

The God we can trust

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[0 : 0 0] Let me start with a question this morning. Why is it that we trust certain people over others? I'll give you an example. I trust my wife with our bank details, our financial information, and yet when I received an email from a Nigerian prince who was incredibly wealthy and desperate to share some of this wealth with me, I was slightly more kind of dubious about the details that I passed on. Why are there some people who are very happy to kind of believe what they say to us, and yet other people we kind of know to take their latest escapades, perhaps with a kind of a pinch of salt, and dial it down just a little bit? Well, ultimately, we trust people, don't we, because of what we know about their character. We trust people because of their actions in the past.

We trust people because trust is earned, as they say. One of the big themes of the book of Exodus has been God revealing himself to his people through his actions. God's showing his people of Israel who he is by what he does, and what we're going to see this morning is that he is the God who the Israelites could trust, and that just the same for us today, he is the God that we can trust.

And that's a really big deal, because there are lots of things in our lives that we worry about, aren't there? I'm sure that nobody here has turned up to church with absolutely no worries this morning, but we all have things on our minds, and being a Christian isn't like a kind of a magic switch that takes all those things away. And so it's important that we know if we're going to build our lives on the foundation of Jesus and God and the gospel, well, actually, can we trust him? Can we trust that in all circumstances? The Bible's full of promises. Can we trust God to keep those promises? That's what we're going to see this morning. And I say perhaps it's a story that we know really well. It's a famous story, but I'd like us to try and see it, if we can, with kind of fresh eyes as we look through this passage that Jonathan's read for us this morning. And as we do that, I think we'll see it really falls into two main acts, two acts in this great passage. And so first, act one, and what we see in act one is that God is in control. It'd be worth keeping your Bibles open in front of you. You'd see that at the end of chapter 13 that we read, and verse 18, God led the people. At verse 21, the Lord went before them day and night to lead them along the way. Into chapter 14, verse 2, the Lord tells them to turn back, tells them where to camp. All the way through this passage, it is God who's in control, setting the agenda, directing his people, the Israelites.

And yet we see also that he's in control of the Egyptians. Have a look at verse 4. God says he's going to harden Pharaoh's heart, which will make them pursue the Israelites. And then verses 5 down to 9, well, that's exactly what happens. God is in control of this whole situation. Right from the off, this passage is making it clear to us that everything that happens in this great event is in God's hands. That he is the one orchestrating every detail. He's not just kind of reacting to things as they happen to pop up. He's in control. And more than that, in this control, he has a purpose.

At verse 4 again, I will get glory over Pharaoh and his hosts, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord. And so we see God's control. We also see this control is not arbitrary or aimless.

[3 : 51] There is a reason behind it. Through this great event, God is going to be glorified. Through this great event, we'll see something of his character. Through this great event, even the Egyptians will come to know that he's the Lord. And so act one, God is in control. And yet, in the midst of this, the people on the ground see and fear Egypt. I think with stories like this that we know so well, it's quite easy for us to kind of sit back in our fairly comfortable chairs and nod and say, yep, it looks as though God has got this one in the bag. I'm sure this is all going to end up fine. You know, we know the end of the story, but actually the situation on the ground seems quite different. And so the Israelites, we read, are going well in verse 8. They're marching out defiantly.

And then just two verses later, verse 10, we read they're fearing greatly. They're terrified all of a sudden. What's happened? Why the difference? We see in verse 10 that the Israelites have lifted their eyes and they've seen the Egyptians marching after them. It's really interesting in this passage as you go through it, the language of kind of looking and seeing, this visual language, is all through the passage. And right now, the Egyptian army has filled the Israelites' vision. It was this huge army. Verse 9, all of Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and army pursued after the Israelites. Pharaoh was kind of throwing the kitchen sink after these guys, trying to recapture them, trying to get his slaves back. And that army is what the people are focused on. They've looked up and there on one side of them are the Egyptians. As far as the eye can see, the greatest kind of pinnacle of human power at the time. And then on the other side, they're trapped in by the deep blue sea.

