

Trusting God When All Seems Lost

By John Maiden, Associate Pastor

December 31, 2017

Exodus 14

Good Morning Perry Creek. I am so glad to be bringing God's word to you this morning. My name is John Maiden, and I am now full-time at Perry Creek. I first want to stop and thank each of you for your kind generosity to our family. Your Christmas Eve gift was beyond gracious and know that you will be helping us bring our little baby girl into the world. If you have your Bible, I will ask you to turn to the book of Exodus, chapter 14. We're in between sermon series "The Star" and "You're Invited." This morning, as we approach a new year, it will do us good to be reminded that that we serve a God who we can put our hope and trust in.

Harrison Okene is a sea cook from Nigeria who thought that his life was coming to an end. His boat, the Jascon 4, had upended and had sunk to the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. For three days, he was trapped breathing in a small supply of oxygen that was caught in an air pocket. As the water temperature started to drop to freezing, he was praying to God for a miracle. He had reached the point of complete hopelessness and despair. There was nothing he could do. He needed to be rescued. A group of divers were sent to the bottom of the ocean to recover the dead bodies. After recovering some of them, Okene was found alive by one of the divers. Can you imagine what Okene must have felt? He was beginning to lose all hope and then right when it appeared he would die he was rescued from death.

Our story from the book of Exodus is about a rescue. The title of my sermon is "Trusting God When All Seems Lost." How God came and rescued the Israelites when they were completely hopeless on their own. To be honest, we all need to be rescued from something. Maybe right now you are looking at this New Year approaching and dreading what it might bring. Maybe there is sin in your life you can't get rid of. Maybe you find yourself in a difficult place or circumstance. My hope and prayer this morning, as we approach this new year, is that whatever 2018 has in store for us, for you, for me, We are reminded that we have a hope that is unshaken!

You have the Pentateuch, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. It is widely believed that Moses is the author of these books. In Exodus, God's people, the Israelites, were living in Egypt (which is not the land God promised to Abraham). As the Israelites began to grow in number, the Pharaoh of Egypt began to get a little worried. Because they were getting too big and powerful, the Egyptians made them their slaves so that they would not be a threat to their rule. During this time, the Israelites cried out to God for help and asked for him to deliver them from this bondage of slavery. God then raised up his servant, Moses, to lead his people out of Egypt. He then caused ten plagues to fall upon the Egyptians until Pharaoh finally let God's people go. This is where we pick up the story. They were in the wilderness being led by God towards the Red Sea.

We Serve a God Who Can Be Trusted

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.' And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord." So the Israelites did this.

- Exodus 14:1-4

God told Israel to go and camp in a certain place in between the Red Sea and the wilderness. The positioning of Israel here really put them in a vulnerable position if Pharaoh changed his mind and started to come back after Israel. But as we see, this was the point. God had a plan.

Verses 3-4 tell us God's plan. He was going to harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will desire to go after the Israelites. Then God will show up and get all the glory. God said, "I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord." Israel obeyed what God had commanded them and made camp.

When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, "What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!" So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly. The Egyptians—all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, horsemen[a] and troops—pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon.

- Exodus 14:5-9

Next, we see that Pharaoh changes his mind, just as God said, about the Israelites. Why in the world did he decide to let them go! I mean they were serving them hand and foot. They had been their servants for 430 years. I can imagine they had gotten used to doing nothing. Without the Israelites, who would do all the work? So, he gathered his chariots and his army to go after the Israelites. Scholars say that Pharaoh probably had over 1,000 chariots and their army was very well trained. Had the best military devices of the day. So, this massive, well trained army, with all the military advantages of its day, took off after the Israelites. Talk about a disadvantage for the Israelites.

As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord.

- Exodus 14:10

So, Israel was sitting there camped out by the sea when all of sudden they look up and see this massive army coming after them. Can you imagine this scene? There was their enemy, the people that had enslaved them for 430 years. All their military power. Movies are filled with these

dramatic scenes. We have seen characters down in a valley and they look up and thousands of people are coming towards them. Remember in the Lion King, Simba is just hanging out in the valley and all of a sudden the ground begins to shake. Simba looks up and hundreds/thousands of wildebeest are running towards him. He has a look of absolute panic. In Mulan, Mulan is with her army and they look up and see all the Huns. I have been scared before in my life, with my parents being here, I can remember being huddled up many times in a closet as a kid during a tornado. But can you imagine this? They were completely trapped. The Red Sea was at their backs and their enemy was in front of them. They were completely helpless against this well-trained army and they knew it.

The Bible says when the Israelites saw the Egyptians they “feared greatly.” Their response was to cry out to God for help! Because even if they believed it or not, God was the only one that could save them. The only one who they could put their trust in.

They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!”

- Exodus 14:11-12

Have you ever felt hopeless? At the end of your rope with nowhere to turn? Some of you may or may not know this, but I am going to get a little vulnerable with you. I struggle with anxiety. There have been times in my life when it has been worse than others. Over three years ago it was really bad. I can remember on several occasions crying out to God for relief. I had no idea what God was doing. All I knew was that he had messed up and was allowing things to happen in my life that were not right or even loving. I felt completely hopeless.

