

Twelve Words Disciple Makers Love
Kenwood Baptist Church Summer Sermon Series
Pastor David Palmer
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TEXT: Exodus 14:1-14



Good morning, Beloved. Let's turn our attention to God's Word together this morning. We are in a summer series called "12 Words Disciple Makers Love." When we follow Jesus, it requires us to gain some new vocabulary. This new vocabulary helps us as a church to be on mission together. Each week we are exploring a significant word in Scripture, a word that people who love discipleship grow to love. We will offer a working definition of these words to support this disciple-making culture at Kenwood.

Our word for this Sunday is one of our most important words of all. It is the word "salvation." When we think of salvation, there is a lot that might come rushing to our minds. I want to offer to us this working definition:

"Salvation is God's rescue from sin, death, and the devil, bringing us into His family by grace and binding us to Himself in covenant."

This definition reminds us what salvation actually is. We're talking about a divine rescue from danger. You and I are in great danger apart from God's intervention in our lives. We are in a situation from which we need to be rescued.

Great rescue theologians throughout the centuries have labeled these “The Big Three:”

1. **We need to be rescued from sin.** Sin is within us. You can commit sin, but you can also suffer the consequence of sin. You can be sinned against and that can wreak havoc on your life.
2. **We need to be rescued from the ultimate consequence of sin, which is death.** Death, believe it or not, is an unnatural state. You and I are created with not only a longing to live forever, but a real desire to live forever. Eternal life is the outcome of salvation. We need to be rescued from death in its unnatural state. God is the God of life, and death does not belong in God's presence.
3. **We also need to be rescued from the devil,** the power of the adversary of our souls who accuses us before God.

We need to be rescued **from** these, but we also need to be brought forward **into** something better. Salvation is not just forgiveness of sins so we can go on with our lives. Salvation is not rescue so we can just be given a second chance. Salvation is God's saving action to pull us out of danger and bring us into His family and then not only to bring us into His family but to bind us together with Him forever in covenant.

So to understand salvation, we want to let God set the template for how we picture this, because the way that salvation is introduced to us in the Bible is in the great salvation act of the exodus. So we're going to go back to Exodus.

Exodus is the Greek name for the second book of the Bible. If you go to Greece today and you look at a room, all the red signs in rooms say *Exodus*. It's as if biblical allusions are being built everywhere into the culture. But the Greek word *exodus* just means “exit,” or “a way out.” It is the Septuagint name for the second book of the Bible. In Hebrew, this book is called “Names”, *Shimote*. These are the names, because central to the book of Exodus are not only the names of the people who are rescued, but there is the great revelation of the name of God in Exodus 3.

There is one large figure in the book of Exodus whose name is not recorded, and that is the name of Pharaoh. It is very important to observe in the book that Pharaoh's name is forgotten and God's name is remembered. And so are ours.

So we are jumping right into the middle of this story. It is the second book of the Bible. There have been ten plagues of Egypt. There have been four hundred years of slavery. God has come to rescue us, to deliver us, to bring salvation. In Exodus 13, we depart from the land after celebrating the Passover. That is where we are picking up the story. It looks really good. But, in Exodus 14:2, the Lord speaks to Moses:

"Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea."

This is the terrifying moment of the story. We are actually in the clear. We have already left Egypt. And now the Lord tells Moses, tell the people to turn around and encamp in front of these fortress cities. Pi-hahiroth, Migdol, and Baal-zephon are all fortress cities along the route



that would take us expeditiously to the land of promise. If we remind ourselves of the geography of Egypt, remember that Egypt has the gift of the Nile. If you look at Egypt while you're flying over it, it is very obvious why the Nile makes such a big difference. The Nile regularly floods every year. You can grow three cycles of crops in Egypt as the river overflows into the Nile Delta. The Nile River flows north, so Upper Egypt is

actually in the south. Lower Egypt is in the north.

But in Exodus 13 we have left and we are headed toward the wilderness area. It is a seven day walk along what the Egyptians called the Way of Horus to the land of promise. In Exodus 13, it looks like we made it. God rescued us. We are leaving. Then, all of a sudden, God says, "Actually, turn back around and pin yourself in at the sea." God tells the people to turn back. We turn around and we get pinned in in this series of lakes and marshy areas, and all of a sudden our rescue is in doubt.



