

Faithful Travelers On A Spiritual Journey

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Have you ever stopped to think about life as a journey? Well, if you have been in the church for any length of time, the answer would be yes to that, one filled with purpose, direction, and a glorious destination. The Bible reminds us that we are not standing still. We are moving forward where we should be. Like faithful pilgrims of old, we are traveling towards something far greater than anything this world has to offer—a Kingdom prepared by God Himself.

Please turn with me to II Peter 3. The apostle Peter encourages us not only to be aware of the challenges along the way, but to look forward with anticipation and hope. And even in a world full of distractions and uncertainty, we are called to grow, to stay grounded, and to keep moving ahead with confidence. What a powerful truth this is!

Our journey is not random; it is guided. Our struggles are not meaningless; they are shaping us. And our destination is not uncertain; it is promised. So today, let us lift our eyes beyond the present moment and embrace the journey with renewed faith and rejoice in the incredible future God has planned for us.

Peter encourages us to continue our spiritual growth. In II Peter 3, verses 17 and 18, he says,

II Peter 3:17-18 You therefore, beloved, since you know beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

So Peter emphasizes that we face a real danger. Even though we may be righteous individuals, we still face real danger—the risk of being misled by the ways of the ungodly, even if we are currently firm. His warning

highlights that spiritual stability must be actively maintained through continuous growth in grace and knowledge. As a reminder of how to combat these redirections, Peter tells us repeatedly to look forward to God's Kingdom.

And here in II Peter 3, we are going to go back a few verses to verses 11 through 15.

II Peter 3:11-15 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of the Lord, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.

So the Days of Unleavened Bread represent the Israelites' eager anticipation of the Promised Land as a type of our looking forward to God's Kingdom. And we walk by faith, not by sight, which requires a deep reserve of faith. And everyone who is faithful to God can look forward to this peace and joy.

Unleavened bread symbolizes both pilgrimage and judgment, as well as corruption. As a symbol of pilgrimage, it is associated, of course, with the Exodus. Now the Israelites, rushing to leave Egypt, took their dough before it was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes and on their shoulders (you find that in Exodus 12:34), leaving slavery behind as a pilgrim people.

Although the words pilgrim and pilgrimage are missing from most English translations of the Bible, the concept remains central to being a follower and worshipper of God. A very simple definition: a worshipper and follower of God. Pilgrimage also signifies broader meanings of faith and trust that define God's people across all times.

In both testaments, pilgrimage serves as a metaphor for the pattern of earthly life for anyone moving toward God's Kingdom. In all instances, the concept implies a journey to a sacred place. And both aspects are essential. The pilgrim is always a traveler, but a fixed, glorious goal is always the destination that motivates the journey.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread is a reminder of Israel's pilgrim character. It commemorates the hurried departure and rescue from Egypt and the continuing process of the Lord's deliverance of the Israelites to the Promised Land. Now it is a physical type of the church's spiritual exodus from the world, God's continuing deliverance of His church.

Please turn with me to Acts 7, verse 33. The word delivered was used by Stephen when he spoke about the Exodus to the synagogue council. Here in Acts 7, we are going to read verses 33 and 34. Remember that Stephen is telling this story, so to speak.

Acts 7:33-34 "Then the Lord said to him [that is, Moses], "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you [that is, Moses] to Egypt."

Now the overall impact of observing these unleavened days should be entirely positive and inspiring as they symbolize the root of our deliverance into God's Kingdom. There is a process of liberation from the world and our own human nature, and we are experiencing a new kind of exodus. Not literally from Egypt, but spiritually from the world. The Days of Unleavened Bread are about delivery into God's Kingdom. As God delivered the Israelites into the physical Promised Land, so we are being delivered into our spiritual Promised Land.

As Israelite men were required to travel to Jerusalem and worship there three times a year, it is reasonable to assume that other family members did so when they could. And now as spiritual Israelites, we obey God's command to keep this seven-day feast. In Exodus 23, verse 15, it says,

Exodus 23:15 You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days [that is, every day, not when you feel like it, but every day], as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty).

