

From Death to Life
Exodus 14:15–31
April 5, 2026

I honestly don't know how one introduces a text like this. It's a story so well-known that I don't have to prepare anyone for what's going to happen. It's a narrative so fascinating—in and of itself—that there's little to no need to generate some sort of interest. And, frankly, based on what we witnessed earlier in the baptistry, it's a passage you've *already* seen the ultimate significance of. Said another way, you know the details of this story, those details are intrinsically interesting, and the point of the story has *already* been made *visibly* clear.

So, I will just remind us of a couple things. First, the crossing of the Red Sea is not a story told *merely* to fascinate us, to *merely* prompt intellectual questions about walls of water, chariot wheels, or the identity of the angel of the Lord. While those are *good* questions, certainly, what happened at the Red Sea was intended to reveal the character of God to the Israelites. And further, that's why *we* are reading the narrative today. So that *we* might know who He is.

As you'll see, that reality will drive the points of the sermon. Because in this passage, God makes Himself known as One that protects, One that judges, and One that delivers. And, in fact, what we'll see is that where those three aspects of His character intersect is where He's known most fully.

Which leads us to a second reminder. The God that reveals Himself in the Scriptures does so progressively—little by little. Meaning, we don't know *everything* about Him from merely reading Genesis 1. And *that* means that what happens in the book of Exodus isn't the end of the story either. Furthermore, what happens in Exodus often points us to something that will happen later. Exodus previews. And though we've said that more than once, with a story *this* familiar, with a narrative we seem to *already* know, maybe it's a good reminder.

Note first,

1. **Seeing the Exodus and Knowing God** (vv. 15–18)

Verse 15: **Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward.”**

When we left the Israelites last week, the 600,000 plus¹ were camping by the sea, having just recently been “let go” by Pharaoh. However, while camping by the sea, they looked up and **behold, the Egyptians were marching after them** (Ex. 14:10). Hundreds and hundreds of select chariots filled with men wielding weapons. The Hebrews were terrified. And they cry out to the LORD.

But, in these moments, Moses sees what they do not *yet* see. He told them *not* to fear. Rather, they were to stand by, keep silent, and **see the salvation of the LORD** (Ex. 14:13). The LORD was going to fight for them (14:14).

However, I don't imagine Moses said all that *without* also doing a good bit of praying as well. And it's with *that* in mind that the LORD says what He says in verse 15: **Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward.** With 600,000 plus, to move forward would mean to break camp, round up animals, pack belongings, and prepare for an orderly departure.²

Moses was to tell the Hebrews to get ready to go. And then the LORD told him, in verse 16: **As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand.** As a reminder, at the *first* plague Aaron was to stretch out his hand, with his staff, and touch the waters (Ex. 7:20). The waters would then

¹ That's *just* men, based on Exodus 12:37

² Doug Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC, 338.

turn to blood. Then, during the *second* plague, Aaron was to stretch out his hand, with his staff, over the waters (Ex. 7:5–6), so that frogs might come out. Here, *again* with water, Moses was to lift up his staff and stretch out his hand **over the sea**.

In each case, the power wasn't intrinsic to the staff itself; instead, the staff represented the power of God.³ What *had* come about, and what *would* come about, could *only* be explained by *His* doing. And in *this* case, Moses was to merely lift the staff, stretch out his hand over the sea, and it would be divided. So that, verse 16 goes on, **the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land**.

One of the things that really encouraged me after last week's sermon was the way some of you made connections between Exodus and Matthew's gospel that I hadn't made. For example, I mentioned how evil's *seeming* advance did not come *close* to negating God's rule. And in fact, all of the charging chariots were subplot, as God was actually luring the Egyptians to a particular spot for a particular purpose. Said another way—though it *seemed* like the end for God's people, it was actually the end for someone else. After making that statement, I attempted to connect that reality to Judas's betrayal. How it might've *seemed*, in that moment, that evil was advancing—and maybe even winning.

But then, after the sermon, a couple of you went even further connecting Old Testament and New, noting that the very thing the disciples were fearful *of* in Matthew's Gospel—Christ being handed over—ended up being the very thing they were delivered *by*.

And I bring *that* up because a similar thing might be seen here. The Israelites looked at the sea of chariots in front of them. And then they looked at the *deep* sea behind them. On one side, it's enslavement, or death. On the other side, it's *certain* death.⁴ And yet, what they *never* could have imagined being the *means* of their deliverance was the very direction they were soon to take.

Which is what verse 17 describes: **As for Me, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen**. We're not told *how* yet, but we are told *why*. Why does what's *about* to happen, come about? Verse 18: **Then the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I am honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen**. Again, God is not *just* delivering His people, He is revealing Himself.