There are things in our lives that are more than we can handle and we need help, just like Israel. Remember God put them there! I would say that God allows us to go into those places so we call on Him. So, He can grow us and mature us. So, He can show up in a mighty way. Maybe even a way we would least expect.

We can trust though, that in the mist of this hopeless feeling, God has a plan. God tells us in Romans 8:28 that he works ALL things for the good of those who love him. All things. Do you believe this?

I am sure the Israelites were thinking, God what are you doing? Even when we don’t understand or we can’t see what in the world God is doing or why he has put us in this circumstance we can trust Him. He is working for our good. It may not be how we envision it. It may not be what we want, but God can be trusted. Do you trust him?

But immediately the Israelites prayers begin to turn panic and complain. The Israelites began to get angry and complain to Moses for bringing them to the wilderness. They thought for sure this was the end and they were going to die. They would have rather been slaves their whole lives in

Egypt than to die here in the wilderness. They immediately took their eyes off of God and trusted in their own knowledge and resources.

Immediately, the Israelites were forgetting and doubting God. They were not trusting him. Did they not just see God show up in their lives in a mighty way? They saw his power in the plagues and how he delivered them from Egypt. They doubted his goodness and power. They did not want to trust God. They even doubted his promises. That he would bring them out of Egypt into promise land and would make them into a great nation, just as he promised Abraham all those years ago.

How easy is it for us to point a finger here and say “Man, those Israelites are crazy!” But what about us? What about me? What about you? Do you trust God? How often do I say the phrase “God, what are you doing?” The Israelites were trusting in their own wisdom and understanding. How often do we find ourselves doing this?

Trust in the Lord with all Your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

- Proverbs 3:5

I have seen God save me from death to life. Before I was not a child of his and was headed my own rebellious way, He came and saved me and made me a part of his family. So why should I not trust him? I have seen his love for me on the cross and his promises to me to work all things for good and to never leave me or forsake me. But I still doubt Him.

When it came to desiring a wife and a family, I thought at the age of 27 he had let me down on that one. He didn't know what he was doing. God was keeping things from me. It was here that I found myself not trusting God and not trusting his promises. He had a plan for me and that he was all that I truly needed. I just needed to trust Him. I look back now and see His faithfulness. He didn't promise a wife, but he did promise to work a good plan for me. I am thankful God has blessed me with Sarah and my children.

What about you? Are there areas in your life where you are lacking trust? Where do you feel helpless? Today is New Year's Eve. I am sure many people are looking forward to a new year, but I am sure that many could be dreading a new year. You fear what the year might bring. This year has been hard and next year promises more of the same. You feel helpless. Maybe your marriage seems hopeless? Kids are far away from God and there is nothing you can do to bring them back. Maybe you are struggling with anxiety or depression? Maybe your health is failing? Or you have experienced the pain of lose? Maybe you are struggling but God is just as much in the promise keeping business as he was in Exodus. He promises to never leave you or forsake you. He promises followers of Him as a Son and Daughter for all of eternity. He promises to work ALL things for your good! You can trust Him even when you don't have all the answers.

What are some promises of God that you want to cling to in 2018! Let's face it. Just like the Israelites found themselves right here as they looked up and saw the Egyptians, we cannot always comprehend the plans and knowledge of God. But we can trust Him. Trust Him with your life,

because he is a God who saves. Do you choose to trust Him today? Because as we see in our second point:

We Serve a God Who Saves

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

- Exodus 14:13-14

Moses then reminds Israel who God is and speaks truth to them. Sometimes we need this in our lives. We need people to speak the truth of God in our lives and remind us of God's truths and promises. Sometimes when we find ourselves in the pit of despair it's hard for us to see truth. This is one reason why the church and its community is so important. Surround yourselves with people who will speak truth to you, even when it is difficult.

Moses tells them: Stop your complaining! God has a plan! Just as God has had a plan this whole time! He has a plan now. DO NOT FEAR! They were not going to die. God was going to bring salvation to them today, and they would never see the Egyptians ever again. It was true that in and of themselves there was no hope. They were completely hopeless, but they could put their trust in God who could rescue them and he would bring them salvations.

For us, God is saying do not fear! Trust me! I have a plan! One of the most common commands in Scripture is "Do not be afraid". Don't fear. Trust Him! We can root a lot of sins to fear. One of the reasons that my anxiety was so bad three years ago was because of fear. I can remember Pastor Dwayne at open door telling me to go home and address my fears. And to do that I needed to take out a sheet of paper and answer the question "What am I not believing rightly." What a great exercise. You find yourself struggling? What are you not believing rightly? And then address those with the promises and truths of God's word.

* I am struggling with anxiety? I am not believing that God can be trusted.

* I am struggling with lust? I am not believing that the pure in heart will see God.

* I am struggling being disobedient to parents? I am not believing what God says that we will have a better life by obeying Him.

Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, believe in God." Believe in God. He is a God of salvation and rescue!

*"Fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."*

- Isaiah 41:10

Back to our passage today. So Israel has the sea at their backs and their enemies before them.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go

through the sea on dry ground. I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.”