The Days of Unleavened Bread might seem to some to have a slightly negative aspect because of de-leavening, which involves removing something we tend to enjoy from our lives. We must give up something for these seven days, and Peter explains this as a spiritual principle in I Peter 2. Peter says,

I Peter 2:11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

Now turn with me to I Corinthians 5, verse 6. The apostle Paul pointed out in I Corinthians 5:6-8 that the Corinthian church should have known how God would judge and discipline the perverse situation in their midst. But since the self-styled ignoring members apparently did not have a local minister, they should have stopped the presumptuous offenders from attending.

I Corinthians 5:6-8 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

By using the Exodus model and linking it to behavior that demonstrates new life in Christ, Paul connects the ideas of pilgrimage and influence. Christian pilgrims are to live in ways in which the old leaven is nonexistent. Additionally, he mentions in Galatians 5:9, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." which reflects his concern about the Corinthian brothers' tolerance of blatant sin at that time.

Now in God's plan of salvation, the seven-day period symbolizes the beginning of judgment on the church, emphasizing that we are pilgrims

whose true citizenship is in heaven. Like the Israelites, our journey toward the Kingdom of God is often indirect, filled with challenges, requiring trust in God's guidance through uncertain circumstances.

God actively leads, corrects, and refines us to promote spiritual growth and salvation, and as a result, we are called to live set apart, maintaining a distinct sanctified way of life that keeps us focused on our divine purpose rather than worldly distractions. And there certainly are a lot of worldly distractions coming at us so fast it is like a flood.

Moses and Joshua knew the location and significance of the Promised Land, understanding that their deliverance from Egypt was eventually meant to lead them there. Although Moses initially did not travel directly toward Canaan, he trusted God's guidance even without knowing every detail of the journey. So the Exodus highlights both the faith required to follow God's direction and the trust that God would solve the immense logistic challenge of moving millions of people who had to daily manage travel, provisions, and camp life throughout their journey.

Now this draws a parallel between the Israelites' journey and our Christian life, emphasizing that while we know our destination—the Kingdom of God—we do not know the exact path to get there. I mean, we do know it is a straight path and we do have God's instruction. But through life, there are many challenges that come up that sometimes misdirect us. This highlights the need for faith and flexibility and obedience, especially when the direction is unclear. And since we walk by faith rather than sight, we must trust God's continual guidance on our journey, confident that He is skillfully directing both our individual lives and the whole church toward His intended purpose, toward His will.

Now we can encounter God anywhere at any time, but we know that attending Sabbath services helps us step back from the busyness of life into a place where we can find peace and pray and worship together. And we find real joy in praying and singing and teaching and preaching and fellowshiping on the Sabbath and holy days.

Please turn with me to Psalm 84, verse 5. The heartfelt pilgrim cries, "Happy are those. . . in whose heart are the highways of Zion. (ESV)" The psalmist

expresses the excitement and blessing of the journey, and those who journey to Zion to worship are blessed. So Zion is a symbol, a metaphor, or a code word for Jerusalem or God's throne, the Temple, God's Kingdom, God's government. Here in Psalm 84, we are going to read verses 5 through 7.

Psalm 84:5-7 Blessed is the man whose strength is in You [that is, the Lord], whose heart is set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca [and it is not for sure where that valley is, but it is assumed that it is a very dry valley], they make it a spring [God makes it a spring]; the rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion.

So the pilgrims' strength comes from God, who supports them on their journey. The highways are in their hearts, which means they genuinely want to go. And God clearly states that pilgrimages to worship and make offerings on holy days in Jerusalem or wherever God places His name are required.

Now the journey to the Promised Land—that is God's Kingdom for us—is filled with difficult times of struggle and tears that people must face on their way to meet God in His temple. Becoming stronger in God's presence is often preceded by our journey through futile places in our lives, times where we are just not really growing. And those who enjoy spending time in God's presence will see difficult times as opportunities to experience His faithfulness and blessings again. And if you are going through your own struggles today, make sure you are moving toward God and not away from Him.

The faithful traveler is strongly committed to worshipping God at the Temple.

Psalm 84:10-12 For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You.

