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Market Street Fellowship

## **Running From Death vs. Walking In Life**

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I have to admit, the idea of sharing today was rather daunting. In fact, when Sarah told me Julie had graciously signed us up to teach, I totally expected to step aside and just let Sarah eloquently take up our allotted time. I'm typically not a very vocal member of the body. I think that springs from my childhood in a very legalistic church where people were more than happy to share their thoughts on spiritual truth, which usually involved yelling at me for listening to rock music or wearing jeans on Sunday morning. As a result, my walk with Christ became deeply personal. I didn't want to be like them, so when the Lord moved in my heart I generally kept my mouth shut and let Him stay there.

I realized, somewhat ironically, that I was hesitant to share today for the same legalistic trappings. I was raised to believe that the Pastor—with a capital P—had a direct line to God. And whatever he said—and it was certainly never a woman in my church—was spiritual truth that he had poured over and meditated on for hours, if not days or weeks, to receive God's official seal of approval. Say the wrong thing from the pulpit and you earn a lightning bolt to the brain. You're worse than a sinner. You're a stumbling block.

Saying the wrong thing was much worse than saying nothing at all.

But that seems silly to me now. Imagine a body. Let's say, I'm the pinky finger. Nothing super important, but I stick around to make sure your gloves don't look weird. Imagine a pinky finger that keeps to itself, never sharing, never communicating with the rest of the body. We have a word for an appendage like that. It's dead.

A few months ago, someone brought up the passage in Exodus 14 that recounts the Israelites' escape from bondage and their harrowing journey through the Red Sea, on the run from Pharaoh and his army. While reading that passage, a proverbial light bulb went off in my heart. The first light of something true. More than a spark, but rather a flare that's shot off into the night sky and hovers there, giving just enough light to tentatively start down a path. I didn't have words for it at the time, and honestly I'm not sure that I have words for it now, but I'm trying to be a good pinky.

In that story of Israel being pursued by Pharaoh's army to the absolute brink of destruction, I saw an amazing reality. For brevity's sake, I'm calling it **Running From Death vs. Walking In Life**. We spend so much of our Christian lives running from death, when in fact we are called to walk in life.

As some of you know, I'm a screenwriter. And I pretty much relate everything to telling stories, because that's what I do for a living. One of the first things they teach you in Screenwriting 101 is that a survival story is the simplest way to create drama. Life vs. Death is the most straightforward form of narrative. When the zombie apocalypse

happens, our heroes no longer care about taxes or sports or dentist appointments. They care about one thing and one thing only: Escaping death. Survival drives them totally.

Turn with me to Exodus 14:10

<sup>10</sup> As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD. <sup>11</sup> Then they said to Moses, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? <sup>12</sup> Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, '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."

Here, when faced with death, Adam wants nothing more than to escape, even if that escape means returning to bondage. They are literally being pushed by death in the form of Pharaoh's army. It's driving them to the very point of extinction. With the Red Sea blocking them in, the Israelites have no where left to turn.

<sup>13</sup> But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see **the salvation** of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever.

That verse really hit me between the eyes. I began to see a type and shadow here of our own salvation. As Adam, we are constantly, ceaselessly pursued by death. But the cross is our salvation, and the cross is not merely death, but the **overcoming** of death. It is the complete and total burial of death.

<sup>26</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen." <sup>27</sup> So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing right into it; then the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. <sup>28</sup> The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh's entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained. <sup>29</sup> But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters *were like* a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. <sup>30</sup> Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.

Here, the Israelites receive salvation. They not only escape death by crossing the Red Sea, they are totally removed from the very idea of death. Not only have they survived, but their salvation has completely removed the pursuit of death from the equation.

<sup>31</sup> **When Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses.**

When faced with death, everything else fades away. And in the zombie movie, when our heroes escape death, the film ends. The credits roll and we leave the theatre satisfied. The Israelites survived death firsthand and their response was elation. They were not only happy, they **believed**. They believed because they were so grateful to be alive, to

vibrantly see life in those precious moments following imminent death.

We're like this, too, in many ways. We let death drive us. Or we let dead things drive us. Natural problems, circumstances, situations. And when we cry out to the Lord for salvation, we don't even realize that our death has been buried in the cross, that we don't have to run from death anymore, that what we're being freely given is life.

But we still crave death. Even if that death is bondage.

I discovered something pretty interesting while I was preparing this talk. I looked up Israelites Escape From Egypt online, and almost every single account I read ended after the Red Sea. For Adam, this is the natural climax of the story.

