

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SCRIPTURE: *Exodus 14:21-31*

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SERMON: *“Salvation – God Delivers”*

(Acknowledgment to Tim Keller for his series titled “The Language of Salvation” and Luke Keefer Jr. for his book Everything Necessary.)

Last week’s word was **Slavery**. We all start out as slaves to sin and struggle to let go of things that control us. But God graciously and patiently works in our lives, and He becomes real to us.

This is what Moses experienced on Mount Sinai, and it’s what all of us can experience if we respond to what God is graciously doing in our lives.

This week’s word is **Salvation**, and this morning we will read the salvation story of the Israelites, God delivering them from slavery in Egypt.

Before we begin, take note that our series though isn’t titled, From Slavery to Salvation...it’s titled ***From Slavery to Intimacy***.

And so we need to realize that God’s intent is not simply salvation – otherwise this would be a 2 week series. His desire is for intimacy with each one of us...He wants you to know Him and experience Him in your life...and so we’re taking several weeks, looking at the story of Moses and the Israelites to help us understand this process as God works to get us to this point of intimacy.

Last week we left of with Moses having a personal encounter with God, with “I AM” on Mount Sinai. Let’s go back there and see...

1. WHAT'S HAPPENING

..after Moses encounters God in the burning bush.

Moses has a brother, Aaron, and God tells Aaron to go out and meet Moses at Mount Sinai. He does, and together they return to Egypt. Upon arriving in Egypt, they call together all the elders of the Israelites, and tell them about this encounter that Moses had with the God of their fathers, and the fact that this God was about to deliver them from slavery.

Exodus 4:31 And when they heard that the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.

I can't imagine their emotions, the elation, knowing that their time of slavery was about to end and that they would soon know what it was like to be free.

Moses and Aaron then go and appear before Pharaoh, telling him that the Lord said to let the Israelites go...and Pharaoh scoffs at them.

Exodus 5:2 "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go?"

Well, God sets into motion a series of plagues...10 in all. It begins with the Nile river turning to blood. Continues with frogs covering the land...of course they will not remain in or around the Nile which is now blood. They come out of the water in droves and then they die...and then the gnats come followed by the flies. Not surprisingly, the livestock then begins to die. But if you think that this is just a result of nature going awry, you need to know that the livestock of the Israelites did not get sick.

As these plagues unfold, one after another, Pharaoh's response will differ. At times he is unmoved. On several occasions he tells Moses that he will allow the Israelites to go, but then changes his mind.

Finally, the 10th plague – **The Plague on the Firstborn**. This takes place on the night that became known as Passover, and this became the event that future generations of Israelites would look at in the same way as you and I look at the Cross.

The Lord told Moses that on this night, He would go throughout the land of Egypt and every firstborn son in Egypt will die. But the Lord instructed Moses to have the Israelites do this: *“Take a lamb without blemish and slaughter it at twilight, take the blood of the lamb and put it on the sides and tops of your doorframes.”*

Exodus 12:23 When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframes and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.

Sure enough, at midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, and there was loud wailing throughout the land. Pharaoh experienced for himself the loss of his firstborn son, and this brought him to the point where he told Moses “Go.” And go they did.

There was this mass exodus out of Egypt, and God led the Israelites along a desert road headed towards the Red Sea. But it didn’t take long for Pharaoh and his officials to look at each other and say, *“What have we done? We’ve let the Israelites go!”* They realize they’ve just lost their slave force. And so Pharaoh assembles his army and sets off in pursuit of the Israelites.

Can you imagine what went through the hearts and minds of the Israelites when they saw them coming in the distance?

Exodus 14:10b-12 They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to this desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!”

But Moses wasn't discouraged. He told the Israelites to stand firm and watch as the Lord delivers them.

Exodus 14:21-31 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

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

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

But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. And when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

Today's word is **Salvation**, right? For the Israelites, salvation meant being delivered from slavery in Egypt. When we speak of our salvation, we are talking about being set free from sin. And so let's talk about *our* salvation, starting with this question:

2. WHAT DO WE NEED TO BE SAVED FROM?

For the Israelites, it was clear, they needed saved from slavery in Egypt. Ours is much more subtle. There are many people – and I was one of them – that didn't think we needed saved

from anything. As I said last week, we don't see ourselves as slaves. The things that control and enslave us are very subtle. But there's something here in the midst of this story that helps us to see more clearly.

The Israelites have left Egypt and have gone many miles on their way to the Red Sea, when Pharaoh and his officials say, "*What have we done?*" and set off in pursuit of the Israelites.

So there comes this moment when the Israelites look behind them and see the Egyptian army, they look in front of them and there is the Red Sea, and what do they say to Moses?

Exodus 14:12 Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'?

