

## Exodus (Part 16) – Delivered Out of Darkness

Matt Chandler – December 11, 2016

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[Video]

From darkness to light, this is the story we all share as the people of God. He draws us out to draw us in. From the birth of Israel to the church today, God delivers and dwells with his people. He draws us out of our sin, our Egypt, and draws us into his presence, into relationship with him.

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Hey, good morning. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. We're going to be in Exodus 13. It's good to be back with you. I thought Anthony Moore absolutely did a phenomenal job on the Passover last weekend. What a gift of God's grace to us as a church to have men like Anthony who are able to rightly divide the Word of truth in a compelling and powerful way. I got to listen to that as soon as it was available and really set me up moving into chapters 13 and 14 of Exodus.

The book of Exodus begins to take a turn today, and it's a significant turn that will really shape the spring we have together as we look at the back half of the book of Exodus. Up until this point, God has been revealing himself in regard to who he is and the delivering of his people out of bondage and slavery. It's important to keep in mind that as we've walked through Exodus, we've said that Exodus is book two of five books.

That means that when we read Exodus, we need to be thinking... The best illustration I could come up with is we need to be thinking like a *Star Wars* movie, right? There are other movies around it that make the whole make sense more. What happened is back in the book of Genesis, in movie one, God comes to Abram and says that the brokenness that has entered into the cosmos because of sin, God is going to make right. He is going to fix all that is broken in sin being introduced into the cosmos.

He's going to do that through the line of Abraham. Through that line, all of the families on earth will be blessed. We see very early on in our Scriptures the missional heartbeat of God to see not just one ethnic group of people of him, but men and women from every tribe, tongue, and nation on earth come to be reconciled to him, reconciled to one another, and to bring glory and fame to the name of God.

We see that's God's plan, but in book two, in the story we're in, the people of God have no real sense of themselves. They have been in slavery for over 400 years, so everything they know culturally and everything they know about how to operate has been informed by the paganism they have been living in. Starting in chapters 13 and 14, God begins to shape his people.

He begins to give them commands on how to live and how to operate in such a way that they will become, that we will become for God, a kingdom of priests that herald the good news of God's reconciling work in Christ to the nations. What I want us to do in Exodus 13 and 14 is begin to watch how God shapes us and molds us into a distinct people. I have four points. They all start with *C*. I just say that because I thought you would be proud of me. Let's dive in.

1. *We are a consecrated people.* Look there in Exodus 13, verses 1-2. **"The Lord said to Moses, 'Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.'"** Now, if I had more time, we could draw this line, and we could flesh out the meaning of what it meant to be the firstborn. If you do remember and have been here through our study, when Moses first meets with Pharaoh, he says that God, Yahweh, "I Am Who I Am," has commanded that Pharaoh let Israel go. "Israel, my firstborn son."

If Pharaoh would not do that, God would in turn take from Egypt *his* firstborn son. The Lord considers his people the firstborn son. The inheritance and authority of the family line went to the firstborn son. The idea of consecration for Israel was that the family and the wealth of the family and the name of the family and the position of the family belonged to the Lord.

Consecration is the idea of taking what is ordinary, whether that be a place, a utensil, or a person, and you set it aside for exclusively holy purposes. You and I are consecrated by God. What it means to be the people of God is we are a people who have been consecrated. If I could simplify that, here's how I would simplify it. *We belong to God.* That's the bottom line.

The framework of my life, the understanding of my world through my eyes is rooted in this truth. I am not my own. I have been bought with a price. I belong to God, and everything I have is a gift from God and ultimately belongs to God, so I am not my own. I am his. Paul would say this in multiple different places in multiple ways. We see this as a theme throughout the Scriptures. We are consecrated, set aside for the purposes of God in the world.

Probably the most spanning, kind of umbrella, "this is true about us," verse that I know is Romans 14:8. Here's what the apostle Paul says. **"For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord."** I don't know of another category now. If you're alive, you belong to the Lord. If you're dead, you belong to the Lord. Look at how he finishes the verse. **"So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's."**

What is being drawn in that text is we are his. We belong to him. Everything in my life is rooted in that reality that I'm not my own. I'm looking at my marriage in a really unique way. What that means is I belong to the Lord, so what would the Lord have of me? Well, the Lord is going to inform me. We're going to talk about more of this in a second. The Word of God is going to come to me, belonging to the Lord, and say, "Love Lauren like Christ loved the church, in that he loves her and gave himself up for her."

