Open your Bibles to Exodus 14:1-14.

We're continuing our study of the Book of Exodus.Our theme today is God's Purposes in Our Trials.

In our text today, we're going to read about how God led the Israelites into an impossible situation at the Red Sea.

•He led them to a great trial. A place of testing.

•But He did so with many wonderful purposes in mind. And they all have to do with His self-glorification.

•The difficult circumstance was the stage on which the Lord would glorify Himself.

In this sermon I intend to answer a question: Why does God bring His People to trials?

•I'm not so foolish as to think that I'll give an exhaustive answer. Rather, there are some answers found in our text that I want to point out to you.

My goal today is to show you the hope you have in God in the midst of hardship.

•To get your eyes off your abilities, and on to the Lord.

•To get your eyes off the trial, and on what the Lord is doing in your life and heart.

•I hope to encourage you to rest in His sovereignty, to know that he's glorifying Himself, to trust that He's growing you, and to believe that He'll be God to you and see you through.

So if you're here today and find yourself asking, "Why, God? Why have you put me in this situation?" I hope to be useful to you.

•My prayer is that God would use this sermon to "pull the curtain back," so to speak, and show you some of His designs in your trials.

•May God do so and bless the preaching of His Word.

If you would, and are able, please stand with me now for the reading of the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God.

Exodus 14:1-14

[1] Then the LORD said to Moses,

[2] "Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea.

[3] For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, 'They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.'

[4] And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD." And they did so. [5] When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, "What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?"

[6] So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him,

[7] and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them.

[8] And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the people of Israel while the people of Israel were going out defiantly.

[9] The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

[10] When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD.

[11] They said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt?

[12] Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us

alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."

[13] 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.

[14] The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."

(PRAY)

Our Triune God,

•You've given us the Scriptures to reveal yourself to us.

 So we ask that you would open our minds and hearts to receive what you've revealed, that we might know you more deeply.

•Grant us faith that we might rejoice in you and see the truth that everything is about you.

•Teach us, Lord. We need to learn. And we want to learn because we love you.

•So work in our hearts today and make much of yourself.

•We ask these things in Jesus' Name and for His sake.



1.) Some context to begin: Israel is on the move.

•They've begun to leave Egypt. They're in the wilderness, near the border, but not completely out.

•God is leading them in a Pillar of Cloud and Fire, as well as through Moses.

•They're headed to Canaan, the Promised Land.

•And we're about to see that the LORD led them to a place no human strategist would've.

vv1-2 say, "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baalzephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea."

•God told Moses to have the Israelites "turn back" and set up camp.

•God has them do an about face from wherever they were heading. They had to backtrack.

•He says why in v3: "For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, 'They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in."

•Turning back would've made it seem that they were lost.

And that's not to mention that the PLACE where

God had them go would've made it seem that they were being poorly led by Moses.

•Now, there are a handful of guesses as to where exactly they encamped.

•I'm not going to give an ancient geography lesson this morning and go through multiple possibilities.

 Instead I want to draw a rough picture of what the terrain would've been like.

We can guess what the situation was like because of the names of the places mentioned:

•Pi-hahiroth: This might mean "mouth of crags/ mountains," "mouth of the canal," or "region of marshes." Either way, that area was not fit for travel.

•Migdol: Probably refers to a place of fortresses. The Egyptians had forts along their borders.

•Baal-Zephon: Means "Lord of the North." This is probably a pagan shrine of some sort.

•The sea: The Red Sea.

So here's the summary of the situation:

•The sea is on one side.

•Possibly a network of Egyptian fortresses on the other.

•And a region that can't be traveled on the third side.

They've turned back, by God's command.

•And they've hemmed themselves in on three sides. They have only one exit.

•If an enemy were to come and block their way to the wilderness, they're trapped.

•No military strategist would EVER recommend this.

•But this is where God led them.

And God had a plan, as we read in vv3-4:

•"For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, 'They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.' And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD." And they did so."

•God was laying a trap for Pharaoh by leading the Israelites to this place.

•God knows that Pharaoh will think the Israelites are lost and badly led. And because of that, Pharaoh will want to catch the escaped slaves.

•Furthermore, God will harden Pharaoh's heart in his sin SO THAT Pharaoh does exactly what God intends.

Why? Because God is going to "get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD."

•God was going to drown Pharaoh's military in the Red Sea and demonstrate once again that He alone is God.

•God's plan was to make much of Himself in this.

•Leading the Israelites to the Red Sea seemed foolish. But the LORD knows how to best glorify Himself.

