

## Deliverance

The book of Exodus is about two things: deliverance and memory. Time after time, the Lord delivers the Israelites: from oppression, slavery, danger, starvation, and thirst. Often in spectacular fashion—in a sound and light show like no one has ever seen.

Time after time, when the fireworks fade, people fail to remember that God did this. They forget things that it's hard to imagine anyone could possibly forget, and in less time that you would think possible.

Prior to today's reading, the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt. Miserable, treated harshly, no freedom. Ruled by a tyrant.

God heard their cries and stepped in on their behalf. Through a series of stunning plagues, any one of which would be hard to forget—water turned into blood, hordes of locust, and gnats, and frogs, and flies, hail and fire and the sun turning .

Pharaoh stubbornly held out against God's wishes until the most unforgettable event of all. An angel of death swept through Egypt and killed all first born, while leaving the Israelites unscathed. The message was obvious to the Egyptians: You are fighting someone way stronger than you are. Unless you want to be utterly destroyed, let the Israelites go.

They did, and the Israelites rejoiced in their miraculous release. But not for long.

Displaying a mind-numbing lapse of memory, the Egyptians change their minds and send their army to attack the people whose God just showed he could squash them like a bug.

The Israelites, meanwhile, discover the Egyptian threat just as they bump into an impassable body of water. Caught between the devil and the deep Red Sea, they instantly panic, convinced they are about to be slaughtered.

They have just witnessed the God's awesome power, and how helpless the Egyptians were against it. Yet they can't find it in themselves to trust God.

*Oh, ye of little faith. Oh, ye of little memory.*

What happens next is a dramatic rescue of epic proportions. The waters of the sea part, and the Israelites find a path across the now dry land. The Egyptians charge in after them. Just as the Israelites reach the other side, the seas come crashing down on the Egyptian host, drowning the whole army.

If you were there that day to see this, wouldn't that scene be etched into your memory for the rest of your life? How could you possibly forget it? How could you ever fail to trust God? How could you ever offer God anything but praise!

In chapter 15, the Israelites respond appropriately. *"Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea."*

And they all lived happily ever after, trusting in the Lord always, right?

Well, you would think so. Yet just *days* later, as they were traveling through the wilderness and found no drinkable water, they began to panic just like they did at the Red Sea. Less than a week after witnessing that spectacular display of God's power and faithfulness, that should be seared into their memories until their dying days, they seem to have no memory that it ever happened.

Again, God delivers them, providing water. In the very next chapter, they face a food shortage. In light of what they faced at the Red Sea, this is nothing. Surely, they remember what the Lord has done for them. How could they forget?

Well, they do. Shortly after this miraculous deliverance, they moan, *"If only we had stayed in the land of Egypt where we had it so good; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to die of hunger."*

This is ridiculous. You think you had it good in Egypt? You were slaves in Egypt, begging to be set free. God delivered you spectacularly. Can't you remember anything? How can you possibly trust Egypt more than the God who delivered you? How can you be so stupid?

Again, God delivers them, this time with bread from heaven. Alright, enough of this nonsense. Surely you have learned to trust God now.

Guess again. Next chapter they are short of water again. Surely they have learned to trust God. I mean how dense can you be? Very dense in their case because here comes the chorus, *“Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children with thirst?”*

Can't these people remember anything? Maybe if they wrote it down. How about a covenant, a written agreement between God and the people? So Moses goes up to Mt. Sinai to get this written in stone, and what happens?

In the 40 days that Moses is up there, the Israelites forget all about God, and they go about making a new god. This memory lapse very nearly resulted in their total destruction, saved only by a last-minute gift of grace from God.

The theme of Exodus is that God is faithful and trustworthy. God delivers. Failure to remember that results in disaster. It ruins relationships. It causes us to revert to our worst, most whiney selves. We cannot get anywhere.

Faith is what frees, and a huge element of faith is remembering. Memory is the key to faith in God. In Exodus, God provided all sorts of memory aids. There was the memory aid of repetition. Relentlessly, in verse after verse of the Old Testament, God drills it into the people,

*Remember who I am. Remember this story of how I will not abide injustice. Remember how God delivered you from slavery to freedom. And just as important, remember how it felt when you were on the receiving end. Remember what it felt like to be slaves, so that you may always be on the right side of justice.*

God also provides the memory aid of ritual. The ritual of the Passover and of the Seder were instituted to help the Jewish people remember what should never be forgotten.

These memory aids have worked to some extent. Jews have relived these memories in time of the worst persecutions in history and it has sustained them for centuries. Jesus introduced a similar memory aid in the Lord's supper, in which we celebrate what never should be forgotten.

When the chips are down, we humans tend to give in to fear; we have such trouble remembering the good that God has done.

In the quiet moments of Lent, take time to remember. Remember what God has done in your life, how God has delivered you in the past. Faith is what saves, and there is no faith without remembering.