Now I have my marching orders. I'm not going to do that perfectly. I'm going to stumble about at that, but I need to love my wife like Christ loved the church, and I need to serve her as Christ serves the church. I understand this to be the marching orders on my life, even when I don't like it, because I am not my own. When it comes to being a parent, I see being a parent through the lenses of, "I belong to the Lord." That means my marching orders given to me in the Scriptures are clear. "Don't exacerbate my children to anger."

"Be the grown-up," is the text. "Be the grown-up." I am to commend to them, help them see and understand the majesty and goodness of God. I have my marching orders. I belong to the Lord. When I think about my money, I'm rooted in this. "This money belongs to the Lord. How am I to steward what belongs to him?" See, the basis of Christian generosity is that we understand that all we have and all we possess are gifts from God, not to be hoarded but to be stewarded for the glory of God's name and for our own good.

We are a free people because we understand nothing is ours. Now, the very fleshly impulses of our guts along with the world around us are going to pull us away from the idea that we're a

consecrated people. God would say, "Do you know what it means to be the people of God? You are consecrated. You belong to me. You are off to the side. You have been set aside for special purposes. I'm going to use you for sacred and holy things. Set yourself aside as a consecrated people."

My own flesh pulls against that, right? My own gut will oftentimes say, "No, no, no. I belong to me. I know what I want. I know what I need. I know what I deserve." I can feel those impulses. Anyone else? Does anyone else feel, "I belong to me"? No, no, no. I don't want to do that. I'll just backtrack. There are times in my marriage when I know God said, "You love Lauren like Christ loves the church, in that you give yourself up for her. You serve her."

You know what my flesh says? "Nuh-uh. I've done tried that. Nope." That's my fleshly impulse. "I know what's best for me. I don't have to listen. I agree with Pharaoh when he asked, 'Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?'" My own flesh pulls against me, and everything in our day and age pulls against this, every commercial we watch, every television show we like. Everything says, "No, you're the king. You know what is best for you."

The autonomous self understands how to flourish. Give in to those impulses. You cannot be happy unless you do everything your heart desires to do." We can't even Netflix and chill without being wooed into this, "I am God. I am king. I know what is best for me." Right? The Bible says, "You are a consecrated people." What follows after this idea of consecration or setting ourselves aside, that we belong to God, is God instituting feasts, festivals, and fasts in order to root us into his process of spiritual maturation.

I feel like (God help us) in our day and age, specifically in evangelical Protestantism, we lack the ability to be formed like God would like us to be formed, because there is an integrative approach in the Scriptures that goes beyond mere intellectual absorption and brings the whole body and being into spiritual formation.

2. *We are called by God to commemorate.* This is the idea of remembrance. Look at this, Exodus 13:3-10. **"Then Moses said to the people, 'Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the Lord brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out.**

**And when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with**

**milk and honey, you shall keep this service in this month. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord. Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory.**

**You shall tell your son on that day, "It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt." And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this statute at its appointed time from year to year."**

God is weaving into the rhythms of his people the idea of remembrance, the idea of getting the whole of the person involved in spiritual formation. If I could take this scene and place it into just a week in the life of the people of God... Once again, we sit down at the dinner table, and our son says, "Where are the rolls? I love rolls. We have rolls every night. Where are the rolls?"

"We're not having rolls this week."

"The rolls are my favorite part of you cooking. Where are the rolls?"

"Years ago, in bondage to slavery, broken and hopeless as we were, God saved us, and he saved us so swiftly that the bread didn't even have time to rise. We're taking this week, and we're eating unleavened bread, son, because God radically and powerfully saved us."

You see the institution of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was meant to be celebrated every year as a marker in which the normal routine and rhythm of life would have changed to remind people, to root them back in their story, to call them back to consecration, where the world would say, "You're king. You've delivered yourself. You know the way forward. You know the way to go."

The Feast of Unleavened Bread rooted them back in this reality. "God saved you. You don't know what to do. God has taken care of you. God delivered you. You didn't deliver you. He picked you up out of the muck and the mire." It's one thing to know that verse. We'll talk about the importance of the Word of God here in a moment. It's another thing to feel it in your gut and to celebrate it with a feast or a festival.

As the Festival of Unleavened Bread began to grow and root itself in the hearts and lives of the people of Israel, they began to notice the fact that leaven... I know that hardly anybody makes their own bread anymore. If the Denton Campus were still online with us, half of them would be like, "Yes, we do," but I'm guessing most of us don't make our own bread.