Pharaoh draws the wrong conclusion from this. He says, "The Israelites are wandering around in the wilderness and they're lost. Good for me." The narrative, though, says something quite different. In Exodus 14:4, the Lord says:

"I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord."

God puts us in a position where now we are between the sea and a pursuing army. But we do what God has said, the command-fulfillment pattern: God says, "Do this." We do it.

We are encountering the language of "hardening of the heart" here. This language occurs ten times in the book of Exodus. The first five times, Pharaoh hardens his own heart. It describes his own cruelty, his own willful degeneracy, his callousness, his commitment to genocide. And then in the last five plagues, God hardens Pharaoh's heart, sealing, in a sense, a judgment against

him, but acting in such a way that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart will reveal the glory of the Lord.

When you and I read “hardening the heart,” it sometimes triggers for us a theological question of “How do I balance divine sovereignty and human responsibility?” Medieval commentators stress, “Well, Pharaoh hardened his own heart five times. That’s his free will and now it's over.” That's the medieval solution which I think is a pretty good solution.

There is another important layer to understanding this idiom, one that the Egyptians would



have understood. The heart was perceived as the center of the will, the preserver of memory. It was the only organ that was left in place during the embalming process. The Egyptian rituals of afterlife were complex and complete, and they were designed to help you make it to eternity. Central to this passage from death to life was a ceremony called the weighing of the heart. The best-preserved text of this is from the Papyrus of Ani. It

shows this scene. It is a dramatic scene in which the deceased person is standing before a scale of judgment. Anubis, the jackal-headed deity, is there holding the scales. Behind him is Thoth, who has a scribal instrument in his hand, ready to record the verdict. If the verdict is a negative, if the heart is too heavy, there is a composite creature called Amit that has all these dangerous animals combined—crocodile, hippopotamus, leopard—into one being, ready to devour you. That is a bad outcome. But when we zero in and look closely at the weighing of the heart, we see these scales. On the left, that is a heart on the scale. On the other side is a feather. That is the Egyptian symbol called *ma'at*, which is a symbol of truth and righteousness. You weigh your heart against what is right. If your heart is heavy, heavier than the feather of righteousness, you are condemned.



Most of us, in some way or another, imagine that God has something like this, that we weigh our deeds and it lurks in the back of the fallen human heart to think, “Well, have I done enough good?” Or maybe we formulate it this way: “Have I done just not too much bad?” Though it's a scale, and sometimes we do comparative shopping with salvation, we think, “Well, I've

definitely not done as much bad as some others." Have you ever heard that great line of desperation? "I'm no axe murderer." We know that really isn't the standard.

The Egyptians came up with a technique because they knew that if the heart actually told the



truth, we would all be condemned. So they came up with a strategy. It's the scarab, the heart scarab. In Egyptian tombs and graves, the scarab is placed over the heart of the deceased. It holds the heart down so that the heart doesn't tell all it knows. It is a way of concealing our deeds. On the Papyrus there are all kinds of things to say to successfully pass the test, oaths to say: "I have not done wrong." "I have not robbed." "I've not

stolen." "I have not slain people." Imagine Pharaoh trying to say that. But the scarab is there. Some of the inscriptions on the scarab set over the heart read like this: "Oh my heart which I had from my mother, the center of my being, do not stand against me as a witness. Do not oppose me in the judgment hall in the presence of the keeper of the balance," telling the heart to keep quiet.

Oh, how different this is from the God who is revealed in Scripture, Who knows the heart. God knows your heart, knows my heart, knows what I have done, knows what I have thought. The scarab is not sufficient protection for the judgment.

We read in Scripture that God "hardened the heart" of Pharaoh. The translation is to "harden the heart," but the Hebrew idiom is actually to "make the heart heavy." God is making Pharaoh's heart heavy and condemning his unrighteousness. And you know, brothers and sisters, none of us can stand on the basis of our own deeds. But the glory of the gospel of Exodus and the gospel in its full flourishing in the New Testament is that you don't need a scarab over your heart to protect you. You have something much, much greater, much, much more powerful.

