

God will Lead you Home

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 September 2022

Preacher: Ray Evans

[0 : 00] Well, thank you so much for your very warm welcome. Can I bring to you the greetings of the church in Bedford where I serve? It's called Grace Community Church. And yeah, it's a privilege to come and bring God's word to you. We're going to look at a passage in the first part of the Bible called the Old Testament.

If you have one of these church Bibles, it's on page 70 and the passage is Exodus chapter 13. And we're going to read from verse 17 just to the end of the chapter.

We're going back a long time ago, three and a half thousand years ago to another culture, but it had its own kings. They were called pharaohs. So you may have been and seen the great pyramids where those pharaohs wanted to be buried.

Well, this is a particular pharaoh and God had sent a man called Moses to deliver his people from terrifying slavery and genocide.

And eventually Pharaoh let the people go. And that's where we read Pharaoh let the people go. God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was the shorter. For God said if they face war, they might change their minds, return to Egypt.

[1 : 19] So God led the people around by the desert road towards the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt ready for battle. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the Israelites swear an oath.

He said, God will surely come to your aid and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place. After leaving Sukkoth, they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert.

By day, the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light so they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

Seems so obscure, doesn't it? Seems like what's that got to do with me? But you see, once you recognize God is leading these people on a journey, they left Egypt.

They're on a journey to Israel, to the land that God had promised them, the promised land. Once you realize that they were on a journey, how did God help them on their journey? This passage is taken up in the New Testament, in the second half of the Bible, written after the life of Jesus Christ.

[2 : 29] And the writer, the Apostle Paul, you can look it up. We haven't got time now. 1 Corinthians 10 says, these things were written for us. These things are written for us. It's not a kind of historical, like, oh, how interesting. But they were written for you to help you on your journey.

So how did God help them on their journey? Will help you on your journey. And as we've seen, as we see, we'll see how God helped the queen on her journey. For as a Christian believer, she made the same journey that we make.

I come from a town called Bedford. Its most famous son was a man called John Bunyan. He wrote lots of books, but his most famous book was called Pilgrim's Progress. And it described a journey, a journey from what he called the city of destruction to the heavenly city.

And he was a preacher, but he got put in prison. And that's when he was in prison, when he wrote the book. And it's the most widely, one of the most widely read books in the whole world after the Bible.

Describes a journey. I don't know where you are on your journey, how the journey is for you just right now. You may have come into church this morning and you're sad and you're thinking, life has really changed.

[3 : 39] I'm going to miss that rock called our queen. She was so consistent, wasn't she? So there for us. Most of us have never known any other queen than our queen.

There was a sense, whatever else happened in Great Britain, UK, she was there. And now that's all gone. And there's been that amazing change to a new king.

And we thank God that one queen has died, but long live the king. And there's a stability in our nation. But we know it's a massive change. But more than that is that personal sense of loss, isn't there?

It reminds us all that however long we live, there is this part of the journey that none of us have ever been before. And it's a frightening part of the journey. And I don't know whether you're near to the end of that journey or not.

You just heard of a lady who's been diagnosed with breast cancer. And that will be playing on her and her family's mind, won't it? What is in store in my part of the journey now?

[4 : 39] For you, it may be a fear of your past catching up with you, which was happening in this passage. Or it may be a fear of what lies ahead of you, the great unknowns.

Maybe something you're going through right now that is really, you're really struggling. But then the question is, is God with me in all of this? So we're going to look at this thing, this section here, three little things really, very straightforwardly.

And the first one is this. God understands your frailty. God understands your frailty. When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was the shorter.

To get from Egypt to the promised land, straight road up by the coast. Two weeks walking, maybe two weeks, maybe. Why didn't God do that?

For he said, if they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt. God understood this. This is not a survival of the fittest moment.

[5 : 48] It's not when the tough, you know, when the going gets tough, the tough get going. It's not like man up. Those of you who are strong and tough, you'll make it. Sorry about the rest of you. It's not about the clever and the bright or the strong or the rich arriving safely and the poor and the feeble and the young and the old just fall by the wayside.