When you make your own bread, when you put the leaven in, the thing that makes the dough rise is a process of decomposition, of death. That's what makes the dough rise. The Israelites began to understand that leaven not only was to be thrown out because of the speed at which God delivered them from slavery and bondage, but it also became a symbol of the wicked impulses inside of them that led to them rejecting their consecration and giving themselves over to those sinful impulses.

This was seven days every year that ended up with a big festival but started out with a type of fast. See, God has shaped his people throughout the ages through fasts, festivals, and feasts. In fact, even Advent, what we're doing...these candles, these readings...are part of a church calendar. I think every time you're at a Protestant church and you start talking church calendar, "That's Catholic stuff." No, it's not Catholic stuff. It's how the people of God have been shaped by God throughout millennia.

I want to walk through the church calendar with you very quickly. I won't highlight all of the days in the calendar, just the rhythms in the calendar. In the liturgical calendar, the church calendar, you have the Christmas cycle. The Christmas cycle is four weeks of Advent. We're in week three, which is why three candles are lit here. We're in week three with those readings.

Each cycle has its own colors represented. It's a way of decorating. All of it is a way to visually and physically enter into commemoration, remembrance, being reminded of God's goodness and grace to us. After the four weeks of Advent (this is going to blow your mind), there is a literal 12 days of Christmas. I know the kids are excited. I don't think it has anything to do with a partridge in a pear tree, but you can go ahead and do some study on your own here.

After the 12 days of Christmas, you have the epiphany of the Lord. Starting January 7 through the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday, you have what is called Ordinary Time. After Ordinary Time, you start 40 days of Lent that begins with Ash Wednesday. If you have Catholic friends, you'll notice that on Ash Wednesday, they have a sign of a cross made of ashes on their foreheads.

What they're remembering, what they're tuning their bodies into through 40 days of fasting, is when Jesus turned his face toward Jerusalem, knowing he was going to die, knowing the time had come, and he, with all resolve, headed to purchase us from sin and death as a trophy of grace for the Father. They remember for 40 days with fasting, longing.

That usually culminates in a Maundy Thursday or a Good Friday celebration, which leads into Easter. This will blow your mind. There are 50 days of Easter celebration that lead up to the day of Pentecost. After Pentecost, from that Monday through the first Sunday of Advent, you once again have Ordinary Time.

These rhythms all come with corresponding colors and reading and celebrations and fasts and festivals and feasts and parties. They're all woven in, and they're all serving one end: to help us remember that we're a consecrated people, to help us remember the faithfulness of God. In fact, the one we do every week here at The Village is we end our services in remembering the life, death, and resurrection of Christ via the Lord's Supper.

That's a remembrance that we're consecrated. We've been bought with a price. We belong to him. Our salvation was not cheap. God loved us while we were at our worst. It's so easy to forget that. Communion reminds us. Festivals and feasts remind us. Fasts remind us. They shape the people of God. We're not just a consecrated people who practice commemoration...

3. *We are compelled by the Holy Spirit.* Look at Exodus 13:17-22. **"When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, 'Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.'" Now, I want to stop. This isn't in my notes. This is just free. The kindness of God in those two sentences is stunning. Maybe I can set it up for you like this.**

Maybe you're in a season of your life when you wish the Lord would just move this thing along just a little bit faster. I don't know what that thing is, but what we see in this text is it is the mercy of God that led them the long way. Do you see that? This people, weak and weary from 400 years of slavery, would return to their chains if they saw the Philistines.

Before God let them see the Philistines, he wanted to shape them. He wanted to strengthen them. He wanted to mold them. He wanted to bolster their confidence in him and his mercy and his grace. Look at me. So he took them the long way. If you feel like the Lord is taking his time leading you to

where you know he's taking you, I would never begrudge the long way. It is almost always God's mercy on your life.

God will not take you a quick, easy way that ends in your destruction because he loves you. He takes you the long, slow way, where you murmur and complain because he loves you. Don't worry about that murmur and complain thing. We'll see plenty of that in our text today. After that, let's look at what happens here. Verse 18:

**"But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.'"**

Now, I love that faith. Do you know when he said that? He said it 400 years before this moment. Joseph is saying, "God is faithful. God does not lie. God will keep his promise. He will show up. When he shows up, you take my bones. This is not our land. This is not our home. We have a home. When God takes you like he promised to our home, you take my bones. I'll haunt you. Don't leave me here." (He didn't say that. I just added that.)