Verse 11 does not promise that God will give us everything that we want. We know that, but that He will not withhold what is permanently helpful to us, things having to do with our salvation, with our growth. He will provide us with the means to walk the path, but we must also do the walking. And when we obey Him, He will not hold back anything that helps us continue to live for Him.

Let us turn to Genesis 12, verse 1. One reason for the strong sense of place in worship psalms is the tradition of pilgrimage which consistently guides travelers toward a desired destination, a sacred site. For the righteous, it is God's Temple in His Kingdom. So the faithful pilgrim Abraham begins his journey by obeying the command to leave his homeland and family in response to God's promise.

Genesis 12:1-4 Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Now flip over to Genesis 47, verse 9. This kind of travel is also typical of Abraham's descendants. Jacob describes his own life and that of his ancestors as a pilgrimage.

Genesis 47:9 And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years [speaking of his whole family, his ancestry]; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage."

From the beginning, then, the life of faith is viewed as a symbolic pilgrimage.

Joseph's faithfulness influenced his entire family. Although he endured the pit and prison and likely questioned his future, he did not give in to despair. Instead, he stayed obedient to God and did what was right. And his story reminds us that even when we cannot see the results of our faith, we can trust that God honors faithfulness.

Now the prophets, especially Isaiah, use pilgrimage imagery in several ways. Though often associated with the theme of the Exodus, Isaiah's focus on pilgrimage is clear in its depiction of future salvation.

Let us turn to Isaiah 35, verse 8. God has given us His Word for guidance and direction to follow now. Some benefits of obedience are received only in the future, but we can enjoy certain benefits now as we apply God's Word in our lives today. God will make a highway for the people to reach God's Temple in His Kingdom. Here in Isaiah 35, we are going to read verses 8 through 10.

Isaiah 35:8-10 A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it; it shall not be found there. But the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

So the highway is the path for the righteous travelers leading from the wilderness of suffering to Jerusalem. It is discovered by following God; only the redeemed will travel God's highway, His highway of holiness. These travelers will be protected from wicked travelers and harmful animals on their way. And God is preparing a way for His people to travel home, and He will walk with us. He never stops pointing the way for us, and He is always beside us as we go.

So how much more of a guarantee do we need than that on where we are heading and whether we will get there or not.

Pilgrimage is also underlying in the Gospels, which highlight Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem. In Mark, this pilgrimage repeatedly emphasizes Jesus' final journey through reminders that directly connect to discipleship. Now notice the phrase in the scriptures that we will read next, on the road, on the road. We start with Mark 9, verses 33 through 35.

Mark 9:33-35 Then He [that is, Jesus] came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?" But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest [of course, speaking of the disciples, and they are traveling]. And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."

So the phrase "on the road" suggests a spiritual journey of religious travelers. And in Mark 10, just over a chapter, in verse 17, this is where Jesus counsels the rich young ruler.

Mark 10:17 Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

And then skipping down to verse 32 records that Jesus predicted His death and resurrection a third time while traveling.

Mark 10:32 Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid. And He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him.

You can see the parallels there of the Israelites' journey in the Exodus and our spiritual journey today in that just as the disciples did not know where they were going, but they were following Christ, He stopped and gave them some more directions on the direction they were headed or what their lives were ahead were like.

Please flip over to Luke 9, verses 57 through 62. Luke elaborates on this theme.

Luke 9:57-62 Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

That is quite a statement. It kind of raises the hair on the back of your neck because that is quite a terrifying statement if you are looking back.

Please turn to Luke 17, verse 28. Now we must not look back at the world and desire it as Lot's wife longingly did.

Luke 17:28-32 Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built [going through normal daily lives, but to the extreme because God was not in their minds]; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. Remember Lot's wife.

That is a powerful statement, a powerful warning.

Now turn over to II Peter 2, verse 4. God knows how to deliver those who overcome sin and reverence Him. We will read verses 4 through 9.

II Peter 2:4-8 For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved [or you could put in the word delivered] Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)—

I think we can relate to that, especially when the holy days come around and we are focused on the right thing. In verse 9,

II Peter 2:9 then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust for punishment for the day of judgment.

