

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

**DATE:** *August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019*

**LOCATION:** *Auditorium (Bill)*

**SERMON:** *“Work Out Your Salvation”*

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*(Acknowledgment to Tim Keller for his series titled “The Language of Salvation”)*

Here in August we’re looking at how God worked among the Israelites and how He works in our lives to get us ***From Slavery to Intimacy.***

**Slavery** we looked at two weeks ago.

**Salvation** is what we looked at last week.

**Intimacy** is what we’ll be looking at next week when we wrap up this series.

But for many of us, we don’t go directly from salvation to this intimate relationship with Jesus where trusting and obeying Him comes easily. We *do* experience Jesus working in our lives, and we sense His presence with us. It’s just that for most of us, there is this process that takes place as we move from salvation to a level of intimacy that is ongoing and meaningful.

This morning’s message is titled ***Work Our Your Salvation***, this command found in the New Testament where it says...

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

Now by reading this, it looks like everything depends on us at this point, but this passage goes on to say...

**Philippian 2:13a** *...for it is God who works in you...*

Which makes it seem as if God does everything and we do nothing. And so I think what we can draw from this is that God has His part and you and I have ours.

And so this week we're going to be talking about what "working out our salvation" looks like...God's part and our part. And once again we'll be looking at the work God is doing through His children, the Israelites.

Let's pick up where we left off last week and see...

## 1. WHAT'S HAPPENING

...with the Israelites now that they have crossed the Red Sea and have been set free from slavery in Egypt.

About a month and half after leaving Egypt, the Israelites stop and settle in a place called the Desert of Sin, and they quickly begin regretting that they ever left Egypt, saying to Moses...

**Exodus 16:3b** "There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."

We saw last week how they grumbled *before* they were saved, and we see this week how they grumble *after* they are saved. In spite of this, the Lord was *exceedingly* gracious, saying to Moses, "Well, let's feed them", and following through by sending quail in the evening, and then in the morning there on the ground was something fine and flaky that covered the ground like frost. The Israelites took one look at it and said to one another, "Man-hu", which means "What is it?"

Moses said, "*This is the bread that the LORD said that He would give us to eat.*" And so the people went to work and started gathering, some more, some less.

**Exodus 16:18** And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much and he who gathered little did not have too little.

Eventually the Israelites left that desert and set up camp at a place called Rephidim, but now the problem wasn't food, the problem wasn't *bread*...the problem was that there was *no water* for the people to drink. This brings us to our main Scripture passage for this morning:

**Exodus 17:2-6** So they quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.”

Moses replied, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?”

But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?”

Then Moses cried out to the LORD, “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

The LORD answered Moses, “Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel.

This morning we are talking about working out our salvation, and for the Israelites, it doesn't look very pretty, does it? We see constant grumbling, complaining and quarreling, and this tells us that while they may have gotten out of slavery, getting slavery out of them is going to be a process.

Now let's fast forward 40 years because as most of you know, the Israelites journey to the land God had promised them was not going to be a quick one. 40 years of camping here and moving on to there. And then, just before the Israelites enter the Promised Land, Moses addresses the Israelites and reflects on the meaning of this 40 years of wandering, saying...

**Deuteronomy 8:2-3** “Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert those forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart...”

Moses is speaking of this process where there is humbling and testing and learning...God seeing what was in their hearts...the Israelites discovering for themselves what was in their hearts. It all begins here in year one of forty. They had been saved, now they were going to learning how to work it out, learning how to live now that they were free.

So let's look at how this plays out in the lives of the Israelites and how this plays out in ours. Let's begin by looking first at...

## **2. THE BREAD**

In the Desert of Sin, God does two things: First, He provides the bread. There shouldn't be bread found lying on the ground every morning, and yet, there it is.

In addition to providing the bread, the second thing: God tells them how to get it.

**Exodus 16:16 This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.'**

Yet another example of what I said earlier, this dynamic relationship we have with God and God with us. He provides something the Israelites could never provide for themselves...but they have to go and get it.

And the bread plays a key role in pointing them to God. Remember earlier I spoke of that day when the Israelites – after 40 years of humbling and testing and discovering – were on the brink of entering the Promised Land? Moses said...

**Deuteronomy 8:3 "He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."**

Manna was bread for the Israelites, but they needed more than material bread, they needed spiritual bread as well. Many of you know that there are numerous times in the Scripture when bread is used to describe Jesus, He is called the Bread of Life for instance.

And so as you and I look to work out our salvation, we listen and look to put into practice every word that comes from the mouth of Jesus, the Bread of Life.

And since this is one of the last times that I'll be up here on stage until December, let me take this opportunity to point us once again to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. I'm aware that some of you may be asking, *"Why are we spending so much time looking at this sermon?"* I wouldn't think it strange if some of you might be saying, *"Why is Bill – just about every week-referring to this sermon of Jesus?"*

Well here's why: It's been said that this sermon is the clearest roadmap for what it means to follow Jesus. It's not that I'm going to ignore other passages and other commands...but above all else, I want to be a follower of Jesus and this is where Jesus Himself tells me how to do it.