Here's what I want you to see. **"And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness."** Look at verse 21. **"And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people."**

Now, if you'll remember back to two weeks ago when Moses goes in to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh says, "Okay. I've sinned against your God. I've sinned against you. You can go. You just can't take any livestock with you." Do you remember Moses's response? "We don't know where God is going to take us. We don't know what God wants, so we have to take everything so that when we get there, whatever he asks, we'll have."

Now we see the kindness of God, leading his people. A pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. I think if we're not careful, the impulse here is to go, "Gosh. That would be nice." Would it be great to go, "Which job should I take? Oh, there's the cloud. Okay. I'm going to take that job. Should I

marry this person? Pillar of fire this way. Okay. You're the one. There's a pillar of fire over your head." The impulses. Wouldn't that be great?

I want to argue with you this morning that we have something so much better than a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire. We have the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit that does the work of illumination, helping us see and understand the nature and character of God as he has revealed himself to us in the Word. What you and I have is the Word of God.

The issue is not, "What do I do? Where is the pillar of smoke?" but a type of laziness and fear around the Word of God that keeps us from being people who know the Word of God. I don't know where it began. I really don't know. I've tried to figure it out. I've tried to dig in it. I get, "I just want to know how things work." Somewhere along the way, the idea of knowing theology and doctrine and going deep into the Word of God somehow became a synonym for kind of cold, dead orthodoxy.

It's like the more you know the God of the Bible, the less you love him. The more you know him, the more crusty you get. The more you love, the more self-righteous you get. I just couldn't categorically disagree more. Nothing works that way. "The more you know your wife, the more you'll dislike her. The more you get to know your friends, the more you'll hate them. The more you learn about your neighbors, learn about this relationship, the more you'll hate it."

That's absurd. No. The more we know and learn about who God is, what he is like, the more we're in awe of him, the more we're driven by his mission, the more we're informed by his heart, the more we will love him. Here is an illustration that my friend Mike Cospers uses. He says that the basis of modern medicine (I know I'll get some emails from doctors) did not come about by studying healthy, vibrant human beings. It came about by studying cadavers.

They would take a cadaver, and they would break it down and go, "Oh, this looks like the circulatory system works this way." Then they would apply it. It has only been in the last 50 or 60 years that we've actually studying healthy, vibrant humans and said, "Oh, this is how health works." I'm afraid that so many of us take the Bible and treat it like a cadaver.

"Let me break it down. What kind of genre is this?" Listen. There is a place for understanding genres and languages and things like that, but ultimately, the Bible would say in Hebrews 4:12, **"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division**

**of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."**

The Word of God is not a cadaver. The Word of God is living and active. It is not merely a historical narrative. The Word of God is alive, and what it produces in its listeners, in its hearers, is life, not death. To know it is to be infused with life. Another Cospers illustration. I will add to it. He says that the scientist who knows everything about the strawberry from a scientific point of view but has never tasted the strawberry is at a distinct disadvantage to the 2-year-old who knows nothing of the science but has actually had one.

Where I would add to his illustration is how much more does the one who understands the science behind the strawberry enjoy the taste of it when he tastes and sees? This is why we want to be serious about you knowing the Word of God at The Village Church. It's why last Friday night we had a big forum on how to study the Bible personally. It's why we do the classes we have.

In fact, right now, you have opportunity to register for our spring classes. For the whole fall we worked through the first half of the book of Genesis. Now in the spring we'll work through the second half of the book of Genesis for both men and women. We have my favorite class we offer in our classes, which is the story of Scripture that helps you understand the symphony of what God is up to from Genesis to Revelation and how the unity in our Scriptures is a beautiful thing to be marveled at and rejoiced in.

At some of our other campuses, there are church history classes, but this is an opportunity for you to sign up and plug in to a place where life is happening at The Village and to root yourself more fully in the Word of God. Listen to me. There is a way that seems right to man. In the end, it leads to death. Are you tracking with me? There is a way that seems right to man. There is a way that for us, we go, "Oh, well, this sounds right. This seems right."

Remember, we're being pulled away from consecration, not toward it. In that pull, there is a way I actually think, "This would please the Lord." The Scriptures would go, "No, that never pleases the Lord." Remember what we say. In the Scriptures, we see not only the nature and character of God but we see all of the thou-shalts and the thou-shalt-nots, all of which are God inviting you into how he designed the universe to work for his glory and your good.

