

The God who rescues

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 February 2019

Preacher: Ali Sewell

[0 : 0 0] Over Christmas, I watched the film The Darkest Hour about Winston Churchill. I'd wanted to watch it for a while and hadn't got around to it, but I had a chance to see that, and it filled in what I think could be described as a few gaps in my knowledge of history, which was good.

And one of the key things it kind of focused in on, one of the big kind of themes of it, was the Dunkirk evacuation of 1940. Over a third of a million Allied soldiers rescued from the beaches of France.

Incredible event. There's another film about it last year, Christopher Nolan made, imaginatively titled Dunkirk. You might have seen that. But this incredible event, this incredible rescue that changed the course, right from the beginning, changed the course of the Second World War, and probably, it would be fair to say, changed the course of history.

And it's this rescue which, because of that significance, it's still spoken about, it's still remembered in books, it's still put down in great films like this, because it was an incredible event, and it's an event to be remembered.

And this morning, we're looking at an incredible rescue again, but even further back in history, another history-defining moment, and another rescue which is to be remembered.

[1 : 2 4] And that's the Passover, this event that we've kind of read about where God rescues his people from slavery in Egypt. It's kind of the high point of the book of Exodus so far, as we've been working our way through.

It's this rescue that, right from the beginning, God has promised. And it's happened just as God has promised it. And it's a rescue to be remembered.

And so those are the two kind of headings, headlines, I suppose, when I look at this under this morning. The idea of rescue and the idea of remembering. And we're going to do that working our way through chapters 11 and 12, so it'll be worth having those open in front of you if you have your Bibles.

So number one, a rescue. This is the result of this kind of tenth and greatest plague is, as we've just read, as we've just said, that the Israelites are finally freed from Egypt.

They don't have to kind of sneak out, they're actually kind of sent out with kind of gold and gifts from the people. They're sent out of slavery. It's God's great victory over Pharaoh, over Egypt.

[2 : 3 3] It's this great rescue that is kind of right at the heart of the book of Exodus. Let me give you a quick recap. You might remember last week we looked at this kind of battle, really a pretty one-sided contest that we saw between God and Pharaoh in the first nine plagues.

I remember this word plagues could be described as blows or strikes. Three rounds of three blows which brought Egypt to its knees, which, as God himself said, were acts of judgment.

Judgment on Egypt. Judgment on Pharaoh who'd enslaved God's people. And this tenth plague, this final strike, really this knockout blow, is clearly the most severe yet.

And we just heard as it was read, it affects everyone from Pharaoh at the very top to the servant girl at the very bottom, even the livestock out in the field. It is the death of the firstborn son.

Chapter 12, verse 30, there was not a house where someone was not dead. And as we begin this, I wanted to start, perhaps that makes you think, you know, this is awful.

[3 : 48] This is kind of barbaric. You know, how could God do something like that? And before we kind of dive in and look in a bit more detail, I want to remember, again, we talked about this last week, this idea of judgment, certainly such a strong judgment, it can make us feel kind of uncomfortable.

Remember what we said last week, that actually for justice to be done, there needs to be judgment on wickedness. Let me again take you back to Exodus chapter 4, where God says this to Pharaoh, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, let my son go, that he may serve me.

If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son. And so this is shocking. And yet, right from the off, we see that this has been a battle for God's firstborn son.

It's been a battle for the people of Israel, those who've been enslaved for generations, those who'd had their sons drowned in the Nile, those who God had promised such good things for, and yet who Pharaoh had oppressed and persecuted.

And right from the off there, we see in those verses in chapter 4, and we've seen it countless times last week, that God has told Pharaoh what is required to avoid this judgment. Let my people go.

[5 : 06] Let my son go. And yet, time and time again, Pharaoh has refused that. And so ultimately, this judgment comes. So it's a judgment which is fair, which is pre-warned, which is appropriate to the situation.

It doesn't stop it being a judgment which is kind of brutal and hard to read about. But it is this judgment that ultimately brings rescue to God's people, which finally breaks Pharaoh's resistance and sees God's people free.

And so there's tons of stuff in this passage. We could talk about it for kind of weeks and weeks. We're not going to do that, don't worry. We're just kind of going through Exodus, looking at the big picture, trying to get the big ideas.

And the big idea in this is really how is this rescue of God's people achieved? And the answer is this, that it comes through blood. It's a rescue through blood.

And so you might have kind of thought there's some strange bits as you're, as Charity was reading through there. There's this sort of command where the people are to take a lamb, and they're to kill the lamb, and they're to put the blood of the lamb on their doorposts and across the lintel of their door.

[6 : 16] It's kind of gruesome. I don't think you got vegetarians back then, which is fine, but it's all a bit kind of grim and messy, isn't it? And what's the result of that? Well, verse 23, And what happens is this, that the people are rescued by this blood of the lamb on the doorposts.