Wait, that's not at all what they said. We read that Moses and Aaron called the elders together to tell them about Moses encounter with God...what did they do? Grateful when they heard of God's concern for them, they bowed down and worshiped. You think the Israelites weren't elated to know they would soon be free?

And now here they are saying, "If only we had stayed!"

How could they so easily forget what things were like in Egypt? The brutality, the back-breaking labor...the slave masters were described as "ruthless." How could they forget?

And so what we see here is *what we need to be saved from*, and the answer is, ourselves. Yes, we need to be saved from sin, but we are the driving force behind it. We need to be saved from ourselves, because of this remarkable ability that we have to deceive ourselves.

For the Israelites, it was deceiving themselves about the horrific conditions in Egypt, but not just that, actually looking back on those days fondly. It's almost incomprehensible. Except, that is us.

Have you ever said to yourself after a painful experience, "When will I ever learn?" Or, "That's it. Never again." Only to do it again. And again. And again. What is wrong with us?

When I was a young man I abused alcohol...heavily...and when someone does this, they wake up with what we call a hangover. Your body feels as if you've been beat up. You are tired, your head may be spinning, your stomach is nauseous and just the thought of food can cause you to throw up.

This is what we do to ourselves. Then we look around and see all the carnage involving family and friends, broken, damaged relationships...and we say, "Never again."

And if you've never experienced a hangover, you can replace that word with any word that has brought pain into your life, causing you to say, "Never again."

But you know what happens? Time happens. You see, the more recent the event, the more recent the crisis, the greater the impact. But as time passes from that moment of crisis, our ability to deceive ourselves increases.

I've done a good deal of counseling through the years, and I will get calls from men – usually husbands - who are desperate to meet with me because of something they did in the past 24 hours. They have done something that has brought pain into their lives. Inappropriate conversation with someone on Facebook, caught watching porn...Their wife is incredibly upset, they are broken, they are humble, they want help. And when we meet, and I can sense their desperation.

We'll make plans to meet again the following week...and what a difference a week will often make. With the passing of time comes the self-deception. *"It's not as serious as I thought. I think I can control this, I can manage this. I think I'm good."*

The Israelites – with the passing of time - deceived themselves about the horror of slavery, and we have done it ourselves. And it's not just forgetting the bad, it's forgetting the good. When all of the first born sons died that night throughout Egypt...*their* first born sons lived. God passed over them when He saw the blood of the lamb on the doorframe. How could they so quickly forget all that God had done to bring them this far?

I imagine that many of us can recall times in the past when *we know* that God stepped into our midst and did something extraordinary. I know that life is full of coincidences, and we've all experienced those...but there have been those moments – those special moments – when we sensed the presence, the power, the grace of God in such a way that it couldn't be denied. And then with the passing of time, the power of that moment can sometimes fade. We find ourselves saying, *"Maybe it was just a coincidence."*

We need saved from sin to be sure, but what we really need is to be saved from ourselves because of our ability to deceive ourselves. *"This isn't hurting me. This really isn't hurting anyone else."*

We end up embracing sin, sometimes embracing things that are clearly harmful. Or embracing things that may not appear wrong – our technological toys for instance - but have control over us nevertheless.

We are so easily deceived, and because of this we need to be saved from ourselves.

So...

3. HOW ARE WE SAVED?

I'm going to take 1 minute and 1 minute only and give you what is called Doctrine. That might sound dry, but doctrine is good. It gives us something to stand on. Our denomination – the BIC – we have doctrinal statements about we believe, including what we believe about salvation.

Here's a summary of our doctrinal statement on salvation:

God's plan of salvation is **fully revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ.**

God came to earth – God With Us – **to redeem the human family from sin.**

This was accomplished through His death, which brings **complete atonement**...and His resurrection, which testifies to **His victory over Satan, sin, and death**.

With joy we confess that Jesus is Lord and acknowledge His authority over our lives. **We honor Him with our worship and obedience.**

This is just a summary of our doctrinal statement when it comes to our salvation. But...

4. WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Well, many would say that because salvation is found in the person and work of Jesus, we ask Him to forgive our sin, believing He died on the Cross in our place...and we commit to following Him as Lord of our lives.

But what does salvation really *look like* in your life and in mine?

Luke Keefer Jr. was a Brethren in Christ theologian, and he points to a passage found in Ephesians 4 that helps show us what salvation looks like in our lives. It says...

Ephesians 4:22-24 You were taught with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

What Keefer points out is that for those who have turned to Jesus, there are these two spheres of influence *in* our hearts and lives...the influence of our sinful nature, described as the old self...and the influence of Jesus. Two spheres of influence within us.

And it would be a simple thing if we would simply pass from one sphere – old self – to the other. But you know and I know that this is not how it happens.

Keefer points out that some might respond by saying, *“Now wait, did we not pass from the influence of the old self to the influence of Jesus at conversion? Don’t the Scriptures say that if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation...the old has gone and the new has come?”*

Keefer says that the answer is both “yes” and “no.”