It's this hopeless situation. The people see and fear the Egyptians. They are terrified. And what makes it worse is that they've done exactly what they were told to do. Remember, they've followed the route where God led them. They've camped at the place where God told them to camp. God has been in control, and yet now they're stuck. It seems as though God has seriously let them down. And so what do they do? Well, they do what we'd all do in this situation. They complain.

They complain to God. They complain to Moses. Verse 11, what have you done bringing us out of Egypt? Verse 12, it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.

They've lost all hope that they had. They look up, and this problem is too big. It's overwhelming. They wish they were slaves in Egypt. In fact, they say, and this is really kind of stretching the truth a little bit, I think, they say we never wanted to leave Egypt in the first place.

[6 : 52] God and God's man, Moses, have really let them down. Well, let me be honest with you. You know, I've never been kind of cornered between the sea and an ancient Middle Eastern superpower. I'm imagining that's not an experience any of us here share, but we actually can know in the same way this feeling of huge issues kind of filling our vision, filling our head, filling our thoughts. You know, these real life situations that we face that just seem to have no way out, seem completely beyond us, whether it's work challenges or financial worries or relationship difficulties. Perhaps it's just kind of day-to-day life, a to-do list that just gets longer and longer and longer. These thoughts that kind of plague us at the night, these worries which are so hard to shake, which fill our vision, just like this sight of the Egyptians did with the Israelites.

And even today, we come to church, don't we, bringing some of our baggage with us, bringing some of our concerns, bringing things on our mind, health or relationships or family or future plans.

And the question here isn't, well, are these real issues? No, the question here is, is God in control of these real issues? Can we still trust God despite what's going on here, despite how things often seem?

Because sometimes we feel, you know, we've done what we're supposed to do, but perhaps God isn't doing his bit. You know, we find ourselves saying to God, look, one of us is obviously messed up here and I'm, you know, pretty sure it wasn't me. And you know, that's how the Israelites felt. God's made this huge tactical blunder. Why are we camping here? This was a terrible decision. And yet actually this passage here, it reminds us that we can trust God because he is in control. Whatever it looks like, whatever is there in front of us, God has put all these kind of pieces in place. And often we can't see why. And yet just like with the Israelites, God is in control. And more than that, God has his purpose that he's working out. Just as here, he was going to use the Egyptian army, this very thing that filled their vision, the very thing that terrified the Israelites, God was going to use that to gain glory and recognition for himself. Well, so too for us. He has that purpose for each situation we find ourselves in. He is in control of it. He can use the very things that causes the biggest difficulties for his glory. God does not say that the things that we have in our minds, the things we think about aren't real problems. He doesn't say we have to pretend that we don't have anything wrong.

He doesn't have to pretend that, you know, the Christian answer is to say, oh, we're fine, we're fine, we're fine. But he does say that he is in control and that we can trust in him.

[9 : 50] And so that's act one, that God is in control. Well, we see the proof of that control. We see the proof that we can trust in him as we move to act two. And we see in act two, God delivers his people. And it's another example. We see this time and time again in the Bible.

The Bible doesn't just say to us, you know, you just have to trust God and that's it. The Bible doesn't speak about kind of blind faith. The Bible gives us reasons to trust. It gives us kind of concrete evidence to trust. And we said at the beginning that trust is earned.

Well, Moses here tells the Israelites the same, that they are going to see something which will leave them in absolutely no doubt that they can trust God. He directs the Israelites' eyes away from the Egyptians to instead focus on what they're going to see of God. Have a look if you've got them there at verses 13 and 14.

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.

You only have to be silent. Again, it's that seeing language. Don't look at the Egyptians. You're going to see God at work. And that is what we see. God reveals his plan in verse 16.

[11 : 15] They're going to walk through the sea on dry land. It's probably fair to guess that that's not what they were expecting. He reasserts his purposes, verses 17 and 18, that he's going to get glory through all this. And then following on from that, he carries this out just as he said he would.