To be lazy about this or to boil it down to platitudes where we proof text and use a verse that doesn't say anything about what we're using it for is to put ourselves in harm's way, to rob ourselves from this God who loves us and is for us. I want to encourage you to take some of these steps.

4. *We are covered by the power of God.* There are two things I want to talk about when I talk about being covered by the power of God. First, *God is faithful when we are not.* Second, *God destroys his enemies, setting us free.* Those are my two points on being covered by the power of God.

A. *God is faithful when we are not.* Exodus 14:10-14. **"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."** I want to stop there. One of the ways I think you can walk in the Word of God becoming living and active to you... We practice this at my house with the kids, and it's a practice I try to do myself.

I try to use my imagination when I use the Scripture. What I mean by that is not read things that aren't there, but I want to imagine this moment. What you have is the people of Israel whose backs are not against the sea, and what is before them is just flatlands of wilderness. What we see in the text are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of chariots and horsemen who are coming their way, and if you're in the narrative, all of them have just lost a son.

If you're using your imagination, how angry are the Egyptians? Ready to slaughter? Right? Ready to be ruthless and grotesque and all of the ugly parts of humankind? Absolutely. Where are the Israelites supposed to go? They haven't been trained in war. They're dressed for war, but that's like Halloween. They haven't been in a fight. Are they going to swim across the Red Sea? They can't do that. Where are they going to go? They're hemmed in. The only way to go is straight through this invading army that has bloodlust and is coming to kill them and destroy them all.

The good news here is even though they're terrified, God has just been flexing for weeks now. He has bent the whole natural order of things. Hail, wind, disease, life, death, blood. The whole natural order has been bent by the Lord to serve the purposes of God. All of the promises of God have come true in this moment. Yet the people of God (here's where we can be encouraged) have always been slow to learn. Verse 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? 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.'"**

Look right at me for a second. Again, I need to hurry. Most evangelicals I know, most Christians I know, have this thing that if God would just do this thing, then their doubts and fears and all that would just be alleviated forever, and they would just know that for the rest of their lives, they would happily just be full-on with the Lord if just this one thing were to happen.

Yet, what we see in the Scriptures is this is just categorically untrue. This is a people who just moments ago (again, reading with our imaginations) were in jubilation. They're free. They're not only free. They plundered the Egyptians. They are weighed down with silver and gold and livestock, and they have plundered and destroyed.

God has the greatest empire in human history up until this point. The type of celebration upon that exodus probably would have blown our minds. Now they're camped out, have the camp set up. What are you doing? You're counting your silver. You're counting your gold. I don't know if it's there. I'm over here. The Bible is there. This is conjecture.

You're playing around with silver. "Look at this silk tunic thing I have. This is amazing. Do you want to trade for this?" There is this kind of celebration that would be hard to get the mind around. Then they see dust in the distance. "What is that? Is that a storm? Is that..." Then they see. "Oh no. It's the Egyptians." Chariots and horsemen and soldiers. They accuse God. "You are not good. You have not delivered us. You betrayed us. You are not for us. You are not keeping your promises."

That's fifth gear to reverse in a hurry. It's how the people of God have operated forever. I think if you put this in a different kind of situation, you would feel... I don't know how old your kids are, but everybody is going to have this moment with their kids on Christmas morning where they open up their presents, and say something like (they need to be disciplined), "This isn't the one I wanted," or, "Is that it?" or, "This isn't the right model."

As a parent, what that does is it makes you crazy. You want to say really crazy things like, "We'll just put it all in the car and take it back. How about that? Since you're already disappointed, I might as

well help you out and burn all of your stuff in the front yard." Right? It will make you crazy. They just need to be disciplined.

In the end, this is a people you want to punish. Imagine all God has done here, the great pains to which he has gone to bring them out of bondage and slavery. They're not even completely out of it yet before they begin to accuse him of being unkind, accuse him of being cruel, accuse him of not caring. What is God's response? Let's look at God's response.

Verse 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. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.'"** God is faithful when we are not. That is stunning.

Their accusation is, "You're not faithful. You're not good. You're not kind." God's response is, "Don't be afraid." In fact, this kind of sets up a method of operation that God will utilize throughout the Old Testament when he wants Israel to get it. He is always kind of whittling down their armies. If you know the Old Testament well, what happens?

"Gideon, your army is too big."

"Well, it's like one to ten odds, God. We're down one to ten. We're going to get crushed."