And then we read of how God's plan came to pass:

• "When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, 'What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?"

•At some point after they had set up camp at the Red Sea, Pharaoh was informed of the situation.

•And that's when Pharaoh's mind began to change, just as God said it would.

It entered Pharaoh's heart to pursue the Israelites, against all reason. And God hardened him in his sin.

•He began to act as if the Ten Plagues hadn't happened and that he didn't just bury his firstborn son.

•What foolishness! This is the heart of the unregenerate sinner. They do not fear God.

So Pharaoh gathered a military force to go after them.

•He got in his chariot, along with "six hundred chosen

chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them...and he pursued the People of Israel..."

The Israelites had no idea that this was happening.

•The text says they were "going out defiantly."

•They were confident. They thought their troubles were over. That there was nothing to worry about.

•How quickly that was about to change as it became clear that the LORD had led them to an impossible situation!

v9 says, "The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon."

•Now, let's think about how scary this would've been:

1. Egypt had the mightiest military in the world.

2. Chariots were the highest form of military technology at the time. Very lethal.

3. Pharaoh had 600 chosen chariots going with him. (Think the Navy SEALS of Egypt.)

4. He also gathered every chariot in the land that he could. This could been thousands.

5. "His army" went with him. That's foot soldiers coming behind the chariots.

•This was a serious, well-trained, well-armed force.

And then there were the Israelites.

•Just a few days freed from slavery. Untrained. Mostly unarmed. Undisciplined. Having never seen war.

 It doesn't really matter that the Israelites numbered over one million. Half or more were women and children.
And the men couldn't fight.

•The odds were horribly against them.

•AND GOD HAD LED THEM HERE!

•They were stuck. They had no where to run.

So it's no wonder that the Israelites "...feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD."

•The saw the saw the Egyptians coming and were terrified.

•So they responded appropriately in THIS VERSE: They "cried out to the LORD." They prayed.

•They appealed to God for help, knowing only He could help.

But that glimmer of godliness quickly gave way to sin:

• "They said to Moses, 'Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: "Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians"? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."

In their unbelief, they turned on Moses. They complained against him and said, "This is YOUR FAULT! You did this! You should've left us alone! We didn't even want to be free!"

But they forgot that Moses didn't free them, or bring them to the Sea.

•GOD DID.

•So really, they were blaspheming the LORD in their unbelief.

•Psalm 106:7 says, "Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your wondrous works; they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love, but they REBELLED BY THE SEA, at the Red Sea."

•God had promised to get them to Canaan. So they should've trusted that God would intervene.

•They might not know WHAT He would do, but faith should've declared, "He will do SOMETHING! Because He has promised."

•But they didn't. They effectively said that God was weak, foolish, and a liar because they were sure they would die at the hands of the Egyptians.

In their faithless panic, they sinned against the LORD.

So quickly they had forgotten all the LORD had done for them!

•So quickly they forgot the LORD HIMSELF!

•So they defaulted to fear and spoke against Him.

In reality, it would've been better do die obeying the LORD in the wilderness, than live in Egypt as slaves.

•Whatever God calls His People to is better than simply remaining alive.

•But their re-capture by Egypt isn't even a possibility because they had a promise from God!

•And how foolish they would feel about this instance of unbelief AFTER the Red Sea crossing!

But in contrast to their unbelief, Moses had one of his finest hours of faith:

• "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 have only to be silent."

•Moses didn't know God's whole plan. But he did know God's promises. And he did know that God intended to get glory over Egypt.

•So he held on to that with all his might and provided a

wonderful example of faith.

•It didn't matter that he didn't know what God would do. All that mattered is that he knew God would do SOMETHING.

And so, Moses drew attention AWAY from the Egyptians and TOWARD God.

•"Fear not..." Why should they be afraid if the God of the Plagues, the God of the Exodus, I AM, was for them?

•Will He not be faithful? Is He not able? Has His arm been shortened?

•"Stand firm..." Don't panic. Don't move.

•"See the salvation of the LORD." Watch Him work it out for you.

There may have been nothing for the Israelites to do in this situation, but that DIDN'T mean there was nothing the LORD could do about it.

•So they needed to be silent, trust the LORD, and await further instructions as they expected Him to intervene.

•They needed to remember who God is: The One who saves His People, who always knows the best way, who is always faithful.

God would fight for them.

•Why? Because HIS HONOR was on the line.

•If they died, or if Egypt enslaved them again, God would've be shown to be a nothing-god like the gods of Egypt.

•But He WILL NOT allow His name to be profaned.