So just as God delivered Lot, He can also deliver us from the temptations and trials we face in this wicked world. Although Lot was not sinless, he trusted in God and was spared when Sodom was destroyed and God delivered him to a better place, considering him righteous. God will judge those who cause temptation and trials, so we never need to worry about whether justice will be served on those people who try to lead us astray because God says, Justice is Mine; I will repay. God's deliverance of the righteous shows that He can rescue us when we are tempted and that He knows the best way to do so. He sees a solution when we cannot, even if it is often one we would not have thought of.

Whenever we find ourselves tempted or headed the wrong way or thinking the wrong thought, the first thing we should do is pray and ask God to help us. Either we ask God to rebuke Satan if it is that serious or to help us to resist and overcome it.

Throughout the Bible, the faithful who follow and obey and submit to God are pictured as either literal or figurative pilgrims. They are people of the Way, people journeying rather than settled, still looking for the spiritual place that will satisfy them.

Luke continues in Acts where the Christian movement of sojourners is referred to as the Way, and you are very familiar with the Way as the designation of God's people. In Acts 19, Luke writes,

Acts 19:9 But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.

Acts 22:4 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

In John's gospel, Jesus Himself declares He is the pilgrim's path to the Father.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Now please turn to Hebrews 11, verse 8. The book of Hebrews repeatedly depicts the Christian life as a pilgrimage, often returning to biblical heroes who undertook such a journey of faith. Abraham obeyed God and was called to travel, as I mentioned earlier in the sermon.

Hebrews 11:8-10 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

So his descendants were strangers, foreigners, and pilgrims. Yet they saw God's promise from a distance. And then in verse 13 it says,

Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

So our awareness that we are strangers and pilgrims might be forced upon us by circumstances. It may come late in life or develop throughout hardship and trial, yet the truth remains this world is not our home, and we cannot stay here forever. Therefore, we must be cautious not to become so attached to this world's desires and possessions that we are unwilling or unable to move forward at God's command. Continuing on in verses 14 through 16,

Hebrews 11:14-16 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

And that is the city of the living God.

These faithful individuals died without receiving everything God promised, yet they never lost focus on His Kingdom. Sometimes we get frustrated or discouraged when our needs and expectations and hopes are not immediately fulfilled after we are called to Christ. Impatience can take hold, and the goal might seem out of reach, tempting us to give up, but we should draw strength from these faithful people who lived and died without seeing the full outcome of their faith on earth, yet continued trusting in God unwaveringly.

Many of God's devoted people were compelled to wander because of persecution or other circumstances beyond their control. Continuing on in Hebrews 11, we are going to read verses 37 to 40.

Hebrews 11:37-40 They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good

testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

So many assume that pain is unusual in a Christian life. When suffering arises, they ask, "why me?" and may feel that God has abandoned them or is less reliable than they once thought. We live in a wicked world where suffering is widespread even for believers. Yet God remains in control, and He allows some Christians to become martyrs for the faith, while others endure and survive persecution.

Instead of asking why me, it is more helpful to ask, "why not me?"

Our faith and the values of this world are on a collision course, and if we expect hardship, we will not be shocked when it comes. At the same time, we can take comfort in knowing that Jesus suffered as well. He understands our fears and our weaknesses and our disappointments. He has promised never to leave us, and He intercedes on our behalf. Therefore, in times of pain and persecution and suffering, we should place our trust confidently in Christ, who feels our pain.

Considering this heritage and pattern, we are urged to lay aside every weight as we journey toward our goal, which is not the earthly Zion but the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.

Now please turn back over to I Peter 2, verse 11. Peter's first epistle also refers to the called-out ones as travelers, and Peter addresses the Christian communities depicting them as pilgrims and strangers living as exiles because of social alienation, widespread societal persecution, and other things that our present culture does in the opposite direction of God's way of life.

Now here in I Peter 2, we are going to read verses 11 and 12; we already read verse 11 before but I am going to read it again. And this part of these scriptures here in my Bible is captioned Living Before the World.