This is not sort of God saying, well, here's a test. Who can pass? God wants his people to arrive, all of them. And he says this, if they face the Philistines.

Now, even in our culture, the word, oh, you're a Philistine means, you know, you're rough and tough and mean and nasty. You know, uncultured, brutal, vicious, violent.

That's what they were. They got a reputation for being that way. And in between Egypt and the promised land live these people and their fortified cities. It was a great big no entry sign.

And although we're told the Israelites went up out of Egypt ready for battle. God knew this. If you put hardened, seasoned veterans against fresh, raw recruits who've never held a sword in their hand, who's going to win?

[7 : 09] What does it feel like when some of your best mates die very quickly in a fight? You feel like, oh, my goodness, I didn't know it was as awful as this. I've never been in combat.

I went paintballing once and that was enough. It put me off for life. You know, I was splattered in the first 30 seconds. Well, if that was a real bullet and it was a real war, that was it. But God understands this.

So he doesn't give them something that's beyond them. He sends them by another route. It may seem longer and it may seem, why? Why? But God says, but I know.

Because I understand that, you know, all the best plans survive till the first contact with the main enemy force. You won't cope. Some of you may, but you won't all.

And my plan is that you arrive safely. And that's what he did for them. And he's doing that for you. There's many times in life, why didn't I get that job?

[8 : 12] Why didn't I get that promotion? Why did I get fired? Why did my company get taken over by a multinational in another country and then we're told to move? Why? Why?

Why? And at the time, they're all, why? And he's, well, you won't understand. You're going to have to trust me. Although it seems that's the shortest route, it's not the safest route.

And there's many times in life where you think, well, I don't understand what God's doing. Now, here's the mystery. You say, well, why didn't God miraculously intervene?

He has just done that. They've just seen the most incredible, amazing miracles. We read them. We can hardly believe they happened. They saw them and they knew that they had.

They'd seen God miraculously intervene. And you say, well, why can't God get rid of the Philistines? He got rid of Pharaoh and all his army. What's the problem?

[9 : 12] And there's a lot of mystery in life like that, isn't there? Sometimes you pray and God seems to just open a way forward. And he's like, oh, simple little things.

We've just come back from a family holiday in France. We got there, got back, no problems. Sometimes we've been on holiday. You know, the car gets a flat tire. You're a mile down the road.

And then somebody needs to go to hospital. And then, you know, somebody raids your bank account. And when you get there, there's a building site. And you're thinking, I prayed about this holiday. So much of our lives, either tiny little things or even the very big things of life.

There's that question, why can't God do this? Why doesn't God do that? Well, behind it all is a heavenly father who loves you to bits. Now, sometimes if you become a mom or a dad, it's a bit easier to understand.

Because there's times when you have to do things with your children. And they don't understand. You remember that first jab? You take them in. They're looking at you. They're looking at the doctor.

[10 : 15] They don't know what a needle is. And they look at you. And ever since then, they're never going to trust you again, mom or dad. And they're only one.

And you know many a time. Even as a human dad, knowing so little, you know a little bit more than your little ones, don't you? And there's times you say, dad, son, you want to understand. It's true of many things, isn't it?

So many things in life where you say, trust me. Here, God is saying to his children, trust me. I'm not deceiving you. I'm not fooling you.

I'm not lost control of it. There is a reason that I understand that you may not. And there's a direction in your life, a turning from the fast route to the better route.

Trust me. And he did it for them. And he may be doing that for you. There's times in my life. I was an academic. I was involved in university. I did my two degrees at Cambridge.

[11 : 23] And I couldn't get a job. I became a window cleaner. I thought I'd clean windows just for a week or two until I got a good job. Two years later, still cleaning windows.

People are like, what? You're the most overqualified window cleaner in the world. What are you doing? Well, if you thought that, you imagine what my family said. Lord, what are you doing? But God was moving things sideways.