I think what follows is probably a scene, is probably a picture that we kind of find impossible to imagine. That the wind blows, that the sea is divided, these huge walls of water on either side.

And the Israelites walk through on dry land. I don't know what picture you've got in your head. It's probably the kind of Sunday school picture of them kind of strolling along with a big smile and sort of shoulder high walls of water on each side.

It's probably not what we're thinking of here. This is something that would have been unlike anything seen before or since. It's something that would have been, it would have been terrifying.

I don't know about you. I'm never, I'm always a bit kind of get a bit uneasy about the sea. It's just so big and I never really know what's down there. And I'm not a huge fan of swimming. So I imagine if I'd have been an Israelite here, this would have been too much for me. I'd have been like a quivering wreck. And I'm sure some of them were as well, having been kind of prodded along by their friends and family behind them. But in some ways, that's the point. This is a terrifying sight. Because this isn't the Israelites saving themselves. This isn't a story of how kind of brave they were or how, what a great idea they had going through the sea. This is a story about God making a path for his people. This is a demonstration of God's power. This is a confirmation that God keeps his promises. He is with his people and will rescue his people even when things look hopeless.

[13 : 04] This rescue is all God's doing. What did the Israelites have to do? Well, as Moses said, they just had to be still and see what God was going to do. And ultimately, we see that the Egyptians recognize this as well. The second half of verse 25, they recognize that this is God's power.

That it's actually God that they're fighting against. God's purposes do come to pass. The Egyptians ultimately recognize that he is the Lord. And yet it's too late as this water comes crashing back over them. Because what we see again in this passage is a demonstration of God's judgment.

It's destruction of the Egyptian army. We can't just kind of kind of rush that under the carpet. This wasn't some unfortunate collateral damage. This was the complete judgment on God's enemies.

These Egyptians who'd set themselves up against God and up against his people. Well, they're destroyed. They're completely removed. Not one of them remained. Again, as we've seen in the last couple of weeks, this rescue that God carries out for his people, this rescue he does in his strength, it comes through judgment on those who oppose God, on those who are opposed to God's people. And so we see here this stark contrast. Those who oppose God who are never seen again. And those who've accepted his rescue, who've trusted in him, the people of Israel, verse 29, who walked on dry ground through the sea.

And then the great conclusion of that too is what? It's that the people see and fear and trust in God, in the Lord. Verse 31, sorry, verse 30 and 31, they go on, Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians. And Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seasaw. And 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 his servant Moses. And the great kind of movement of this passage, the great kind of swing that we see here is from verse 10. Remember we saw that in act one, the people seeing and fearing the Egyptians. To verse 31, the people seeing and fearing the Lord and believing in the Lord. And that fear here, that fear of the Lord, it doesn't mean being scared of God.

[15 : 36] It doesn't mean trying to get away from him. It really means a kind of a reverence, an understanding, a recognition of his power, of his awesomeness. And what caused that movement from fear of the Egyptians to fear of God? Well, the people saw the great saving power that God had displayed.

Their focus was shifted from their problems to their saviour. God delivers his people and the people see and fear and trust him. And the incredible thing about this event is that it is not just the people that were there. Not just those stood on that shore on that day. But again, like last week, this is a rescue to be remembered. This is a rescue to keep on looking back to. This is an ongoing demonstration that God can be trusted. We see this event spoken about throughout the Old Testament, the part of the Bible written before Jesus was born. Let me just give you one example. Psalm 77.

This is written about 500 years after the events of the Exodus. That's a psalm where the guy writing it is in great distress and worry. He's crying out to God, my soul refuses to be comforted, he says.