Back to the story. When Pharaoh was told the people had fled, his mind changed. He said, "What have we done? We have let these people go from being our slaves." So he gathered his chariot and his army. He took six hundred chosen chariots. These are like the tanks of the ancient world. You have your normal tanks, then you have your really high-end tanks. So these are the chosen, select chariots, and all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them, with a third man, the text says. Normally chariots are driven with two, but really powerful chariots have a third man, like an officer, in them. The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. He pursued the people and the people were going out—the *ESV* says "defiantly," but the Hebrew

text says something that I think is quite a bit more beautiful. The Hebrew text says that the people were going out “with a raised hand.” We were going out with our hands up. We were going out like free people because the call is, “Let My people go so that they might worship Me.”

The exodus is not about freedom in terms of gaining autonomy. Salvation is not about forgiveness of sins so you can just live your life. Salvation is about being rescued from sin, death, and the devil so you can be brought into God's family and be bound to Him. Freedom is not the absence of commitments; it's having the right ones.

So Pharaoh pursues them with all of his army. This is a regular motif in Egyptian art. The pharaoh and his army and the pharaoh and his chariot with his bow. You can see the name of the pharaoh. When Napoleon soldiers found the art of Egypt, they saw those ovals around the royal names, and it is the Napoleon soldiers who said, “That looks like a bullet casing.” They call it a *cartouche*, which is the French word for a bullet casing. The Egyptians didn't call it a bullet casing because they didn't have guns. It is actually an elongated circle; an oval shape here directly in front of Pharaoh's face, containing his name because the pharaoh is responsible for keeping order in the whole universe. This picture of Pharaoh describes him as the one who has a mighty outstretched arm. But God in the Exodus narrative reveals Himself as the true One with an outstretched arm, mighty to save. It is one of my favorite expressions in the Bible. God has an arm that is not too short to save. God, the God of power and glory, reaches out His arm and rescues people who can't save themselves, like you, like me. God rescues us and brings us into His family.



As Pharaoh drew near, we read in Exodus 14:10:

“When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord.”

The people of Israel lift up their eyes, and we turn. We have the sea behind us, and all of a sudden, here come Pharaoh and his mighty army. We are terrified. It is not just that we are afraid; we are “greatly” afraid, as one would be if you had six hundred M1 Abrams tanks, and all the rest of the Egyptian army, the largest army in the world, rushing at you, and the sea behind

you. You'd think, "This doesn't look good. This doesn't look like the altar call at my church. This looks bad."

So we say to Moses, "We are about to die," and we ask rhetorically, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us out here to die?" Right when we are on the cusp of salvation, we can seem to appear to be dying because we assess that we are lost. In Exodus 14:12, we say to Moses:

"Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."

So we voice this devastating cry: "Wouldn't it be better to be alive and a slave?" Sometimes, right before the dawn of salvation in our lives, the old life seems tolerable, or we look at it through rose colored glasses.

Yet, how great is the work that God is about to do for us! In Exodus 14:13-14, Moses speaks:

"Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."

"Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which **He** will work for you." Salvation is God's work from start to end. You and I don't contribute to the work of salvation. This is why the Exodus introduces salvation to us in the Bible. We watch what God does on our behalf. "Stand and see the salvation God will work for you. The Lord will fight for you." What a line. The Lord will fight for you and you have only to be silent. Be quiet. Watch what God will do for you.

Let's say our working definition again together:

"Salvation is God's rescue from sin, death, and the devil, bringing us into His family by grace, and binding us to Himself in covenant."

So that is what we mean when we use the word "salvation." It is God's rescue from sin, from death, and the devil. It is God's bringing us into His family by grace.

Where is grace in the Exodus story? It's a couple of chapters earlier than ours. In Exodus 12, God had instructed the people to take a lamb and to offer that lamb as an act of worship, and to prepare and to eat the Passover lamb together, having taken a bunch of hyssop and dipped it in the blood and put the blood of the lamb over the lintel of the house. God, as He sets the template for us to see and understand salvation, shows us His grace. We do not deserve the

rescue. We are saved from judgment by the blood of the Lamb. The blood of the Lamb covers us. And when God sees the blood of the Passover Lamb, God passes over our homes.