Anyways, he had to learn things. You're going to learn things as a window cleaner. You'll never learn any other way. You learn things about people. You learn things about doing the humdrum.

You learn things about frustrations. Clean the windows in the morning. Rain all afternoon. And the customers say, you didn't clean my windows. It rained all afternoon. You learn things.

And I had to learn things that I could never learn any other way. And it seemed to go on and on and on. And then in the kind of providence and mercy of God, he opened a way forward and led me into ministry in quite remarkable ways.

[12 : 22] But he may be doing that for you. You've got to trust him. And if he's like that with you, you be like that with others. If he understands your frailty, we're told, husbands, be considerate towards your wives.

Fathers, my children's favorite verse in the Bible almost. Fathers, don't exasperate your children. Like, understand they're still kids. You know, they're not adults yet.

Masters, bosses, understand how it is hard to be under your leadership. Maybe even yourself.

You need to talk to yourself sometimes. Your body is saying to your brain, you need a rest. You need some refreshment. You need some relaxation. You need some exercise.

Be aware of your own frailty. Because God understands it. And he leads you accordingly. Second thing.

[13 : 24] God honors your faith. You get this bit about, okay, I understand why God didn't lead them into a fight. But what's this bit about bones of Joseph? Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the Israelites swear an oath.

He said, God will surely come to your aid. Then you must carry my bones up with you from this place. What is that all about? Well, it's really fascinating. Even in our culture, we've known of Joseph, don't we?

Joseph had the amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, Andrew Lloyd Webber. Joseph is still alive in our vocabulary. Joseph was a savior. God's people had lived through a terrifying famine.

But again, in a very mysterious way, God had sort of woven a path so that this man who'd been in prison became trusted by the Pharaoh to plan for the food to be stored during all those years of famine.

Years of plenty. Some of you know the story. Years of plenty and then years of famine. And Joseph had saved the nation. And he'd saved his own family. They'd come down to Egypt and he'd saved them many, many years before.

[14 : 38] But God had told him he'd believed God's word. He said, look, yes, you have saved my people now, but it's not always going to be like this. There's going to come another leader. And he's going to enslave the people.

And he's going to treat them badly. But it will come to an end. I promise to send a deliverer. And I'm going to lead you back to your homeland, the land of Canaan.

I promise. And Joseph had believed God's promise. And before he died, he said to his compatriots, look, this is what's going to happen.

God has said, we're going to be here in Egypt for a while, but this is not home. Home is the land of Canaan. He's going to bring us back. And when you go, take my bones with you.

And that, what Joseph said, do this, it's now being fulfilled hundreds of years later. What Joseph believed God's promise and God's promise was being fulfilled.

[15 : 39] God was, in a sense, honoring that faith. But it's bigger than that. Now, I don't know about you in Edinburgh. In Bedford, Bedford is a very diverse town.

Lots and lots of people from all over the world. And that's lovely. But it's quite interesting that some people, when they die, they want to go and be buried back at home. They don't want to be buried or cremated here in Britain.

Because though this is now their home, they've still got those memories of home. I don't know where home is for you. I've lived in Bedford a long, long time. But home, actually, is Devon, where I was born. My auntie, my last surviving auntie, died this last year.

She's buried in home. It's not that. It's not just a nostalgia thing. You know, I'll be nice to be buried back at home when I was a boy. No. No.

In the New Testament, Hebrews chapter 11 tells us all these people were looking forward to a heavenly city. There's a long line of these names.

[16 : 41] It starts with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. And it involves Joseph. And the writer, Hebrews 11, says Joseph was looking forward, not just to going and being buried back in his boyhood land, nostalgically, but because he believed that Canaan symbolized the heaven to come, a better resurrection.

That his bones were being taken from Egypt to be buried in Canaan, because Canaan symbolized the promise that God made the whole world and all his people, that death would not be the end.

There would be a new heavens and a new earth. This is momentous. This is for us, you see. It's not like, oh, dead men's bones. What's that got to do with us? It's a promise that God made this man, and he believed God's promise.