And yet finally, he's able to kind of ground himself and find confidence. How? By remembering, by looking back to this event. Psalm finishes by saying this, your path led through the seas, your way through the mighty waters. Though your footprints were not seen, you led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. And the point there isn't, he gets to the end of the psalm and he's kind of suddenly singing, you know, oh happy day, you know, there's nothing wrong at all, I don't know why I was being so stupid. No, his problems don't vanish. And yet he's able to regain his hope. He's reminded that he can trust in God in all these difficult circumstances he's going through because of the foundation of this great event. And that's just one event of, one example of many in the Old Testament. Israel trusting God for generations to come because they've seen his great rescue for them. Israel can trust God in the present and the future because of what he's done in the past because trust is earned. And here God earns it. And again, we've seen time and time again as we go through Exodus, what is true for the Israelites is true for us. And yet it's kind of amplified. We have a far greater rescue that we can look back on. We have a far greater rescue that shows that we can trust God in every circumstance. The rescue not just of kind of one nation or one people group, but for all people who accept that rescue. Because we can look to the cross.

The cross, God provided this way for us to move from hopelessness to life. The cross, God displays his power, his commitment to his promises. God shows he can be trusted in all situations, including our biggest difficulty of all. Our sin, our rebellion against God.

[18 : 51] How do we know that we can trust God in all things? How do we learn to trust? Well, we look back to the cross. And again, that kind of pattern is the same. We weren't there. It was 2,000 years ago.

And yet still like the Israelites, we can look back to our great deliverance. Still like the Israelites, we can sing songs which celebrate what Jesus did there. We look back to what God's done, how he's revealed himself to us. And that is what kind of the second half of the Bible, the New Testament, spends so much time doing, looking back to the cross. That's what the Apostle Paul does in a letter called Romans. He says, if God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Apostle Paul is looking back to the cross. He's saying, look, there is the darkest situation the world has ever seen. And there was the time when it looked as though God had failed, that his plan hadn't worked, that he'd lost.

God had failed. He was crucified. He was killed. You know, it had all gone horribly wrong. That kind of hope was extinguished. But just like at the Red Sea, in this hopeless-looking situation, God was in control. God was carrying out his purposes. God did use it for his glory.

And we can trust him now because of what he had done then for us. And again, that's certainly not to say that our problems will disappear.

[20 : 34] It's perhaps significant. You know, God didn't make the Red Sea disappear, and yet he went through it with his people and provided a way. And I think just the same for us. God goes through our difficulties and our challenges with us.

And there is nothing that we face without him. Nothing that we face where he's not in control. So our problems don't disappear, but we know that God goes through them with us. And we also know that our very biggest need, and that need that perhaps we're often dangerously unaware of, that we find it easy to forget about, our biggest need of forgiveness has been dealt with.

And we can trust God with the fact that although we've set ourselves up against him, although we've turned away from him and rejected him, that he has provided that path for us to be reconciled with him once again.

That if we trust in Jesus, we can avoid that judgment that fell on the Egyptians, and enjoy that freedom that comes to God's people.

Not because we're good enough, or we're brave enough, or we can work out these problems in ourselves, but because of what he has done for us. And perhaps that's something for you to think about for the first time this week.

[21 : 47] Perhaps that's something for you to kind of come back to this week. Just to do this, to recognize that the seriousness of the situation that we find ourselves in without Christ, our hopelessness.

And yet also to recognize that and to accept that there's a certain hope that his rescue brings. And just kind of picture the scene, you know, when God divides the sea to rescue the Israelites.

You know, it's a terrifying scene. It's a kind of, yeah, a scene that we can't really comprehend. And yet I'm sure of this, that there were none of them kind of hanging around on the beach, wondering if there was a different way that they could save themselves.

Wondering if they could do something which, you know, in some ways they were more responsible for. And they saw their need. And they saw that rescue. And they took it. And that is the model of our situation.

It's the cross that provides that rescue for us. It's the cross that provides that deliverance. And it's the cross that we know. If we look to the cross, if we can trust him there, then we can trust him with everything else.

[22 : 55] How will he not also graciously give us all things, if he would even spare his own son for us? The verses that we read from the book of Romans earlier continue, For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

And this is the love that was demonstrated to us at the cross. And this is the demonstration that we can now trust God in all things. Because trust is earned. And we see here that he has earned it.