I Peter 2:11-12 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your

conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

So Peter expresses his attitude toward the world in the next verse, verse 13, saying he writes from Babylon, again referencing the early history and pattern of God's wandering people. Physical effort is required of the church just as there was for Noah and his family when God rescued them from the corrupt world and delivered them to the new water-washed world. There was physical effort required by Moses and the Israelites when God rescued them from Egypt and delivered them to the Promised Land. Ironically, centuries later, God delivered Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to Egypt to protect them from Herod's order to kill the children. So it is interesting how God had flipped that in the opposite direction.

God's deliverance requires us to submit to His will, and anyone God cannot rule will not receive salvation. Our deliverance has conditions. We must be teachable, and God evaluates our mental effort and hopefully counts us worthy of delivery.

The next effort is the physical effort to go when we are stirred to action, when we are inspired to reject the world and follow Christ. Now it is important to realize that God does not simply deliver on demand. In Numbers 14:39-45, when Israel, after recanting their initial response to the spy report, went up against the Amalekites and Canaanites, and they were soundly defeated. And God does not deliver a disobedient, faithless people. He instead delivers them into the hands of their enemy.

This is the first of Israel's great lessons in no-deliverance. Those who presume on God will have their expectations reversed, as Amos later put it. Those disobedient people who long for the Day of the Lord, that is, the day of God's wrath, will receive darkness.

A no-deliverance theme is also used by the prophets. For Isaiah, it depicts Israel's plight in the absence of God's action because of their obstinate disobedience.

Isaiah 42:21-22 The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will exalt the law and make it honorable. But this is a people robbed and plundered; all of them are snared in holes, and they are hidden in prison houses; they are for prey, and no one delivers; for plunder, and no one says, "Restore!"

Hosea depicts God as a lion to Ephraim and Judah, tearing them to pieces and carrying them off with no one to deliver them. And Micah sees the nations treating the remnant of Jacob like a lion among the flock, mauling and mangling as it goes, and no one can deliver.

On the other hand, the stories of deliverance of righteous Israelites in a foreign nation demonstrates God's power to deliver His faithful ones who obey and trust the God of Israel. God's deliverance of Israel sets the tone for the different psalms that describe the mighty acts of God.

Psalms 107 presents four stories of liberation from wandering in the wastelands, from imprisonment, from suffering caused by rebellion, and from the dangers of the sea. In each story, the people cried out to the Lord in their distress, and He delivered them from their trouble.

Psalms 91 speaks of various terrors, deadly pestilence and plague, the terror of night and the flying arrow by day, the fearsome lion and cobra that might befall us, but it firmly assures that those who love God will be delivered. And there in Psalm 91, verses 14 through 16, the psalmist writes,

Psalm 91:14-16 "Because he [that is, the servant of God] has set his love upon Me [the Lord], therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation."

So very encouraging.

The spiritual process of this delivery is justification, then sanctification, and then salvation. God's deliverance of Israel also depends on timing. His power to act is unquestionable. He is the God of Israel's exodus. In Isaiah 50, verse 2, Isaiah quotes God's rhetorical question,

Isaiah 50:2 Is My hand shortened at all that I cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver?

Please turn over to Psalm 144. Several biblical terms are used interchangeably to describe God's gracious act of removing us from harm. There are words such as rescue and save and deliver, just to name a few. Here in Psalm 144, we are going to read verses 7 to 11.

Psalm 144:7-11 Stretch out Your hand from above; rescue me and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of foreigners, whose mouth speaks lying words, and whose right hand is the right hand of falsehood. I will sing a new song to You, O God; on a harp of ten strings I will sing praises to You, the One who give salvation to kings, who delivers David His servant from the deadly sword. Rescue me and deliver me from the hand of foreigners, whose mouth speaks lying words, and whose right hand is the right hand of falsehood.

So deliverance is in many ways similar to rescue, although the image of rescue often implies an immediate or impending danger, a perilous situation, or a desperate effort to save from harm. Deliverance also often involves individuals who are overwhelmed or unable to reach their destination on their own.