God's promise is being fulfilled. But it's only part A of the promise being fulfilled, Egypt to Canaan. Part B is when Joseph will be raised from the dead on the last day.

Really believe that. All those people in the Hebrews believe that God would not leave them dead in the grave, just bones buried in Canaan. Canaan stood for the promised land, the new heavens and the new earth.

[18 : 03] Now, do you realize how significant that is? The Queen's body, her bones, are being brought to Edinburgh today, aren't they? And then they're going to be taken to London.

And then she's going to be put in a grave, in a vault. And you know what words are going to be said? Well, the words that are said at pretty much everybody's funeral here in Great Britain. We've given God thanks for the life of, and then put the name in.

And then as a minister, a vicar, a pastor, I often say this was dust to dust, ashes to ashes. You know what comes next? These great Christian words ensure and certain expectation of the resurrection to eternal life.

We bury the body in the ground, but God will give us new bodies. There was a very poignant moment on the telly last night.

And they said, Queen Elizabeth is leaving the Balmoral estate forever. And I thought to myself, no, there's a better Balmoral in heaven itself.

[19 : 09] She will see the beauty of God's new creation because she's one of God's daughters. And she believes that promise as Joseph believed that promise.

And do you see how stark that is to so many other things on offer? I came across this quote recently. A man called Alain de Botton. He's a very, he's very cultured, educated, lovely, kind guy.

But he's a confirmed atheist. And he wrote this. Let me just quote it to you. I'll say it a couple of times because it's hard to take in. The pleasure we derive from the journey is perhaps dependent more on the mindset with which we travel than on the destination we travel to.

Let me say that again slowly. The pleasure we derive from the journey is perhaps dependent more on the mindset with which we travel than on the destination we travel to. That is, you basically got to enjoy the journey.

And if you enjoy the journey, well, that's great, isn't it? Now, do you see this? He's an atheist. He can't talk about the destination. He can only talk about the journey and say, try and enjoy it.

[20 : 20] If you actually step back for a while and think about the journey, you never know when the journey is going to end. You don't know how it's going to end. And you don't know what's coming next, except it looks pretty bleak.

So you have to say, enjoy the journey because you can't talk about enjoy the destination. But for Joseph, his journey at times was really hard.

But he knew what the destination was. A few years ago, I thought I ought to read some Jane Austen because I hadn't read any Jane Austen when I was a boy.

And everybody was talking about, I better read a bit of Jane Austen. But I began to understand that these are quite painful things to read because you never know what's going to happen. But I've learned the lesson, read the last page and then you're safe.

Because however many times Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy fall out, in the end, it's okay. Then you can read the novel. Well, you know, you sport it, but you haven't.

[21 : 20] But it's not like that with us. If you know in the end where you are going, if you know heaven is home and God will get you there, well, you can cope with the twists and turns on the journey, can't you?

Joseph's journey had some very, very dark moments. But he knew where he was going. And where he was going was not Egypt and this life only. It was heaven and life eternal with a heavenly father and a wonderful savior Jesus, empowered by God the Holy Spirit.

That's what he hoped for. And that's what God is giving you if you're a Christian believer. He's saying, look, you're on your way to heaven.

And you say, well, and you've got something better than dead men's bones to carry with you. As Christian believers, you've not got this dead savior.

You've got an empty tomb and a living Christ who is with you every step of the way, which is point three. Final point. God will.

[22 : 25] He will protect you in your fears. After leaving Sukkoth, they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. Now, we read that and go, OK, it's a bit like saying turn left down the road, isn't it?

But it's not that. That's ominous. They left Sukkoth, place of safety, and they camped on the edge of the desert. And notice verse 4 of chapter 14.

The Pharaoh, he thinks to himself, verse 5, when the king of Egypt was told the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds. What have we done?

He realized that they're in the desert. Verse 3, the Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion hemmed in by the desert. I'm going to go back and get them. The desert is a dangerous place.

I don't know what you're like with your navigation. But in the desert, you haven't got anything to navigate by, have you?