•So He would be the Divine Warrior, and rescue His people by His might, for His glory.

2.) Now, what can we learn from this?

•As I said earlier, the life of Israel is often a picture of the life of the believer. And God's dealings with them is a picture of how He deals with His Church.

•In 1 Corinthians 10:11, the Apostle says that we're to learn from their story: "Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction..."

•And this text teaches us some of the reasons that God ordains us to endure so many trials in life.

Brothers and sisters, it is simply a FACT that God leads us into trials.

•Now, I want to be clear: He doesn't tempt us to sin. But He DOES test us.

•He puts us in difficult, even seemingly impossible situations. He guides our lives by His Hand of Providence, executing His eternal decree for us.

•And since we come into difficulty, we know that it is

ultimately from HIS HAND.

•He did it with the Israelites in our text. They were FOLLOWING HIM. And He led them to the Red Sea.

•Even the Psalmist said that the LORD is his Shepherd. And sometimes he was walking "through the valley of the shadow of death."

•Sometimes God leads us to the valley, to trials.

And these can be earthly difficulties of various kinds. Just general "hard providences."

•Things like death, sickness, financial difficulties, and the like.

•They can also be internal trials and spiritual battles: Not despairing, persevering through depression, enduring long times of feelings of apathy toward your Christian duties, feeling generally downcast, dealing with a besetting sin, constant temptation to sin, and more.

•And God leads us there. His guiding us as a Pillar of Cloud and Fire doesn't in any way exempt us from these things.

•Sometimes our trial is a direct result of following Him: Family fights, exclusion from friend groups or society, workplace problems, and more.

So what is God up to in these things? Why would He have us go through so much?

•In brief, God intends to glorify Himself.

•Remember what He told Moses in v4: "I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host..."

•God intends to glorify Himself in your trials. He intends to glorify Himself by working FOR you and IN you.

And, listen: THAT'S GOOD FOR YOU, CHRISTIAN.

•Why? Because His glory and your good and inextricably bound together.

•Why? Because He has covenanted with you in the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, to do you good.

•He has sworn, based on the merits and suffering of Christ on your behalf, to be God to you, preserve your soul, provide, pity, protect, sanctify, and grant you every grace you need to honor Him.

•The God who cannot lie has covenanted with you.

•His honor, therefore, is on the line. And He will not allow His Name to be profaned, or the work of His Son to be made little of.

•So He will be faithful to help you. And THAT BRINGS HIM GLORY.

•He will show Himself to be everything He is. He will make much of Himself by being faithful to you.

Friends, we need to get our eyes focused on the LORD when we suffer.

•We need to think about how He's going to glorify

Himself by "showing off" in our trials.

•That's where Moses directed the Israelites to look.

•So that's what I want us to think about now.

3.) First, God Intends to Glorify Himself by Overcoming Our Enemies.

•That's what God said to Moses in vv3-4.

•God was going to strike the Egyptians and get glory.

•Matthew Henry said, "God sometimes raises difficulties in the way of the salvation of His People, that He may have the glory of subduing them, and helping His People over them."

Friends, the trial is hard so God will receive ALL THE GLORY for getting you through it.

•He brings you to something where you recognize you can't fix it, change it, or overcome it yourself.

•But God intends to come to your aid.

•And the greater the difficulty, the more God is revealed to be glorious and mighty in the end.

So to start, I beg you to look at your hardship THAT WAY.

•If it's horribly hard, God will be glorified all the more!

•You'll praise Him all the more when He gets you out!

•You'll be forced to own the fact that He acted on your behalf. That He worked in you and your life.

•And what a story of His faithfulness you'll have to tell your brothers and sisters! You'll have a story of God's glory to tell your children! To tell the world!

You'll have a story to tell of how God preserved you through the grief of the loss of your beloved father.

•You'll tell of how God taught you humble submission to His will through the death of your unborn child.

•You'll tell of how God taught you patience in the face of stubborn children.

•You'll tell of how God moved the heart of your enemy to do you kindness.

•How God saved the one who oppressed you.

•How God changed your heart, taught you to hate that sin, and forsake it completely.

•How God granted you perseverance when all your strength had run out.

Are we not, this very day, talking about how God overcame the impossible situation at the Red Sea?

•Are we not glorifying Him as we remember His wonderful works that day?

•The greater the trial, the more glory for God.

•So don't despair. For God loves to reveal His mighty arm by overcoming our enemies.

4.) Second, God Intends to Glorify Himself by Teaching Us to Depend On Him.

•And PRAYER is a manifestation of dependence.