"One to ten is too good of odds, bro. I'm going to ask you to wean this thing down."

"Okay. Now it's one to twenty. Are you happy?"

"You know what? No. I still think you'd get a little cocky if you won the fight. Let's go again. Whittle it down."

"One to a hundred odds?"

"All right. Now you'll know it's me. Go get them."

This is what the Lord has done. The Lord is going, "I've got you. You haven't got you. I've got you. I'll save you. You need only to stand firm and be quiet. I will deliver you. I will rescue you." See, God covers us in his power. When we are faithless, he is still faithful.

This is a stunning reality for a people who tend to be overly hard on themselves in regard to, "Surely God is punishing me. Surely God is not for me. Surely God cannot ultimately deliver upon these promises of grace and steadfast love and kindness." Yet, what we see in this text is the power of God over a grumbling, complaining, idolatrous people. "I've got you. *Shh*." But that's not all we see here when we talk about being covered by the power of God.

B. *God destroys his enemies*. That leads us into freedom. Let's look at this in verses 26-31 of chapter 14. **"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.'**

**So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the Lord threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained.**

**But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses."**

We live in a day and age where this idea of God's judgment is almost unpalatable, but I want to point this out for us. As the consecrated, compelled, commemorating people of God, that the Lord is just frees us up to love and serve with compassion and grace, even our enemies. This truth makes us first and foremost a missional people because we have no enemies who are flesh and blood. We have only spiritual realities and the gospel call to herald the good news to all, especially our enemies.

The apostle Paul would say it like this in Romans 12:19. **"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"** When people share the gospel with their enemies, when people show kindness to their enemies,

when people go to places where they are despised and hated to herald the good news of the gospel, they go understanding that bad things can happen, and they will not avenge themselves. Why? Because you leave room for the wrath of God.

What marks us as a people of grace and love and compassion, abounding in love, isn't that everyone is going to be kind to us. You have to keep in mind that this verse is in the context of an unbelievable amount of hardship that is befalling the church of Rome. Why don't they respond violence for violence? Why don't they respond to hate with hate?

Because Christians leave room for the wrath of God. We're free to be marked by compassion and mercy, to be known for these traits. That's why I said this is good news. My enemies don't have flesh and blood on. All that is flesh and blood is for me an opportunity to point toward the saving, redeeming work of my God in Jesus Christ.

When we take these ideas together, really the whole spring will be shaped really around one verse that we'll get into in February. That verse is, "You will be for me a kingdom of priests." What happens is if you look at a map (again, we're going to look at this in February), you'll see that God places his people significantly, right between the two major empires of the known world.

Why? So they might show the nations what it means to belong to God, what it means to be consecrated by God, and what it means to be on the mission of God, to seek and to save the lost, and to bless all families on the earth. This is what you and I are caught up in. This is why I just want to argue for the rest of my days that there should be no such thing as a bored Christian. How could you be bored? Everything in your life fits in to what God is doing.

The reason you live in your neighborhood isn't some sort of weird accident or you really like that style of house. God has uniquely wired you and placed you for purpose. What purpose? To herald the good news. You have been uniquely wired in your gift set. You have certain hobbies that you're drawn toward. You have certain intuitive giftings that have led you to a career. None of that is an accident. None of that is an accident. All of that is about the mission of God. There shouldn't be any such thing as a bored Christian.

I ask for some space from some of our elders. It has been about 10 years since I did a deep dive into our area, Denton County, what is really going on. What are kind of the idols present? What are the hurdles for people hearing and understanding the gospel? Here's a stunning reality. It has been 10

years. In 10 years, Denton County has gone from about 20 percent saying, "I have no religious affiliation," which has led to me saying people think they're Christians who probably are not. They go to church, but they don't really have a relationship with Christ.

Here's a stunning reality. As of last year, 60 percent of Denton County self-identifies as non-religious. In a time period of 10 years, we've gone from about 20 percent saying, "I'm non-religious," to 60 percent saying, "I'm non-religious." Now, maybe you live in a domain of society where you're going, "Yeah, I could have told you that," but I think most of us, because we run around with a lot of Christian people, we have a tendency to see all of these churches, and we just think, "Oh, it's Bible Belt stuff."

I'm telling you that you and I have a beautiful opportunity to be salt and light to the world around us, to live in such a way where we show hospitality, where we're marked by compassion and love, where we're filled with a zeal for the things of God because we've been informed by the Word of God, understand how we've been consecrated, and began to open up our homes and our lives for the glory of God in this space.