The Bible is full of stories and pictures of deliverance, as we have already seen, and it is a collection of liberation stories shared by people who experienced great deliverance and wanted us to receive it as well. The Bible, from the expulsion from the Garden of Eden to the establishment of God's Kingdom headquarters in New Jerusalem, can be seen as a story of deliverance, a story of the fate of pilgrims. The Bible tells a story of humankind going astray, taking the entire creation with it, and God working to save His creation from its corrupt and destructive path.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants, Israel, became God's chosen people in God's plan of liberation. However, Israel went astray just like the rest of the world, and a final hero rose from Israel—Jesus, who brought this dramatic process to its peak and will bring it to its end. Much of the New Testament highlights the significance of the crucifixion and resurrection in its great deliverance and how a redeemed people can live as those who will one day inherit and inhabit a new creation.

But the Bible also contains many smaller episodes of deliverance, some of which foreshadow the major difference made possible by the crucifixion and resurrection. It offers a renewed sense of hope and a great appreciation for the value of life, and this lesson is especially learned from the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Paul reminds us that even when we are at the end of our rope, hope is never gone. Our mortal bodies are prone to sin and suffering, but God never leaves us. Because Christ conquered death and lives in us, we enjoy eternal life dwelling with us through Him in that sense.

All our risks, humiliations, and trials become opportunities for Christ to demonstrate His power and presence through us.

II Corinthians 4:11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

So this U-shaped pattern is ironically illustrated in the story of Christ, the Deliverer, because Jesus the Deliverer must dive into the depths of human difficulty to bring human victims to new life in God's Kingdom. He has experienced what we experienced and He knows how to get us through. In Philippians 2:5-11, Paul emphasizes that Christ Jesus descended, from being in the form of God and equal with God, to taking on human likeness and servitude, even to the point of suffering the terrible death on the cross, and then He was highly exalted to universal Lordship.

Adam and Eve fell from a privileged position seeking to be like God to a state of servitude and bondage to death. Christ the Deliverer will finally raise

the children of Adam and Eve. In this depiction of victorious salvation, Christ the Deliverer descends from a higher place than Adam and goes to the lowest depths to rescue those who would otherwise be lost—hopelessly lost.

The first major salvation story in the Bible is God's rescue of Noah and his family and the animals through the great Flood and God's deliverance of them into the new world. In this story, the world has become hopelessly mired in sin and God chose one man in His Family as a sort of new Adam, whom He delivered from a great judgment and brought safely to the other side.

Now please turn with me to I Peter 3, verse 18. In the New Testament, this deliverance is understood as a foreshadowing of the ultimate deliverance of God's people from a universal judgment. We are going to read verses 18 to 21.

I Peter 3:18-21 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved [or delivered] through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So Noah and his family were saved through water, an image that clearly points us to baptism, and baptism too is part of God's magnificent work of deliverance. Just as the waters of the Flood marked the passage from judgment to salvation for Noah, so the waters of baptism signify our passage from the old life into the new. In this way, the water of the Flood corresponds in profound and purposeful ways to the water we pass through in baptism, both standing as witness to God's saving power and gracious intervention.

Now Peter does not say that it corresponded in all aspects, for example, in respect to quantity or to the manner of the application or to the effectiveness,

but there is a sense in which water plays an important part in our salvation. For baptism to be valid, it must be accompanied by genuine repentance and faith in Christ. It involves turning away from sin and living under the influence of God's Spirit. It is an act of unreserved dedication to God.

Sadly, Noah's descendants after the Flood degenerated into godless rebellion. Additionally, the judgment of Babel, which introduced many different languages, fractured humanity into many nations. In this, God temporarily delivered humanity from its own imminent destruction. God used the languages as a wall of separation.

In the New Testament, the greatest example of deliverance is, of course, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus was arrested, tried, crucified, dead, and sealed in a tomb. He was like Israel with no one to deliver Him immediately, but God raised Him from the dead, exalted Him, and enthroned Him at His right hand with His enemies under His feet. The Old Testament stories of divine deliverance, particularly the Exodus and return from exile, provide a key for understanding this great deliverance, as we have seen.

Now Ezekiel's vision of a valley of dry bones coming to life in Ezekiel 37:1-14 is a prominent instance of the metaphor of death and resurrection applied to Israel's exile and restoration.