At the end of Exodus 12, we leave Egypt, from Rameses to Succoth, these cities that we had been forced to build. We leave in this great multitude. It is a staggeringly large group. If you don't like crowds, then the Exodus is not for you. But then again, neither is the New Jerusalem, because it is going to be big. It is going to be a big city and a lot of people are going to be there. There are 600,00 heads of households. Scholars estimate this is a group of about two million. Just walking out. That is a great size group.

In addition, we read in Exodus 12:38, a mixed multitude also went up with them. Who are these people? The mixed multitude reflects the Egyptians who had seen God's power and realized that the gods of Egypt were phony, that the promises of Pharaoh could not be kept. So the Israel that makes it to the base of Mount Sinai is an international group. It is not just the biological descendants of Abraham that make it to the mountain. Exodus is about revealing God's power to save and having the nations see that and say, "The Lord, He is God." Salvation is God's rescue from sin, death, and the devil, bringing us into His family by grace and binding Himself, us to Himself in covenant. The ending of the Exodus story, the template of salvation in the Bible is to be rescued and to see our identity as God's people.

But then the story culminates in making it to the mountain where the wedding vows are exchanged. In Exodus 19:4, the Lord says:

"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself."

That's salvation. God acts, carries us. He uses the imagery of eagle's wings. Eagles teach their young how to fly by taking them up in the air, dropping them, and then the adult eagles fly in front and create a vacuum of air as the young birds learn to fly. God says, "I carried you." What a picture. It is this picture that Isaiah 40:31 recalls, that those who *"wait upon the Lord shall mount up with wings like eagles."* God carries you. You do not have to strive. You do not have to do enough good works. God forbid you ever put a scarab on your heart when you die. You do not have to do that either. What you do have to do is trust the power of the shed blood of the Passover Lamb so that God can rescue us, bring us into His family, bind us to Himself in covenant.

The Old Testament sets the template so we can see it, recognize it. Salvation climactically comes to us in a New Covenant that is made through Jesus Christ. This word "salvation" points us directly to our Savior. The word "salvation" which we read in Exodus 14, in Hebrew is *Yeshua*,

which is the very name of our Savior Jesus. The Lord told Joseph to name his son *Yesus*, Jesus, “for He will save his people from their sins.” We are to recognize salvation in Jesus in His very name. The noun “salvation” in Greek is *soteria*. The noun that is associated with that is *soter*, a Savior.

These words of Jesus, Savior, are prominent in early Christian art. You can see them around town today. You might see a bumper sticker that looks like this. It's the Greek word *ichthys*. This is a decal on a modern car. But on our trip, we saw many examples in these ancient sites, in ancient cities where Christians had scratched the fish symbol as a meeting spot in the public square. It would be like going down to Fountain Square in Cincinnati and seeing a fish sign scratched on the pavement and knowing “That's a place to meet. That is a place for community evangelism.”



You often see the fish symbol, but you also see many examples of an eight spoked wheel. This is



also an early Christian symbol. The name *ichthys* is an acronym for a set of precious words for us:

I for *Jesus*, *X* for *Xristos* (Christ);
theta, *Theou* (of God), *Yios*, the Son;
and the final *S* for *Soter*:
Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.

That is our confession.

How does the eight spoked wheel become a Christian symbol? The eight-spoked wheel, if you take the letters *iota*, *xi*, *theta*, *upsilon*, and *sigma*, and drop them on top of each other in a stack, it ends up looking like an eight-spoked wheel. You have the *iota* as the middle line, then *X* across, *theta* is the outer ring of the circle and the line across the middle, the *upsilon* is there as two lines pointing up, and then the *sigma* goes across the top, down to the center, back out, and then across the bottom. Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior. That is our confession.

We believe that salvation is God's rescue from sin, death, and the devil, bringing us into His family by grace, and binding us to Himself in covenant. The Exodus event changed Israel's calendar. It is the only time in the ancient world that a people changed their calendar based on

a historical event. Everyone else has a calendar based on the movement of the seasons. Israel's calendar starts with redemption, the saving act of God.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank You for this morning. We thank You for the word "salvation." We thank You, Jesus, that You are our Savior. We thank You that salvation is Your work, oh God, Your work alone. And we thank You that it is Your grace by which we are saved. Thank You for bringing us into Your family and for Your everlasting commitment to us as Your people. We love You Lord Jesus. You first loved us and we praise You, Lamb of God.

In Your Name, Amen.