They're spared the judgment which comes, and instead they receive this great rescue. And again, you know, this kind of sounds a bit weird, doesn't it? It sounds like it's something a million miles away.

It sounds completely bizarre. You know, why would God ask them to do that? What's the point? Actually, the point is, and this is a kind of a huge idea throughout the Bible, a massive theme that runs right throughout the Bible, the point is this idea of substitution.

Substitution. The key, I suppose, to understand there is, again, we read it in verse 30, there was not a house where someone was not dead. And actually, that's true. It is not that death didn't come to the Israelites.

It is that the lamb died instead. And that's what this blood on the doorpost is all about. It's a sign, not just a sign of where God's people happen to live, okay, we'll avoid that house and that house, but actually it's a sign that there has been a death, a death of the lamb.

[7 : 51] And so death does not come to those inside the house. The people are spared. The people are rescued by the blood. And why is that significant? Well, a couple of things.

Firstly, it helps us to see that why were God's people, the Israelites, saved? It never did anything wrong, and they didn't deserve judgment, but actually it was because another had died in their place.

God provided this way for his judgment to fall elsewhere. And so the lamb dies instead of the people. The blood on the doorpost, the blood on the lintel, is the sign that this lamb has died for them.

And this is huge in our understanding of the Bible. We said right from the beginning, why are we looking at the book of Exodus? Well, we're looking at it because it gives us, amongst other things, it gives us like a scale model of the gospel.

And so we're not just looking at a piece of history. We're not just looking at something that happened a long time ago and is an interesting story, but we're looking at the pattern of how God rescues his people.

[8 : 54] And the lesson from this section, what we see in this pattern, is that God rescues his people through the substitutionary death of a spotless lamb.

And that is absolutely huge in the Bible. Really, this kind of passage, this section kicks off what's known as the sacrificial system in the Old Testament, the part of the Bible written before Jesus, where the priests would offer animals and sacrifices instead of, in place of the sins of the people.

And yet even those were there ultimately to point forwards to the fulfillment of all of that. And we find that in the New Testament. We find that in the part of the Bible that once Jesus has arrived on the scene, preparing for Jesus is a guy called John the Baptist.

He's sent to prepare people for this rescue that God was bringing. One of the first things that we read about John the Baptist is that he sees Jesus coming towards him and he says, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

And John knows what he's talking about. John knows what that's going to make the people think about. He's saying, Look, here is the true Passover lamb. Here is what all of this is pointing towards.

[10 : 13] And the climax of that comes as Jesus dies on the cross, as Jesus' blood is spilled. Why did that happen? Well, that is Jesus, the perfect spotless lamb dying in place of his people.

That is Jesus taking the judgment that people deserve, that we all deserve, so that they instead can go free. And that's what a Christian is. That's the heart of Christianity.

It's not that Christians are better than other people, but it's that Christians are people who accept that substitution where Jesus dies in our place to rescue us.

And the question, I suppose, then comes, well, rescue us from what? You know, our situation is not slavery in Egypt. What is it that God rescues us from? Well, the Bible says that our situation is still slavery.

Not to another nation, not to another kind of king or superpower, but it is slavery to sin. Sin really is that kind of mindset or that attitude which instead of putting God's first, puts ourselves first or puts anything else in God's place.

[11 : 18] And it includes all the kind of actions that flow from that mindset. And I think the fascinating thing is that really the world says that, you know, putting yourself first, you know, prioritizing your own needs, you know, going and getting what you want, you know, the world calls that freedom, doesn't it?

That's what we have to strive after. That's what it's looked up to. It's something to chase after. You know, the Bible says, actually, that is a form of slavery. The Bible says that these things, whatever we kind of put as number one, that becomes our master.

And so we end up constantly trying to work for and try and find our value in things that can't really satisfy. We end up constantly in destructive patterns of behavior that we can't shift.

We end up not free to be all that we were designed to be in a relationship with the God who made us. And ultimately, and most seriously, we find that we're not right with God.

we've rejected him and we deserve this punishment, this judgment. And yet, through Jesus' sacrifice, through the true lamb, then we are freed from that.

[12 : 27] That is that rescue, freed from serving sin, freed from being liable to that judgment, freed from having sin as our master, ultimately, to be free to serve God.

And so, back to Exodus, this dying lamb, this blood on wooden beams, is an incredibly vivid picture of the gospel.

It is a vivid picture of how God rescues us to be his people. It is a picture of the cross, where Jesus dies, that his children might live.

And so this is how God rescues. It's such a central section in Exodus and throughout the whole Bible. It's the gospel. It is what, for Christians, transforms their relationship with God.