- Exodus 14:15-18

God tells Moses to raise his staff and stretch out his hands. Sounds like a ridiculous command, but again, God has a plan and it might not be something you can even see. What a great reminder of how we may not see or know God's plan. He reminds Moses that his plan is to receive glory over the Egyptians. The Israelites will walk on dry land across the sea and when the Egyptians come in after them, they will be destroyed. God is going to save Israel. He is going to show up in way they would have never expected and as a result, God's power will be on display, as nothing is impossible for him, and no one is too great for Him. He will then receive all the glory and Israel will be saved.

Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.

- Exodus 14:19-20

An angel of the Lord then appears to separate the Israelites and the Egyptians. He used a pillar to separate them so that the Egyptians would not take over the Israelites. This gave Israel time to get ready to head across the sea.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

- Exodus 14:21-22

Moses then stretched out his hand as the Lord had commanded. Then God completely parted the waters of the sea. When we are familiar with the story, its effect on us sometimes is lost. But this is not what anyone would have expected! God to split the ocean in two so that the Israelites would walk across on dry land.

In His grace, God provided a rescue plan. It was nothing the Israelites did. The Israelites then take a leap of faith. This is not something you run across every day. We see that Israel's salvation involved God's grace and their faith. God, in his grace, made a way for salvation but the Israelites had to trust God, as well. So, they stepped out in faith and crossed over the sea on dry land.

Israel's salvation is a reminder of our salvation and the Christian life. The Bible is one grand story of God delivering his people. Since the fall of Adam and Eve all the way back in Genesis 3, God has promised to redeem and rescue his people. Because all people are in bondage and need a Savior.

Just like Israel, we can be free from our bondage (slaves to sin) because of God's grace. Remember in 14:14 Moses said, "The Lord will fight for you." The Lord will also fight for our bondage, and He has! What a great reminder that our salvation is not about what we can do, but about what God has done for us. Namely what he has done for us in Jesus. Jesus has bore the penalty of our sin on the cross. He came and died for us and defeated sin and death by rising from the dead. So, our faith is faith in Him and surrendering of your life to Jesus. We are now alive and free from the death penalty of sin.

I love how Pastor Tim Keller mentions how the quality of the faith of the Israelites is not mentioned. Only the object of their faith. Meaning that the object of our faith - Jesus - is what matters. Not the quality. You can imagine that there were different kinds of faith being displayed as the Israelites stepped into the sea. Some might have been confident and others might have been terrified. But the person they put their faith in was the same.

The question is then "Have you placed the object of your faith correctly? Has there been a point in your life that you have put your faith in the grace of God in the work of Christ?" If you have, then you are a child of God forever.

The second layer is that we continue to struggle with sin in our lives. We must daily live in God's grace and walk by faith as we fight sin in our lives. The same God who rescues us from the penalty of sin is the same God that will help us fight sin in our lives.

We Serve a God Who Receives All the Glory

The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. He jammed[b] the wheels of their chariots so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites! The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen." Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward[c] it, and the Lord swept them into the sea. The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.

But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

.- Exodus 14:23-29

The Egyptians then went after the Israelites in the sea. As they were in the sea, the Lord began to cause them to go into a panic. The wheels of their chariots were getting stuck in ground. It was at this point that the Egyptians realized they were fighting on an unwinnable fight. They said, "Let's get out of here. God is on their side and we have no chance." But at this point, their acknowledgement of God was too late.

I find this interesting that this was the time that finally realized God was too much for them. Not when God was performing ten miraculous plagues, like killing their firstborn children. Not when the ocean split right before. They continued to see the greatness and power of God and continued to reject Him. But now it was too late. Judgment had come to them. There comes a time when those who do not put their faith in Jesus will be too late, when they die. They will face judgment.

Once the Israelites were all safely on the other side, God commanded Moses to stretch out his hand one more time. Only this time it was to close up the sea. God would defeat the Egyptians, and as he said from the beginning, he would receive glory. The waters returned back to normal as Moses raised his hand and all of the Egyptian army was destroyed.

The gospel is urgent! In our own lives and around the world, time will run out on those who do not believe. God give us a heart for the lost, the billions who don't know you

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hands of the Egyptians

- Exodus 14:30

These verses sum up what God has just done. He brought salvation. God rescued his people. They saw his power and glory on display before them.

Glory is kind of a weird word. Here is an attempt at a definition: "The glory of God is the infinite beauty and greatness of God's manifold perfections. God is all about his infinite beauty and greatness being on display!"

This story reminds us that, simply, it is not about us. And that is a good thing! It is not about our knowledge and wisdom. It's about God's. It's not about our strength. It's about God's. It's not about any hope we can find in ourselves, but hope we have in God. It's not about our circumstances, as God has a plan and is greater.

What you should take away from this story is what the Israel took away from it. We serve an all-glorious, all-powerful God. This is the God we serve! They saw His glory and believed and trusted in Him. This passage says to us. It says see the power and glory of God! Believe Him. Trust Him. He is a God who can save and rescue you! God is for you!

*"Fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."
- Isaiah 41:10*

God is greater and more powerful than all things! Do you believe this?