•God taught the Israelites to pray at the Red Sea (v10).

•Yes, they sinned in unbelief in the next verse. But let's not discount that they immediately cried out to God.

Brothers and sisters, without trials we'd never learn to really pray.

•To really throw ourselves on God's mercy. To really look to Him in complete dependence, owning our inability, and recognizing that HE MUST DO IT.

 Matthew Henry said, "God brings us into straits that He may bring us to our knees."

Tell me, when do you pray more?

•When do you pray most fervently and seriously?

•When are your prayers most full of heartfelt confession of weakness, and a death-grip on God's promises?

•When are you quick to appeal to God for mercy?

•When do you confess His wonderful attributes and ability to help you?

•When do you rely most fully on His grace?

•When times are good or when times are hard?

•I already know the answer.

God brings us to trials to humble us and remind us that we can do NOTHING apart from Him.

•He brings hardship that we might know that only God working for us and in us can accomplish anything good or lasting.

•We may pass a theology test about prayer. But we learn to PRAY through suffering.

When all our resources are spent, and we're up against the wall, that's when we realize by experience that only God can help us.

•So we, like an infant in need, learn to cry to our Heavenly Father.

•If there was another way to teach us, I'm sure He'd use it. But trials are often the only way we really learn.

•And what we learn about prayer, to be quick to it, to be patient in it, to be long in it, to really unburden ourselves, to really trust the Lord to hear us and help, we take those things with us for the rest of our days.

•Prayer is like faith's breathing. And God intends to strengthen our lungs. So He exercises us in trials.

NOTE: Sadly, we often forget. And our prayer muscles atrophy.

•So God teaches us to pray again and again with

more trials throughout our lives.

Brothers and sisters, He's teaching you to talk to Him.

•He's teaching you your need for Him.

•He's teaching you to trust in Him and call upon Him in the day of adversity.

•And in our humble, dependent prayer, we glorify Him as the only true hope and help of His People.

5.) Third, God Intends to Glorify Himself by Revealing Our Sin.

•The trial by the Red Sea resulted in the Israelites complaining against Moses, which was really complaining against God.

 In this, God revealed their sinfulness and the remaining corruption of their hearts. That their faith was weak. That they didn't trust Him.

•The trial brought to the surface what was in their hearts. It didn't create the sin. It brought it out.

Christian, God intends to show you your own heart through your trials.

•Sin gets revealed pretty quickly when the heat gets turned up.

•You think you're patient until you have to daily deal with ungrateful people.

•You think you're mild until you have an infuriating enemy with power over you at work.

•You think you're generous until your bank account gets low.

•You think you're servant-hearted until people treat you like a servant.

•You think you totally trust God's sovereign plan for you until He takes away someone or something you dearly love.

 In trials, God is bringing your heart-sins to the surface so you can repent. He's using it all to sanctify you.

We don't know how sinful we actually are.

•There are areas of our hearts and lives that we'd never inspect. They lay dark and unthought of, until God shines a spotlight on them by trials.

 Imagine how ignorant of your own tendencies you'd be if everything was always wonderful in your life!

•You'd be a spiritual baby forever. But God won't allow that because He's glorified in your growth.

•So He intends to show you what's in you that you might confess your sin and need for Him to sanctify you, and turn from that sin to Christ and reform your life.

•God intends to make you more like Christ! To have the character of Christ!

•So you will have trials that you might see what in you needs further conformed to the image of the Son.

•He's at work for your good and His glory in your sanctification.

And in all of this, God always reveals HIS GRACE!

•He didn't give Israel over to Egypt when they rebelled in their unbelief.

•He remained faithful, even though they sinned against Him. He rescued them at the Red Sea, though they didn't deserve it.

•He didn't throw them away. He didn't abandon them because they offended Him.

•What a kind God! What a merciful God! What a faithful God!

Christian, He is faithful to sanctify you.

•And in your trials, He reveals that He is patient with you and will never cast you away.

•He glorifies Himself in revealing your sin because you get a front row seat to the fact that HE LOVES YOU, IN SPITE OF YOU!

•For Christ's sake, He will continue to forgive and be patient with you.

•He's showing you what kind of God He is, even as He shows you what a sinner you are.

6.) Last, God Intends to Glorify Himself by Teaching Us to Trust Him.

•Through trials, He'll teach you to wait upon Him in quiet, submissive, expectant faith.

•That's what He did for Israel (vv13-14). He told them to sit back, be quiet, and watch Him save them.

•He would do something. He didn't tell them what. But He said He'd do something to help them.