There's no better passage that will help me see what I need to do in order to work out my salvation.

And I come to recognize that all of these things that Jesus is teaching us deals not so much with our outward behavior, but with **what lies within our hearts**. I think I have the outward behavior down pretty good. I could be wrong, but I think most people look at me and would say I'm living a respectable life.

But you have no idea what is taking place within my heart, and let me tell you sometimes it's not pretty. And so these basic day to day things that Jesus is talking about deal with the attitude of my heart...peace or anger...purity or lust...honesty or deception.

These are just a few of the things we looked at in February and March as Jesus every week was challenging me to look within my heart.

And it was just here in June and July that Shaun had us looking at what Jesus says about when we give, when we pray, and when we fast. And behind every single one of these Jesus was talking about what? What is in our heart.

We don't give to be seen, we don't pray to be seen, we don't fast so that people notice. We're misguided if we're looking for the approval of man rather than God.

I don't have this down yet, I'm still working out my salvation, and this awareness takes me back to that verse where Moses pointed out the work God was doing in their lives even as the Israelites were working out *their* salvation. Moses said...

**Deuteronomy 8:2-3 “Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert those forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart...”**

I look at what Jesus' is teaching me in His sermon and it humbles me...it surely tests me, as I can clearly see what He is calling me to do...it forces me to know what is in my heart. It's not until I know what lies within my heart that I am able to experience intimacy with God, and this is where we're going to be headed next week. If I'm not willing to look inside and acknowledge what lies within my heart, I'm not working out my salvation, I'm just spinning my wheels.

And as I said last week, when He gives a command He doesn't stand back and observe...The Lord God led the Israelites all the way as they worked out their salvation, and Jesus is leading us as we work out ours. By His word He will show us the way because He knows the way.  
*He knows the way.*

Have you ever found yourself in your car, looking to get from here to there, and your GPS just isn't getting it done? So you see somebody out working in their yard and you slow down to a stop, wind down your window and ask “How do you get from here to there?” So they start telling you, “Turn around and take the second left, the first right, and then the third left, You'll come to a fork in the road and then...” It's at this point I would turn to Karen and say, “You getting all of this?”

But how about if he said, “Hey, let me jump in my car and I'll show you the way.” So much easier. Jesus knows the way – provides the way - for us to work out our salvation and not just that. He's working in us to help us experience intimacy with Him.

We just need to go get the Bread every day...we have to follow and obey Jesus every day. I would suggest every day going to Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7 and just keep letting Jesus show you the way as you look to work out your salvation.

One more thing that is so important in working out our salvation, and that is embracing the community aspect of this. We aren't to work alone, but together, as a community.

Notice that God said...

**Exodus 16:16b, 18 'Each one is to gather as much as he needs'**

And an omer - 2 quarts - for each person in the tent was what God prescribed. Now nobody would have gotten it exactly right, and so if some who were younger and stronger gathered a tad more, it was given to the person who gathered a tad less. God was making sure that no one had more than what was needed, and no one had less. And so we see that **the bread came to the people through a community relationship.**

In the same way, we experience Jesus in a community relationship. If any of us in here are looking to work out our salvation on our own, we're likely to starve. And so how do we work out what Jesus teaches...as a community? Well, we get together and talk about "*What does He mean?*"

Individually, as a staff, as a Church Board, as a congregation, there are a number of issues that we have been working through here of late. One has to do with the role of women in leadership, and so we are talking through this one together, just as our denomination did more than 40 years ago...getting together to talk through "*What does God's Word mean and what doesn't it mean?*" when it comes to women in leadership roles?

They talked through it together and prayed through it together, and so for the past 40 years we've had many women serving as directors and pastors throughout our denomination. I truly believe *our* congregation could benefit by having one or more females on our staff. And so part of the conversation involves how we can move forward together. Jesus knows the way, and so we're looking to Him to show us.

This community aspect also comes into play when it comes to these sermons that you hear every Sunday. Every sermon you hear on a Sunday morning has been critiqued by a team of five, making suggestions, asking questions, talking through *"What does God's Word say, and what does it mean?"*

Here at Five Forks we want to be a community that comes together, looking to Jesus to work in us and to lead us, helping us to work out our salvation.

Let's talk about...

### **3. THE WATER**

And the lack thereof.

The Israelites have set up camp at Rephidim, but there is no water to drink. So the people quarrel with Moses and demand water, exasperating him to no end. But once again, God displays His incredible grace and patience, saying to Moses, "Let's meet their needs.

**Exodus 17:6b "Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink."**

Now think about that for a minute. A rock. A rock???

If you're in the desert and you're in desperate need of water, you'll be looking high and low for a well or a spring, but a rock – the top of a rock - would be *the least likely place* you would ever expect to find water.