You see there are times when the Scripture speaks of salvation in terms showing how instantaneous it comes.

Romans 10:9 That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

However there are other times where the Scriptures speak of salvation in terms of it being a process. This will be our focus next week when we talk about God’s Word means when it says...

Philippians 2:12b ...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

Yes, we’re saved, but clearly there is more to do.

I look back over my life and I seriously wonder when I was saved. In February of 1982 God engaged with me, helped me to see how I was deceiving myself when it came to my sin, and called me to respond to Him in faith and obedience.

All good...recognized and acknowledged my self-deception, and by faith believed. The only issue was my desire to respond in obedience was severely lacking. Obedience was often a matter of “yes” in this area, but “no” in that area. I had asked Jesus to be my Savior, but I continued to remain the Lord of my life.

I would say it wasn’t until 1987, five years after I prayed what some call “The sinner’s prayer”, that I came to see I was still deceiving myself. And it was then that Jesus became Lord of my life.

I did not become perfect, and to this day remain far from perfect, but it was the summer of 87 when I became serious about leaving behind the old self, and putting on the new self, fully embracing the influence of Jesus.

So...did my salvation occur in February of 82? Or the summer of 87? I don't know, and in the end, all that matters is that as God saw me in February of 82, He was at that same time seeing me in the summer of 87. He knew I was letting go of my old way of life and putting on the new self, coming under His influence.

What is helpful for all of us, when talking the language of salvation, is recognizing these two spheres within us. All of us who follow Jesus know what it is to experience the conflict that takes place between our old self and its deceitful desires, and our desire to follow and obey Jesus.

The conflict comes when we experience the challenge of breaking habits that have become deeply ingrained...the way we speak and act, but not just that, the way we think...the way we use our imagination...the broken desires we have...the self-centered attitudes we hold...all of these can be disruptive to the sincere desire we have to follow and obey Jesus.

But it's not hopeless! And here's why: **“God is not so unjust as to command us to put off the old self and then make no provision for it to be accomplished.”** (Keefer)

Every command that God gives implies the promise of His presence and power to obey. As this battle occurs within us, the old and the new self, Jesus does not stand back and observe.

One day as Jesus was walking by a pool in the city of Jerusalem, He came across a man who had been an invalid for 38 years and was trying to get down into the pool. Jesus saw him and questioned him, “Do you want to get well?” The man responded by saying that no one would help him get into the pool, and that others were just going in ahead of him. Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” (John 5:8)

Now...do you think Jesus said this and then just stepped back? Of course not. If Jesus did nothing except observe, this man still would not walk. And so Jesus did not simply observe.

At the same time, the man had to do something. Fully aware of his inability to walk, he made the effort to rise...and discovered that Jesus had given strength to his legs.

And so my part and your part in leaving behind who we were and putting on the new self - is putting in the effort to rise. We look at every command that Jesus gives and put in the effort to obey, knowing that He is there to help us do just that.

Many of Jesus commands are found in what we've been looking at in His Sermon on the Mount. Here we find clear examples of where we can put off the old self and come under the influence of Jesus.

The old self would find it easy to feel contempt towards others...Jesus wants us to see others as He sees them, and will help us to do it.

The old self would easily lust after someone or something, and Jesus helps us to resist that urge.

The old self would be less than honest, deceiving or manipulating others...Jesus helps us to speak with integrity.

The old self would be unforgiving...Jesus will help us to see how much we have been forgiven in order to help us forgive others.

Knowing the doctrine is easy when it comes to God's plan of salvation. It's also quite easy to know what Jesus commands us to do. But it's not just about what we know, but how we live.

Salvation is not about what we know, but about how we live.

As you leave here this morning, know that Jesus will not ask you to live in such a way that He will not help you to do. He will do His part, you and I need to put in the effort of intentionally leaving the influence of the old self, and coming under the influence of Jesus.

Now here's what I'm going to ask all of you to do this week. A few moments ago I briefly shared my salvation journey....February of 82...Summer of 87. I'm going to ask each of you to write down or type up your salvation journey and the process of God setting you free.

I guarantee that if you do this you will find it incredibly beneficial...as you thoughtfully put to words your experience.

To possibly share it with a friend, or your spouse, children, parent. To have to look back on years from now. A record for your great grandchildren to have one day.

You might begin by describing your old life, your old self. How did God engage with you? What led you to respond? Do you remember praying a prayer, or just making a decision to follow Jesus...and what happened after that? Perhaps a milestone or two or three where God became more real and you were delivered from the control of this or set free from that.

Make it as long or as short as you want, but the key is just getting started...the words will flow. I think you'll end up with something that will be a blessing to you and possibly to others as well.

PRAYER