Listen to me. I love the gathering. It's a good, right thing for us to come together and remember and sing and celebrate and make much of the name and renown of Jesus together as a family, but the gathering was always meant to spill out of the gathering and into everyday life. When you make this the apex of what it means to be a Christian, you rob the weight of God's mission from your own life and the zeal of God's mission in your own life.

The rise of superstar preachers and podcast and vodcast is a death toll on the local church's power in a context, doing the work of evangelism for the glory of God. That's why if you download our stuff, the first thing I say is you supplement with this, but this cannot be your church because the church is grounded in a given location for the glory of God in the evangelization and the discipleship of men and women.

I'm pleading with you. Don't give yourself over to a version of church that is a pep rally for Jesus on Sunday. No. God has called you to more than that. God has called you to much more than that. Don't settle for good preaching and songs. Again, I love the gathering. I love to preach. I feel like I've been uniquely wired. My voice is this weird thing. It's just loud. It doesn't get tired. I know my wife sometimes prays that it would. It just doesn't.

Here is the highlight of my weekend. This is the fourth sermon I've preached this weekend. Last night, at the 5:00, I was right over here just kind of talking and mingling and saying hello to folks. This woman comes up to me, and I've only met her one time before. Probably two or three months ago, it was the same thing. I started over here, and I kind of worked my way around. I was over here.

She and her husband brought this young woman to me and said, "Hey, I want to introduce you to our friend." She introduced me to this young woman and said hello. It was great. I haven't seen them since. Last night, she came and grabbed me. She said, "Hey, that young woman we introduced you do, we've been inviting her into our home for years. We've been answering spiritual conversations with her for years. We've given her some books. She has asked a lot of questions.

I want you to know that night after church, we got in our car, and on the way home, she said, 'I want to say yes to Jesus. How do I do that?' Since then, she has given her life to Christ. She is scheduled to be baptized, Matt. Man, it is just blowing our minds watching her grow, try to connect, figure out how to navigate the Bible. It has just brought more joy to the lives of my husband and me. It has brought more glad-hearted rejoicing in God."

That night, someone they loved, someone they had opened their home to, someone they had earnestly prayed for was transferred out of the domain of darkness and into the kingdom of his beloved Son, and there is no sermon you will ever hear that will compare to the jubilation of being used by God in the miraculous.

To not want to give yourself over for that and settle for sermons and songs... I just don't know why you would do it. If you do it for long enough, you'll need to start jumping around to different churches every few years because the newness and the sexiness of the place will wear off, so you'll have to go find something new, maybe something more charismatic or maybe more liturgical or maybe instead go to that more new spiritual, liturgical, charismatic church that sings like *this*. "Oh my gosh; there's a DJ in the foyer."

It becomes this weird, "I have to move around and get this high rather than give myself over to the mission of God." God is forming a people. Look at me. You are a consecrated people. You are to remember to commemorate the goodness of God in your life with feasts and fasts and festivals and the breaking of bread and the drinking of wine. We'll do that here in a moment.

You are to be compelled by the Holy Spirit, illuminating the Word of God, and you are to understand rightly that you are covered by God. He is faithful when you are not, and he will destroy his enemies, which sets you free to love and serve and tell all of the good news. Or you can do church as a hobby. I think it's a lame hobby, lamer than some hobbies that are lame. It's up there. So he who has ears, let him hear. Let's pray.

Father, help us. Where we haven't understood that we're a consecrated people, that we belong to do, where we have areas of our lives that aren't fully surrendered to you, will you, Holy Spirit, make those visible to us even in this moment, that we might repent, that we might confess, that we might lay those things before you.

Father, where we've been afraid of the Bible or have thought that the Scriptures would ultimately make us love you less, we want to repent of that today and ask your forgiveness. Spirit of God, I ask today that you would give us a zeal to know the Word deeply, to know the Lord more fully, to stand in greater awe of you. We thank you that your Scriptures are living and active, getting to the very deepest parts of us. Forgive us for laziness and fear.

Thank you that you cover us. You are faithful, even when we have no faith. When we wrestle, you're there. We thank you that we've been freed to love and serve, show hospitality and compassion to all, because you will handle your enemies. Help us now as we consider that we're no longer slaves, but instead, you call us your children, your sons, your daughters. Help us get that in the deeper places. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.