But maybe there's something here for us to consider.

For many who we mingle with, Jesus is the last place they would go in order to find meaning and purpose in life. He's the first place that you and I should go. Every day. And as often as we can, we go to Him together, as a community. We're here this morning asking Jesus to show us how to work out our salvation so we can experience intimacy with Him.

Last thing...if you've heard many of my sermons over the past few years, you may know that Pastor Tim Keller out of New York City has been a primary source for me when writing a sermon. I don't agree with his position on everything, but I appreciate his insight and the ability that he has to identify things in the Old Testament that foreshadow the work of Jesus.

And this appears to be one of those passages. Because while it's easy to see Jesus in chapter 16 when looking at the bread, it's not quite so easy to see Jesus here in chapter 17. But let's see if we can't find Him.

This passage begins with the people quarreling against Moses.

**Exodus 17:2 So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."**

The meaning of the word "quarrel" here means "to bring a charge"...the people are bringing a charge against Moses, it's almost like they are putting him on trial.

Because we see Moses going to God and crying out...

**Exodus 17:4b "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."**

And so they're not only bringing a verbal charge against Moses, they are ready to pass judgment and actually carry out the sentence. They're on the verge of stoning Moses. It looks like he's on trial.

The thing is, Moses knows that while they're bringing a charge against him, it's really God they are after.

**Exodus 17:2b "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?"**

The Israelites don't know it, but behind their complaining and grumbling is a charge against God. And so what does God do in response to this? You would think that at this point, He's had enough. So He says to Moses...

**Exodus 17:5b-6 “Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.**

He tells Moses to take his staff...his rod. Now it's important to know that in ancient times the staff or the rod were symbols of justice and judicial authority. Officials in Rome for instance would carry a bundle of rods tied with a red band with an ax sticking out of it.

It was a symbol of power with the authority to render justice. If someone was accused and found guilty, those in authority would take the rod and strike the guilty party with it. And the rod that Moses is carrying isn't just any rod...it was *the* rod...the same rod that Moses used when God carried out justice on Egypt with the plagues.

And so here is God saying to Moses...*“Take the rod in your hand...the rod of justice.”*

It looks like God is going to render justice against the Israelites. He's graciously and patiently tried to help them work out their salvation, but the Israelites just aren't getting it. Then God says something else, He said, *“Take the elders of Israel with you...”*

Wonder what their role might be? Maybe to serve as eyewitnesses?

And so here comes Moses with the rod of justice followed by the elders...the Israelites know they've been grumbling and complaining...and there may have been this sense of “Uh-oh.”

It looks like God is going to render justice, and it won't be against Moses...he's the one carrying the rod.

He starts towards the people, followed by the elders...and just keeps walking, right past them. And the Israelites exhale.

So what's going on? Isn't someone going to pay for the sins of the people...all the grumbling, complaining and quarreling? Well, after telling Moses to get his rod, get the elders, walk ahead of the people, he said this to Moses:

**Exodus 17:6a** “I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come...”

Those words, “I will stand there before you” are huge. Because if two people find themselves standing face to face, the inferior will always stand before the superior. Take a king and a servant for instance...standing face to face, it would never be said that the king stood before the servant. The servant will always stand before the king.

And God says to Moses, “*I will stand before you.*”

Keller points out that it is almost unbelievable that God would use this language. But by using this language, it foreshadows the coming and the work of Jesus, who stands before us. “*I will stand before you by the rock and you will strike the rock.*”

Where is Jesus in this passage? And Keller would say, “Right here.”

We grumble and we complain and express dissatisfaction over trivial things in life, a subtle accusation against God that all we have is somehow not enough. We have been saved from sin and that very fact should bring daily joy...and we grumble because our steak is overdone...because the mattress in the hotel is too hard...because we had to wait in a slow moving line. How can we complain about such insignificant things after all He has done for us? And yet we do. At least I know I do. And so Jesus should be walking toward me with the rod of justice.

This is what He should do. But instead, Jesus comes to me and says, “*I am standing before you.*”

In spite of my sin, this is what Jesus says this to me. And He says it to you. And so...

**Philippians 2:7b-8b** ...taking the very nature of a servant...he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!”

I will stand before you...strike the Rock. Throughout Scripture Jesus is referred to as a Rock, or the Rock. The Rock was struck.

And not just for us to be set free from sin. Because from the rock that was struck, water will flow.

**John 7:37-38 “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”**

And so Jesus is saying that He will – through the Holy Spirit – help us, lead us, show us the way to intimacy with God.

And just as God patiently and graciously led the Israelites in spite of them failing time after time after time, He will do the same with us.

Let me leave you with this quote from author Kristen Hatton:

***“We are no different than the Israelites in our sinfulness, and God is no different to us in his goodness. Just like with the Israelites, he comes to our rescue, showers us with an abundance of grace and seeks to be in relationship with us.”***

Next week we'll get together and talk about that relationship and the intimacy with God that can be ours.