[23 : 25] There's no sat-nav back then. There's no streets turn left on the third street on the right. It's just desert for miles and miles and miles.

It's a place in which to get lost. And then it's a place to find out that your enemy is out to come and get you again. Scary place. But God, what do we hear then? By day, the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them.

By night in a pillar of fire to give them light. So they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. It isn't just that God says, look, I've got your ticket.

It says, heaven, see you later. No. God says, I'm with you on the journey. It's not just that I'm going to get you to heaven.

I'm going to travel with you. And that great image of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. It's very, very prominent in these next sections of the book of the Bible.

[24 : 35] In fact, the whole book of Exodus ends with a reminder to all the people of the immediate presence of God. Exodus chapter 40, page 101.

The cloud covered the tent of meeting. The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. In all the travel of the Israelites, verse 36, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they'd set out.

The cloud didn't lift. They would not set out until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day and fire was in the cloud by night in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels.

Whenever they looked at themselves, they go, oh, no. Or they looked around. They go, oh, my goodness. Or they look back. We're going to get caught. But all they had to do was look up.

And they knew that God was with them. They looked up by day or by night. You're a nightmare. And you think, oh, no. Am I going to ever make it? I look up and there's the pillar of cloud by day or by night.

[25 : 35] God is saying, I am with you every step of the way. I'm going to guide you. I'm going to protect you. I am with you in this journey.

He said that to them. He's saying that to you. He is with you in the journey. His very last words. Sometimes we read it in the end of Matthew's gospel.

Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, teaching them everything. Well, they are the last words of Jesus. But they're not. The last command of Jesus is not go and make disciples.

The last command of Jesus is this word. And we lose it in our English where he says, behold, or surely. It's a word that says, look at me.

I've just told you to go and make disciples. Now look at me. I am with you to the very end of the age. The last command of Jesus is not to look at what we have to do for him, but to look at him and his promise.

[26 : 39] I am with you to the very end of the age. And you say, well, Ray, they had a pillar of cloud. Where's ours? They had a pillar of fire.

Where's ours? And the Lord Jesus says, I've got something better for you. I've given you my Holy Spirit in you. Is it where the glory of God, the fire of God has come and to dwell in the hearts of every Christian?

And how do you know he's there? Because he's the one that keeps telling you, look to Jesus. When you feel, are my sins forgiven? The Holy Spirit in the heart says, look to the cross.

Isn't the price been paid? Look to the empty tomb. Hasn't God raised his dear son? That's the Holy Spirit's work in you. Keep fixing your eyes on Jesus, your saviour.

Look up. Where is he now? Well, he's at the very throne of God praying for you. The Holy Spirit's in you to make Christ real to you. And through Christ, you can come confidently and use those words that Jesus taught every single one of his followers, our father.

[27 : 46] God is with us, more with us than he was with them. To them, he was external. To us, he's now internally dwells in one's body spirit in our hearts.

And his Holy Spirit keeps on shedding abroad the love of God in our hearts to assure us that though we are terrifyingly sinful, we are greatly loved. The great man who lived near me, who's buried just down the road, is a man called John Newton.

He's buried in a churchyard just eight miles away in a town called, you would call it Oni, but the locals call it Oni. John Newton, at the end of his, the man who wrote Amazing Grace, that song, you know what he said?

Somebody asked him, what have you learned, John Newton, at the end of your life? He said, I've learned two great things, that I am a great sinner, but that Jesus Christ is a very great saviour.

The queen has now experienced that, hasn't she? She has experienced now that Jesus Christ is a very great saviour. She's in his presence.

[28 : 55] The queen who served the king. It's a lovely book, have you seen it? The servant queen and the king she served. She's now in the king's presence. Well, this is the great promise, you can be in the king's presence too.

For all who call on the name of Jesus, God's dear son, who died for sinners and rebels like us, can enter into his presence.

May God enable us to trust his word, turn to his son, rely on him, and find ourselves one day safe at home with the king.