•They didn't know His plan. Only His promise.

•God was teaching them to wait and BELIEVE that He is good, sovereign, able, and faithful to love them and take care of them.

Brothers and sisters, your situation may seem impossible in your eyes:

•Overcoming a sin, figuring out a family issue, working through problems with your spouse, raising difficult children, finding joy in the Lord again, or whatever the problem is.

•But know this: GOD IS IN THE BUSINESS OF DOING THE SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE.

Just think about the Gospel for a moment.

•The situation seemed impossible: God cannot deny Himself justice. And we're sinners. We deserve His wrath and punishment for our sins.

•But God also desired to save sinners.

•How was the situation to be solved, that God might be both just and the justifier of sinners?

Answer: The death of His only begotten Son on behalf of chosen sinners.

•The Lord Jesus Christ, representing His People, meriting perfect righteousness for them and suffering God's wrath in their place on a Cross.

•Christ and His merits legally given to all who trust Him. That was the answer.

Now what man would've come up with that glorious Gospel?

•Who among us could've foreseen that God would take on human flesh and do these things for us?

•But that's what He did.

•God "overcame," in a sense, the seemingly impossible situation of being just and the Savior of sinners.

•We couldn't have done it. Or planned it. But that doesn't mean God was unable. Because He did it.

•And by His doing, we're saved from Hell through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Or consider how you came to trust in Christ.

•How are spiritually dead sinners, who cannot please God in their natural state, to do something so pleasing to God as repenting of their sin and trusting in Christ?

•We couldn't bring that about in ourselves. We were

dead.

•But God, by His Holy Spirit, caused us to be born again, granted us the gift of faith, irresistibly drew us to Christ, and united us to Christ.

•We could do nothing.The situation is impossible if left to men. But God could do it.

Or how are sinful, weak, but believing men and women to be used by the holy God?

•How can we be useful to Him?

•We can't. Not on our own.

•But God sanctifies us, equips us, gifts us, and grants grace to us that we might serve Him in wonderful ways.

What can't He do?

•What impossibility can't He overcome?

•Consider the Gospel, your coming to faith, and how God has used you in His service and be reminded that God LOVES to glorify Himself in doing what seems impossible to men.

•And let that lead to you to this truth: God can overcome whatever trial you're in.

•If He can save you, He can do anything.

In your difficulty, God is teaching you to trust that He will be God to you and make a way through.

•In some way, right on time, He'll get you through.

•He wants to teach you to trust Him that He'll do something.

•That He'll clear the obstacle, grant greater faith, grant strength and wisdom and endurance.

•That He'll grant some form of relief at the right time.

•That He'll provide and take care of your NEEDS. That He'll teach you that you don't need certain things.

•That He'll grow you in some way.

He's teaching you to trust that HE WILL DO SOMETHING.

•And by the end of it all, you'll learn that, every time, God will act in some way to help you.

•And you'll learn that by the end of it.

•As Matthew Henry said, "If God Himself brings His People into straits, He will Himself discover a way to bring them out again."

He's growing your FAITH.

•Without trials, you THINK you can trust Him.

•But through trials you come to KNOW that you can trust Him because at the end, you've tasted and seen yourself that the LORD is good.

•And it's through trials that we take a bite and taste for ourselves.

•It may be bitter at the first, but it will become sweet as we watch the Lord be faithful.

Friends, do you believe God is powerful enough to do something for you?

•Do you believe He's wise enough to work something out that you couldn't have foreseen?

•Do you believe He's faithful and loves you enough to help you?

•We'd all say, "Of course" on a theology exam.

•So why then are you so quick to blaspheme Him in your heart and think He's too weak, stupid, hateful, or unfaithful to do what He's promised?

•Don't speak ill of God in your heart. Trust Him!

He has promised to be your God.

•And He is glorified as you learn to trust Him.

7.) Dear Christian, the Lord is at work.

•So don't lose hope. God is your hope.

When the Egyptians are closing in on you, don't say, "Let's go back to Egypt."

•Don't go back to your sinful ways of dealing with hardship.

•Wait for the Lord.

•Look up to Heaven and consider what He's doing already and how He promises to help you.

Your trials aren't pointless.

•And they're not from the hand of a cruel God.

•They're from the hand of your Heavenly Father who delights in glorifying Himself by overcoming your enemies, teaching you to pray, revealing your sin and His grace, and teaching you to trust Him.

•And He promises to get you through.

It's all for His glory.

•And His glory is our good.

- •May God grant us faith to believe.
- •Amen.