It's the same theme we noted back in Exodus 3 at the burning bush. It's the same theme stated in Exodus 6 when God revealed His name—again. It's the same theme He said—repeatedly—during the plagues. In *all* this, time and again, His aim has been clear: to make Himself, and His Name, known.

And *here*—on the shores of the Red Sea—He *shows* up to do so.

2. Seeing the Exodus and Knowing the God Who Protects (vv. 19–22)

Verse 19: **The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them**.

I trust you noted the parallel “movers.” The angel of God, *and* the pillar of cloud, *both* move from “before” to “behind” the people of God. To state the matter as plainly as possible, most believe that the angel of God and the pillar of cloud are one and the same.⁵ Which is basically what we read last week: **The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day** (13:21).

³ Stuart, 198.

⁴ The ability to swim would've been *much* less prevalent in ancient times. See Stuart, 339.

⁵ Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, AOTC, 278; Stuart, 340.

The significance is this: *last* week He was *before* the Hebrews, leading and guiding them. *This* week He is *behind* them, protecting them. That's what verse 20 details: **So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night.**

Keep in mind that once the Hebrews saw the Egyptians coming across the dusty horizon, those select chariots weren't slowing down. With the target in their sights, the horsemen are likely picking up speed. And a million people don't pack up and move quickly. It's only a matter of minutes before they are overtaken.⁶

But what did Moses say back in verse 14? **The LORD will fight for you.** And He does. He stood between, **and the one did not come near the other all night.** *Not* because Israel is strong, but because Yahweh stands in the way.

The God to be known guides *and* protects. We've already learned this about Him during the plagues. He distinguished, over and over again. And of the Israelites, not *one* died (Ex. 9:6). It's interesting that in Genesis 3 an angel of the LORD was stationed, with a flame beside, to block from life. Here, an angel of the LORD stands, in a pillar of cloud and fire, to block from death.

Verse 21: **Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided.** Before we get into this too far, let me address our inner skeptic. Whether young or old, maybe we quietly assume a story like this is too fanciful. If so, let's begin with the truth that makes the parting of the Red Sea not only possible, but plausible. That truth is simply this: the One that *parts* the sea is the One that spoke water into existence. The One that sends the wind is the One that formed every storm you've ever seen, every breeze you've ever felt. Not to be overly simplistic, but what happens here is *easy* for the Sovereign of the Universe.⁷

So, yes, Moses stretches out his hand, holding the staff. But it's the Creator of Genesis 1 that swept the sea back, turning it into dry land. And He did so, verse 22, so that, **the sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.**

By the way, this word for "wall" is used over a hundred times in the Old Testament. And it *never* means a small wall, but always a large (and usually a city) wall. And further, the word for sea was *never* used for swamps or some muddy landscape, but for large bodies of water.⁸ The point is this: at *any* point, should that wall of water *not* be held back, the Hebrews would be dead, buried under the sea.

In a pillar, Yahweh stood between His people and the Egyptians. And as He held the walls of water back, He stood between them and death. The God made known in Exodus is the God that protects His people.

To be clear, it's *not* because they *earned* this. We thought about and discussed the patience of God this past Wednesday night. With that in mind, don't forget that just a few verses prior, the Hebrews had said this: **Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?** (Ex. 14:11).

He'd acted in power on their behalf. He'd mercifully distinguished between them and their oppressors. He'd shielded their firstborn from death. He'd brought them out from under slavery. And yet they *still* doubted. They *still* complained.

Yet He's long-suffering; and He patiently protects His own.

And He protects them, in part, by judging His—and *their*—enemies.

⁶ Stuart, 341.

⁷ However, if you want a few imagined scenarios, see Phil Ryken's commentary.

⁸ Stuart, 342.

3. Seeing the Exodus and Knowing the God Who Judges (vv. 23–28)

Verse 23: **Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea.**

I do think verse 23 speaks to just how dry the ground was. As we mentioned last week, the travel of chariots *depends* on a hard and flat surface.⁹ No sensible commander would order chariots to go into a marshy wetland.¹⁰ But, of course, you can imagine them saying something like, “If the Israelites can do it, are we going to be afraid?”¹¹

And, further, all of this has taken some time. A million Hebrews hadn’t crossed all that quickly. So, though the events of verses 20 and 21 were at night, verse 24 speaks of the dawn: **At the morning watch, the LORD looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion. He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty.**

Precisely what happened to their wheels could be described in various ways. Some would say the wheels locked up, they jammed, were clogged,¹² bogged down,¹³ heavy,¹⁴ or all kinds of other descriptors. Regardless, it’s clear that the chariots could no longer be easily maneuvered.

