INTRODUCTION

Are you ready for a little more Exodus? Let’s open our Bibles to Exodus 13. When we left off of our series about a month ago, we saw how God had heard the cries of His people who were struggling under the oppression of Egypt and her king. They were forced to work and live in the cruelest conditions. And the people of God cried out to God, and He heard their cry, and sent them a leader by the name of Moses who would go to Pharaoh to deliver the message from God: “Let my people go that they may worship me.” Well Pharaoh didn’t obey God, and so he and the people of Egypt were struck with a series of ten plagues or judgments from the Lord.

And God commanded the Hebrews to prepare for exodus. At long last He was about to deliver His people. The night before God gave to His people a special ceremony they were to observe that night, and for the generations to come. It was called the Passover. The angel of the Lord went through Egypt and killing the first born of the Egyptians, but He spared the households of the Israelites where the blood of the Lamb sacrificed for the Passover was brushed on the doorframes of their houses.

The next morning the Israelites marched out of Egypt headed toward the new life God had for His people. They were delivered. Delivered!

That's what the book of Exodus is all about. The name "exodus" means "the way out." It tells us how God made a way out of bondage for His people. And it points toward the deliverance that would be revealed in latter times through the Lord Jesus Christ … our Passover Lamb who was sacrificed to save us from our sins, and to put the past behind us.

Note: That’s good news for us at the beginning of a new year. We think about the mistakes and our failures in the past year. God can and will deliver us from the power of the past.

That's why God gave us the book of Exodus … to show us how to exit the life of bondage and how to enter the life of blessing. It’s about leaving the past behind, but also about moving forward in faith. That’s what I want us to talk about this morning … moving forward in faith.


The Israelites have so much to learn. They were just leaving Egypt where they had been leaderless for centuries. They saw themselves as slaves and victims of the tyranny of the world’s most powerful nation, Egypt. That’s all they had ever known. They had not experienced the awareness of the direct activity of God in their midst. They had never possessed military arms … wouldn’t know what to do with them. They were not used to God’s direct guidance, and understood little of His power and His presence.
Now all of that was about to change. They were moving out and moving forward as a new people with a new identity and a new destiny. But God would have to lead them through some more adversity for them to learn what He wanted to teach them.

In one night God took Israel out of Egypt; but it would take the next 40 years to get Egypt out of Israel. God delivered Israel out of bondage, so that He might deliver them into a blessing (the Promised Land).

The same is true for us. We are not just saved from something; we are saved for something. Do you get that? There’s a life God is calling us to that is not just sitting around waiting to go to heaven when we die, but a life of fullness now. But this life of fullness comes through God’s working on us every day we live.

Note: We need to move forward. There are things in the past that can weigh us down … past failures, past sins, past mistakes, past setbacks. But also we can be weighed down with the blessings of the past … and we live longing for the “good old days;” but God says, “I have so much more for you.”

God is forever pressing us to move forward in our life with Him. And our hope for the future is rooted in our confidence in God, not in ourselves. So the Israelites leaving Egypt show us how we can move forward into a new year with confidence in …

1. **GOD’S PRESENCE**

   **Exodus 13:17 (NIV)** - When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, “If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.”

   The thing we have to see from the beginning is that this was not just a group of people who decided they were fed up with being pushed around by the Egyptians and said, “We’re out of here.” It wasn’t just a charismatic leader named Moses who stepped up, like Martin Luther King, and said “I have a dream.” No, this was the activity of Almighty God who saw the hopeless, helpless condition of His people and moved to set them free. They could never do this without His presence among them.

   Oh how we must have this vision of a “present” God, not an “absent” God. All the things that will happen to Israel over the next 40 years will be presided over by an ever-present God.

   When you go through difficult times, God is there. Trust Him. When you go through times of blessing, God is there. Thank Him.

   We may not understand the way God takes us in life. But it is enough to know that He is with us. We’ll come back to this in a moment.

We move forward with faith in God’s presence, but also with faith in …

2. **GOD’S WISDOM**
Exodus 13:17 (NIV) - When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, “If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.”

Have you ever asked God, “Are you sure you know where You’re going?”

ILLUSTRATION – I remember a couple of years ago I was in India. Normally when we’re there the India Baptist Society has a driver for us, but for some reason I needed to go somewhere and the driver wasn’t available, so I hailed an auto-rickshaw … something like a tiny Moped with a passenger compartment built on top of it. I had one of my friends who spoke Kannada tell the driver where I needed to go. So off we went. I basically knew the route to where I needed to go, but it was apparent to me from the beginning that this driver wasn’t going the way that was familiar to me. We were turning on streets and going through neighborhoods I had never seen before. And these thoughts began to race through my head, “Did he misunderstand my friend when he told him where I wanted to go? Is he going to drop me off somewhere in the middle of this city of 3 million people where I won’t have a clue how to get back to where I am staying?” And I prayed hard! India traffic will do that for you. But to my amazement, my little Indian driver pulled up at my destination … and I gave him a big tip.

Sometimes we may wonder if God knows where He’s going. Did He hear you clearly when you told Him where you wanted to go?