That relationship is restored through this substitutionary death of Jesus. And yet, it's also something that transforms our whole outlook on the world, our whole view of life.

[13 : 25] It changes us as a people in countless ways. Let me just sort of mention two. Number one, if this is true and if we accept that, then it has to be incredibly humbling.

If this is the defining aspect of what it means to be a Christian, and it is, well then it means that there can't be any space, can there, for pride, for arrogance. So often, that kind of accusation leveled against Christianity or the other churches, you know, they're arrogant.

They think they're better than everyone else. You know, who are you to say that you're better than me? Maybe some Christians do act like that. But actually, the gospel should be like a kind of a heat-seeking missile that destroys any trace of arrogance or pride.

Because being a Christian isn't about what we've done. It's about completely depending on someone else, completely depending on Jesus' death. It gets rid of any sense of pride or arrogance that we might tend towards.

It gets rid of this idea of a kind of us and them. You know, the church is always and always will be full of flawed people, of helpless people. And it's only as we remember that that we're able to be this kind of welcoming community that we talk about and that we strive to be.

[14 : 42] Because we're not saying to people, you know, do this and this and this and then you could come and join us on a Sunday if you want. No, we say to people, you know, come and join us wherever you are. Come and join us whatever you like, wherever you're at.

Let us tell you about this rescue that we've found. Let us share with you this rescue that we need. Let us rejoice together about this rescue that is offered to you as well.

And so number one, it's something that really humbles us, this gospel message, this idea of Jesus dying in our place. But number two, it comforts us, it encourages us, it gives us security.

You know, we live in a world which is dominated by this idea of having to prove yourself. You're having to show you're worth it, whether that's through a success at work, whether that's through what you look like, whether that's through how kind of functional your family is or well behaved your children are.

You know, even in Christian circles we can feel that pressure. You know, how good a Christian am I? Am I doing all the right stuff? You know, how much faith do people kind of think I have? What are my prayers like?

[15 : 48] Actually, again, this is such a great encouragement because none of those things are what define God's people. They're defined by what God has done.

We don't need to prove ourselves either through worldly criteria or religious performance. There is the comfort of relying on that sacrifice that Jesus has made and that nothing can change and that nothing can take away.

I spent a while in my school years playing rugby. If you've ever, if you've watched any of the Six Nations or I suppose even just seen a rugby player you'll probably notice that they don't look like me. I'm kind of not the ideal rugby build but I was desperate that I was going to play rugby and I was going to be good at rugby so I had to kind of try extra hard to prove myself.

Try extra hard to kind of cover up the fact I was basically quite small and weedy compared to everyone else. And you know, it happened for a while. I gave my best and I did all I could and then there was kind of a series of three games I got concussed twice and then knocked out in the third one and I just sort of thought you know what?

This isn't for me. You know, this isn't my sport. But we can kind of try and take that attitude into our lives, can't we? I have to prove myself. It's exhausting.

[17 : 05] You know, I have to make it, I know that I'm kind of weak over here but if I try better here you know, then I'll kind of prove that I'm supposed to be here. I deserve to be here. It wears us out. You know, if we take that attitude in life we'll end up being kind of battered and bruised and giving in.

And yet I hope we see that through this great message of the rescue through Jesus, his death in our place there's that encouragement that we don't need to make up for our weaknesses. We can't.

All that is needed, all that is required, all our hope is based on that simple acceptance of Jesus. Jesus, the perfect spotless lamb dying in our place.

And that is how much God loves us. And that is something that nothing can change or take away. So we're humbled by this but also we're encouraged, we're comforted, we're given great security by this.

Okay, so there you go. That was the first thing we're going to talk about. It's a rescue and we've spoken about that for a while because it's a really kind of big deal both in Exodus and throughout the Bible. It's this rescue by the idea of the lamb who dies in the place of the people.

[18 : 18] It's a huge theme running through the Bible, a huge theme we can kind of trace back to this point here, a really big deal in this passage. And yet the other thing, and we'll be quicker with this, the other thing that we see kind of weaved through these chapters is that this rescue is not like a kind of a one-hit wonder but it's a rescue to be remembered.

And so you'll have seen as we're kind of reading through it all those details about how they're to remember this rescue in future. And so we're going to look now at this idea of remembering.

It's kind of fascinating in the passage even before the rescue takes place, even as it's being announced, the Lord tells Moses and Aaron about this celebration, the feast of the Passover.

He tells them all these kind of details of dates, you know, when it's going to happen, how it's going to happen, the type of herbs they're going to use with it. It's incredibly kind of minute detail. That's what the first 20 verses of chapter 12 are all about.

The details are for how generations to come people are going to kind of rehearse and replay and remember what's happened here at the Exodus. Verse 2 of chapter 12 is going to be the start of their whole new year.