What’s also clear is that the LORD did this so that He might bring them **into confusion**. Surely, it’s not *only* their chariots swerving, but their horses are panicking. And at *this* point, the Egyptians *know* what’s happening. Verse 25 goes on: **so the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from Israel, for the LORD is fighting for them against the Egyptians.”** Again, this is precisely what Moses *said* would happen. He knew that Yahweh was not *merely* a guide, nor *merely* a protector, but also an avenger.

Verse 26: **Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and over their horsemen. So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing right into it; then the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.**

By the way, I’m telling the bare–bones narrative this week. Next week we’ll look at the poetry that describes what happened here. And what verse 12 of chapter 15 says is this: **You stretched out your right hand, the earth swallowed them.** Why bring that up? Because this is what has been hinted at for chapters now. In fact, back in chapter 7—at the preview of the plagues—Aaron throws down his staff. The Egyptian magicians throw down theirs too. What happened next? Aaron’s staff–turned–serpent “swallowed” all the other serpents—the *same* word used to describe what happened here.¹⁵ What was previewed back in Egypt is now fulfilled in the sea.

The God of the Hebrews—the God of the Bible—is a God of judgment. Yes, He is slow to anger. Yes, He is marked by steadfast love. But He does *not* leave the guilty unpunished.

In fact, verse 28 shows us how precise He is with His judgment: **The waters returned and covered the chariots and their horsemen, even Pharaoh’s entire army that had gone in after them; not even one of them remained.** Verse 30 explains a bit further the effect of the sea, that the Israelites saw Egyptians dead all along the seashore.

⁹ These chariots might be select, but they’re not all–terrain.

¹⁰ Stuart, 339.

¹¹ Stuart, 340.

¹² ESV.

¹³ Stuart, 343.

¹⁴ Alexander, 279.

¹⁵ Morales, 59. It’s the *only* time this verb is used in reference to the Egyptians.

This is the long-awaited judgment of God's enemies.
And it's a judgment that brings about deliverance.

4. Seeing the Exodus and Knowing the God Who Delivers (vv. 29–31)

Verse 29: **But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.** Through what should have been their grave, the Hebrews were brought safely *through*. *Unlike* the Egyptians, no Israelite perished.¹⁶ Verse 30: **Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians.** What looked like death turned out to be life. Out of Egypt, He called His Son.

Yahweh had made Himself known. And the Hebrews responded in both fear and faith.

Verse 31: **When Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses.**

Only hours before, they'd *trembled*—at the sight of chariots. Now, they fear again, but this time rightly. And a delivered people believe in the One who'd made Himself known.

Conclusion

I said at the beginning that this wasn't unfamiliar territory. Most of you *knew* what would happen.

But I also said at the beginning that what happens in Exodus often points us to something that would happen later. With that in mind, let's go to a scene we've not considered since the very first sermon in this series. It's a memorable scene from Luke 9, when Elijah and *Moses* appear in glory on a mountain with Jesus of Nazareth. Luke tells us their conversation, that those three men **were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem** (Luke 9:31).

Why bring this up today? It's not *merely* because Moses is there, but because the word for "departure" is the word *exodus*. Moses, Elijah and Jesus were talking about what Christ was *about* to accomplish in Jerusalem. And they called *it*—what we're celebrating this weekend—the exodus.

Which leads us *back* to the ultimate significance of this fascinating narrative. And, again, it is what you *already* saw in the baptistry. Because there's a better Deliverer than Moses. And He brings about a better deliverance than Exodus 14.

Because what *we've* earned is judgment, the kind of judgment Egypt received—death. (Rom. 6:23). And yet the good news of the gospel is that God delivers us from what we've earned. More specifically, and more gloriously, He brings us *through* the waters of judgment by taking that judgment upon Himself. *He's* why we come up out of the water. *He's* why we're brought safely through (1 Peter 3). He, the God revealed in the Exodus and—then, more *fully* revealed—protects His people from death by dying in their place. We *should* be Egypt. Instead, because of mercy, we're God's people.

And what must be said, on a day like *this*, is that He doesn't save His people by avoiding judgment. Resurrection is not *bypassing* death. It's dying; and *then* living. What we rejoice in is that He delivered His people not *only* by taking their punishment, but by conquering death itself—rising from it—so that we might too.¹⁷

So, we've read about deliverance. We've watched it. Will we believe, and rejoice in it?
Is He our only hope?

¹⁶ See Alex Duke's forthcoming book on the Exodus.

¹⁷ A. W. Pink, *Gleanings in Exodus*, 112, said it as plainly as it can be said, "That Israel passed through the Red Sea, and emerged safely on the far side, tells of resurrection."