Because, think about it, no one ever makes a movie about what happens **after** death has been defeated. Imagine how boring that would be. Take the movie *Speed*, for instance. Does everyone know that film? Sandra Bullock and Keanu Reeves have to pilot a bus that's rigged to explode if it goes under 55 mph. What if in the very first scene of the movie, Keanu and Sandy succeed and everyone hops off the bus, all smiles, limbs in tact? And for the next 90 minutes, they did their laundry, cooked some pasta, finished a crossword puzzle... They just went about the business of normal life. It would literally be the most boring movie of all time. Drama and excitement are generated from the close proximity to death. We don't want to see them go about their daily routines, we want to see them strapped to the roof of the bus as it hurtles toward glorious disaster.

I guess what I'm saying is, if you'll pardon all the movie analogies, that running from death is the easy part. It's what we understand. The number one thing that drives Adam is escaping death.

Even Pharaoh seeks the Lord because of death.

Turn to Exodus 10:14

<sup>14</sup> The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled in all the territory of Egypt; *they were* very numerous. There had never been so *many* locusts, nor would there be so *many* again. <sup>15</sup> For they covered the surface of the whole land, so that the land was darkened; and they ate every plant of the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Thus nothing green was left on tree or plant of the field through all the land of Egypt. <sup>16</sup> Then Pharaoh hurriedly called for Moses and Aaron, and he said, "I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. <sup>17</sup> **Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and make supplication to the LORD your God, that He would only remove this death from me.**"

Like Pharaoh, escaping death drives us to our salvation. It drives us to the cross. But, like the Israelites escaping death is only the beginning of our story as followers of Christ.

For most of my "Christian life," I thought salvation meant escaping death. We all know the saying: Accept Christ into your heart and you'll live forever. You'll beat the zombies. You'll ride off into the sunset as the credits roll and the house lights come back up.

For much of much Christian life, I thought escaping death was the whole point. I

thought running away from death was my duty as a good follower of Christ. In that scenario, eternal life is the reward for overcoming death. It's the final act, the rolling credits, the end of the movie. Eternal life was the reward for a natural life spent overcoming death.

But let's think about that term for a moment: Eternal life. Another way to say that is total, everlasting life. Or, the complete absence of death.

Digging a bit deeper, the phrase Eternal Life does not actually signify the end of death, but rather the **absence** of it. Eternal life begins the moment death is overcome. In eternal life, death is not even part of the equation. It's not even an option. And yet we cling to it as if it has authority over our spiritual lives. We let death push us. We run from it when, in reality, it is a footnote in the story of our life in Christ.

Through our salvation in Christ, death is at the bottom of the sea, buried, an army of skeletons, never again to give chase.

But we don't really like that.

Like the Israelites, we actually crave the simplicity of running from death. To Adam, it certainly beats the alternative.

If we accept the Israelites' escape from Egypt as a type and shadow of our own salvation in Christ, we'll quickly notice that the story does not end after crossing the Red Sea and escaping death. The Israelites don't get to the other side and immediately enter the promised land. Their salvation now asks them to walk in life.

While being pursued by Pharaoh's army, the Israelites are clearly motivated to walk toward their salvation. They have a one track mind: to escape death. But when the Lord does bring them out of that death, that's when things get tricky. With death no longer at their back, they must now do something much more difficult and completely in opposition to their Adamic nature: They are asked to walk forward in faith.

Where Pharaoh's army gave the Israelites a clear motivation to move forward as one body, the absence of that death now confuses and frustrates them, causing them to wander aimlessly in the wilderness, grumbling, quarreling.

Without death at their heels, they invent their own in the form of a golden calf. They worship it because they understand it. It makes sense to them. They can control it, touch it, impose the memory of their death upon it. Even walking in the light of life, Israel cannot shake the remnants of death.

We do the same thing. Even though our salvation in Christ has taken death completely out of the picture, we still cling to it and use it as motivation. Like the Israelites, it's much easier—and I'm talking to myself here—it's much easier to run away from death than to walk in faith and life.

But if we view the escape from Egypt as a type and shadow of our own salvation, we clearly see that fleeing from death and escaping it are just the beginning. Indeed, the Israelites wandered for 40 years in the desert before entering the promised land.

Being pushed by death brings us to salvation in Christ, but walking in faith brings us into the promised land.

When we turn back to death, even from the other side of the Red Sea after Pharaoh's army has been defeated, even for a moment just to remind ourselves how lucky we are to have escaped our fate... We turn our hearts away from the reality we've been brought into in Christ. When we turn back to death, we turn our hearts away from life.

Growing up, I thought the promised land was just on the other side of the Red Sea. I thought accepting Christ into my heart was the be all and end all of the journey. Now I see that it was the end of death, the end of Adam, the end of me, and the beginning of life in Christ.

The end of death is not the fulfillment of life, but rather the beginning of it.

1<sup>st</sup> John 3:14

"We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death."