[19 : 27] Their whole calendar is going to be changed to help them remember and recognize the significance of what's happening here. And then we see it again. Moses, verses 21 to 23, kind of sends the people out to get ready for this momentous, you know, probably fairly terrifying night.

And then verse 4, verse 24, so he's straight back at it again, telling them, you'll observe this right as a statue for you and your sons forever. This idea of remembrance of this kind of ceremony, this meal, this celebration they're going to set up is kind of woven throughout this passage.

I wonder if you can imagine the people's response. Okay, Moses, let's just maybe get this evening sorted out first, shall we? You've just been telling us about this destroyer who is hopefully not, we trust, going to enter our homes, but, you know, we're feeling a bit on edge here and maybe let's get tonight out of the way and then we could start making plans for next year after that, you know, once we're out of Egypt.

And yet that is not an option because this idea of remembrance and this rescue are so tightly tied together that they cannot be separated.

And this rescue is so significant that it's what's going to define these people's future and if they ever lose sight of that, if they ever forget to remember that, they're going to lose their whole identity. They're going to forget who they are as God's people.

[20 : 47] And so there's built in this visible, tangible, graphic way of ensuring that the people remember this feast that they'll celebrate. And again, this has got such incredible significance and relevance to us as a church.

And so just as throughout the Old Testament the people look back to Exodus and celebrated what God had done for them through the Passover meal, well, so the church is to constantly look back to our great rescue.

It's to look back to the cross, to remember and celebrate what God has done for us, to be constantly shaped by that truth. And that's really what we come to do each week at church.

We have festivals kind of during the year but ultimately that's what we do on a weekly basis where we come together not kind of primarily to learn sort of new facts from the book of Exodus or any other book, not ultimately to kind of catch up with friends and chat to each other but kind of through those things and over and above those things to be reminded of the cross, to remind ourselves of the gospel of that great rescue that defines who we are and changes our whole life going forward.

And just like the Passover, we too are given this special meal to celebrate and remember this rescue as we share communion together. we're going to do that in a couple of minutes.

[22 : 16] In fact, Jesus' last supper which we kind of replicate at communion, that was in fact the Passover meal which he was sharing with his disciples. And yet Jesus fulfills that meaning of the Passover.

Do this in remembrance, Jesus says, of me. We're no longer looking back to Egypt. We're no longer looking back to the lamb with his blood on the doorpost.

We're looking back to Jesus. Jesus says, remember the cross. It's Jesus' life, it's his death, it's his cross, it's his resurrection that we remember. And we're given the means of doing that.

We do that sometimes formally through communion at church. We do that weekly through kind of gathering together as we've said to kind of look at the Bible and how it all points to Jesus. We do that kind of day by day.

God brings us into a community of his people. To encourage each other, to love each other, ultimately to be constantly pointing each other back to what Jesus has done for us.

[23 : 20] Constantly reminding ourselves of the cross, that rescue that defines God's people. And as we do that, it's really important, I think, again looking back at Exodus, again looking at the Passover, it's really important to recognize that in that there's this huge emphasis on children.

I'm passing this on to the next generation. Children are such a part of this celebration. And it's almost designed to provoke them slightly. Verse 26, and when your children say to you, what do you mean by this service?

Well, the idea is it then gives this concrete opportunity for parents to speak to their children and other children about what God has done, about the rescue he's carried out. So for us as a church, that means so much of what we want to do is share the good news of this rescue with those around us, with other people in our community.

But also, a big focus has to be on helping our children to understand and remember this rescue that Jesus has done. The idea behind what we do together kind of at the start of the service with the kind of, you know, kind of get kids to remember stuff.

Well, that's the point of that. Hopefully it's something that people can kind of take home and discuss as families to help children remember, to pass on this good news from generation to generation.

[24 : 42] That's the point of what happens next door in kids' church. It's not just kind of there to entertain or as a babysitting service, but to teach these guys about the cross from their earliest years.

It's why in just a couple of minutes we're going to welcome the children back in to the kind of the back of the room as we celebrate communion together. It will be a lot easier for their teachers just to kind of keep them out for another five minutes and kind of do a game or something.

And yet hopefully we want these young lives to be prompted to ask these same questions. What do you mean by this service? What's going on here? What's this all about? And that great opportunity for us to be able to say, well, we're celebrating how God has rescued us through Jesus because we are his people and that is what defines us.

And so it's something we want our children to know and remember. It's something we want our community to know and remember. It's something that we all need to constantly come back to to know and remember because just as the Passover, this great rescue was a rescue to be remembered at a defining moment of salvation for the people of Israel, well, we'll say the cross is the defining moment for God's people now.

how we celebrate Jesus, how we celebrate the Lamb who was slain and through his blood we are saved. A rescue to be remembered.

[26 : 06] Let me pray.