Please turn with me to Romans 8, verse 20. Now, in His own death and resurrection, Jesus summarized Israel's story of exile and complete restoration. The return from exile, which Israel has never fully experienced, is highlighted.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the firstfruits' hope for the redemption of God's people. His deliverance includes everyone who follows Him. And through His deliverance, the entire created order finds hope for salvation from death and decay. Here in Romans 8, we are going to read verses 20, 21, 24, and 25.

Romans 8:20-21 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Romans 8:24-25 For we were saved [that is, delivered] in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

So patience and perseverance are qualities that every Christian should be developing. And I think patience is one that we develop till the day we die. It is so hard. Sometimes our trials are so difficult that only the hopeful anticipation of future relief keeps us going. And that hope is enough to help us endure with faith and hope and patience.

Please turn over to II Timothy 4, verse 17. Now Paul confirms that the Lord is faithful in delivering us and He will preserve us for our destination, that is, God's Kingdom. We will read verses 17 and 18.

II Timothy 4:17-18 But the Lord stood with me [that is, Paul] and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear it. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!

So Paul used the illustration of deliverance to speak of the work of Jesus Christ as a new exodus, and it seems Timothy felt uncertain about himself because Paul, his mentor, was in prison and his church was experiencing turmoil. So Paul appears to be subtly telling Timothy, "The Lord has called you to preach, and He will give you the courage to do so."

God also provides us with the strength to follow His commands. However, this strength might not be visible until we step out on faith and start doing the job. Paul was probably literally delivered out of the mouth of lions because Nero at that time often had Christians killed by throwing them to the lions in the Colosseum. It was not only there that they were thrown to lions, and so possibly Paul was in a situation like that. It is amazing looking at the list of the trials that he had to go through. It would be almost surprising that that was not one of them because everything else seems to be included. Like the psalmists who speak of God's deliverance as both a national and a

personal reality, Paul shows that he lived with confidence in God's deliverance.

In Galatians 1, verse 4, Paul talks about Jesus Christ giving Himself as a freewill offering for our sins to deliver us from this evil world. And Jesus Christ,

Galatians 1:4 who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.

In Colossians 1, verse 13, Paul writes that it is God the Father who has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son He loves. Biblical phrases like present evil age and dominion of darkness imply an oppressive system that we are trapped in, in desperate need of rescue from the world and delivery into God's Kingdom. Psalm 34:7 says, "The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them."

Please turn to Isaiah 52, verse 7. Now God will provide divine protection along the way as He gathers His people from the four corners of the earth in the final universal pilgrimage. We are going to read verses 7 through 12.

Isaiah 52:7-12 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" Your watchmen shall lift up their voices, with their voices they shall sing together, for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord brings back Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem! The Lord has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. Depart! Depart! Go out from there, touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her. Be clean, you who bear the vessels of the Lord. For you shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight; for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

Although it does not explicitly mention pilgrimage, the idea functions as a central theme for the salvation pattern that it describes. The long-awaited message of peace and good news and salvation is summed up in one joyful cry, "Your God reigns!" The victory of God over every oppression is a reality.

Let us begin to wrap this up. As we reflect on this journey of faith, the one truth that seems to rise above all others: we are not wandering aimlessly, we are being led. Every step, every trial, every moment of growth is part of God's great work of deliverance in our lives.

Like the faithful pilgrims before us, we may not always see the full path ahead, but we know the destination. A city prepared by God, a Kingdom filled with righteousness and peace and everlasting joy—and that hope changes everything.

So let us press forward with confidence. Let us lay aside every weight and all traces of old leaven and walk with sincerity and truth. Let us embrace our calling as pilgrims, people of the Way who trust and obey and endure.

Even when the road is difficult, remember this: God goes before you and He stands behind you. He strengthens you when you are weak. He guides you through uncertainty and delivers you in His perfect time. And one day because of His faithfulness we will arrive not weary, not defeated, but refined and restored and rejoicing.

Keep walking, keep growing, and keep believing because the journey is certain and the destination is glorious!