It's the storyline of the Bible from the beginning to end. Is it a blessing to us when we do that? Of course it is. But the primary focus is God and the Bible tells you that if you put anything before God that is what the Bible calls idolatry.

Everything we do is for him and for his glory because he is God and we are not. And God is the hero and you are not. Now having said that we don't go down the route of heresy but many of us are still puzzled by what God says here aren't we?

Because God said I do all things for my glory and our question and it is a legitimate question isn't God being rather egotistical? Isn't God being rather arrogant and self-centered and egotistical to do whatever he does for his own glory?

[29 : 57] You know it's like when you meet someone and just very quickly you know that what they are really interested in is themselves. And they do everything for their own sake and we characterize them very quickly as selfish and egotistical.

So why is God any different from that? When he speaks like this. Couldn't God have designed reality in such a way that he could give glory elsewhere not to himself so that we could model ourselves kind of being self-effacing on him?

Couldn't he have said here in Exodus 14 I'll punish Pharaoh and the Egyptians for the glory of my appointed servant Moses? Well he could have but if he had done that he would have been an idolater himself.

Because God would have been telling us that there is something more important in the universe than he is. And there isn't. And God would have been telling us that there is something more beautiful in the universe than he is and there isn't.

And he would have been telling us that there is something more satisfying in the world than he is and there isn't. And he would have been suggesting that there is something more splendid and just and righteous than he is and there isn't.

[31 : 07] He would have been proclaiming that there is someone more caring and more savoring in your life than he is and there isn't. He would have been stating that there is a greater hero than he is and there isn't.

And that is why God is a Zarroschor for his name and for his glory Because he is the one you and I need He is the only one who can satisfy He is the only one who saves And so he does all things for his glory For he is the ultimate hero He is the one that you and I are called to trust in everything And the upshot of all this is once we realise who God is How great and how glorious and how good and how gracious And how caring and how saving he is You and I will start to want to re-root our lives And we will realise that the greatest need of our neighbours And our friends and our families and our work colleagues Is rescue, rescue from judgement And as that weighs upon us It will invariably mean that we say I can't handle this I can't handle this anymore Whereupon God will say I am so glad you called Trust in me Hold on to me And so friends His call on our lives is to hold on to him To hold on to the hero To God of Exodus Let's pray Let's pray Thank you.