We can see here the wisdom of God manifested in His active involvement in the lives of His people. God was not just present; He was acting in wisdom in their behalf. God is the only-wise God. That means that God always knows the right and the best way for something to be done. And He always acts in accordance with that right and best way. That’s wisdom. It’s not wisdom simply when you know what is the right and the best way to go. It’s wisdom when you actually do the right thing and go the right way.

Now if God had been consulting with military strategists, they would have disagreed with the evacuation route that God chose for His people. In short … it was too long. By conventional wisdom, it was way out of the way. But God is all-wise. He knows the plans He has for us His people, and it’s not just to get us somewhere quickly or with the greatest ease.

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) - For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

God knew that He took His people along the regular highway; it would take them right into the territory of the Philistines.

Exodus 13:18 (NIV) - So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle.

Exodus 13:18b (NIV) - The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle.
The NIV doesn’t really translate this well. Literally it means that they were organized in squads like an army (literally, “organized by fives”). So they were formed for battle, but they were definitely not trained for battle. God had some training to do before they would be ready for that.

Incidentally, the route we’re talking about would have taken Israel to the location of the present day Gaza Strip where a great conflict is going on. And that’s the way it has always been … the way of war. Well God knew that His people were not ready for that kind of combat yet. So He didn’t lead them that way.

APPLICATION: You know, there are times when we wonder, “God why don’t you answer my prayers? Why don’t you give me that promotion I’ve been wanting?” It doesn’t occur to us that the all-wise God knows something we don’t know. He knows that job will put us into something we’re not ready for. Or He knows that there is something He wants to do in our life, and it will take our going a different path for Him to teach us that.

Sometimes we think we know the best way for our lives to go … and if it’s not a straight line we think we are out of the will of God, or something’s wrong. It’s fun to talk to a godly saint toward the end of their life’s journey and to hear them talk about how all the twist and turns in their life seemed so unnecessary at the time, but on looking back they could see the hand of an all-wise God leading them.

Listen, if we allow God to lead us and direct our paths, we may expect to be led sometimes down a path that seems unnecessarily long or out of the way. In times like that, we need to be reminded that God knows what He is doing. He isn’t in a hurry. He’s working in our lives according to a perfect plan. That’s the excitement of walking with God. We don’t know the way, but we know Him.

3. GOD’S FAITHFULNESS

Exodus 13:19 (NIV) - Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place.”

Now this may seem a little out of place in the narrative. But it’s an important reminder. Israel was God’s covenant people. Israel’s (Jacob’s) son Joseph was the first to arrive in Egypt, hundreds of years before Moses came on the scene. Joseph ended up in Egypt by what may appear to be a huge accident or mistake. But it wasn’t. Joseph’s brothers sold him to a bunch of slave traders who ultimately sold him to Potiphar, the leader of Egypt at the time. But Joseph remained faithful and was in place when God used circumstances to bring Jacob and the rest of his family to Egypt. That’s where it all started for Israel in Egypt hundreds of years before Moses and the Exodus.

Joseph understood the promises of God. He knew that God would one day fulfill His promise to Abraham to bring the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land.

ILLUSTRATION: God is faithful, and we need people around us who remind us of that. There are times when I get a little discouraged. And in times like that I need to look at some people who
remind me of the faithfulness of God. I look around this room and I see some of you who are such a testimony to God’s faithfulness to heal, or to deliver, or to provide … and that encourages me.

At times I need to look at some projects that remind me of the faithfulness of God. Whenever I walk through the Welcome Center, or the Children’s Ministry Center, I remember how we threw ourselves on the faithfulness of God and He showed Himself faithful.

Don’t forget the past. It is an important anchor. Joseph was a man of faith in the past. He knew God would deliver. We need to cherish the tradition of faith in our families and in our church.

So God’s people move forward in faith … faith in God’s presence, God’s wisdom, God’s faithfulness, and in …

4. GOD’S GUIDANCE

Now we’ve seen this all through the text so far this morning, but now let’s talk about it in more detail.

**Exodus 13:20 (NIV)** - After leaving Succoth they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert.

So there the people of God are camped looking out over the wilderness that is before them. They’ve never been this way before. How would they make it? The text tells us.

**Exodus 13:21 (NIV)** - 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 that they could travel by day or night.

The nation was guided by a pillar or column of cloud by day that became a pillar of fire at night. Perhaps you might think of it as a tornado. We’ll see later how the pillar was seen as an angel of the Lord. Occasionally God even spoke through the pillar. So God directly guided His people in this way. When it moved, they moved.

The cloud-like pillar appeared as a column of dark cloud during the day, and a column of fire at night. God’s guidance was clear. The pillar was a manifestation of God Himself, guiding His people.

They knew all day, every day, God was with them. They could go on this uncertain course because they were assured of the guidance of God. They could travel, they could journey, in the light of God’s guidance.

**Exodus 13:22 (NIV)** - Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

Now we don’t have this kind of direct physical guidance today. But what we do have is the Word of God. The Bible says about itself: “Your Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path,”

There are times when we don’t know which way to go, but God will guide by His Spirit and by His Scripture.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Thomas Merton was a Catholic monk who lived in the first part of the 20th century. In his book *Thoughts in Solitude*, Thomas Merton wrote fifteen lines that have become known as "the Merton Prayer:

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.”

That a great prayer for the new year!