

(Pray) Lord, May the meditations of my heart, the thoughts of my mind and the words on my lips be pleasing to You, and be profitable for instruction for all of us. In Jesus' Name – Amen.

By a show of hands how many of y'all have seen or heard of the movie "Frozen." (**raise my hand**) We have watched that movie a lot in our home, and in case you haven't heard there is a sequel coming out on November 21. As I have been thinking and praying about this week's Scripture that movie has kept popping into my head. For those of you who don't know the movie "Frozen" is a tale of two sisters. One sister has something very different about her, and she is scared of this difference because she cannot control it: Because she cannot control her difference she tries to hide it by keeping it all inside. Keeping it inside is like too much water behind too small a dam. Eventually, it is gonna break forth. This difference needs to break free, and that is very similar to the story behind this morning's verse. Letting go and overcoming the barriers that separate them from God is exactly what gives Israel her freedom in God's love, and there are more than a few barriers to break through.

The first thing we need to know about this morning's verse is the number 400. Israel had lived in Egypt for 400 years. Israel had been a part of Egyptian culture and surrounded by two full barrels of Egyptian little "g" Gods. For 400 years they had been separated from the first-hand accounts of those who had seen God working to provide for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Now the Lord God Almighty, was just another little "g" god like all of the other little "g" gods of Egypt. That is a pretty huge barrier. We get iffy and start grumbling when there's talk about making a change to Children's Sunday school. The Children of Israel were facing a much bigger change. A new Pharaoh came to power who did not know the story of how Joseph – one of Israel's sons, had saved Egypt from a terrible famine (Exodus 1:8; Genesis 41). This new Pharaoh was afraid of the Children of Israel so he put them to very hard labor, making bricks and building cities. Exodus 2:23-25 says, "the people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew their condition."

Through Moses God drew Israel out of the land of Egypt. The Egyptians did not want to let go of their Israelite slave labor, and the Israelites were so accustomed to the way they had always done things it was hard for them to let go of Egyptian culture. God brought 10 plagues upon Egypt. The first three plagues fell on the whole country of Egypt including the Israelites who did not want to listen to Moses at first (Exodus 6:12, 7-8:19). The remaining seven plagues fell on Egypt alone including the death of all the first born in Egypt. God led the Children of Israel by a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day, and then through the Red Sea on dry land. When Pharaoh and the army of Egypt tried to follow God swallowed them up in the sea. No other god had ever done anything like that before. No other god has ever done anything like that since except our God. Our God saved one extended family of some 2000 members from enslavement in arguably one of the most powerful countries of the Ancient Near East. The Children of Israel had so much to be thankful for, and they were.

As the Children of Israel stood on the bank of the Red Sea with Pharaoh's army drowned behind them they lifted up their voices and sang with Moses; Azi Vuzimwrath Yah (**repeat**). All y'all say it with me now; Azi Vuzimwrath Yah. It means God is my strength and my song. God is my strength and my song. God not only freed Israel from the grasp of Egypt, God gave Israel the ability to let go of the very things that had kept them in bondage to slavery and death in Egypt. They had the opportunity to obey the command to leave Egyptian culture behind. God was calling Israel to something new. Out of gratitude Israel sings together,

“The Lord is my strength and my song,  
and He has become my salvation;  
this is my God, and I will praise him,  
my father’s God and I will exalt him”  
(Exodus 15:2).

The Lord God Almighty was no longer just another little “g” god in Egypt. God had become Israel’s salvation. Salvation meant freedom from hard labor. Freedom from Pharaoh’s fear and paranoia. Freedom from the mistreatment of the Egyptian soldiers and task masters. Freedom from the fear of their children being put to death by Pharaoh. God had shown the Children

of Israel, Egypt and the Ancient Near East there is no other god like our God, and that is a lesson worth remembering in gratitude today.

Today, we, the people in this room, the collections of people who call themselves Christians have this in common with our Ancient Near Eastern relatives. There is no other god like our God, and there is no other name by which all can be saved. With Advent around the corner consider the absurdity of it. God, the author and creator of everything submitting to take the form of a human body to be born like one of us; to grow up like one of us with all of our foibles and failures only to be rejected by the very people He came to save. Jesus was rejected because the people Jesus came to save refused to let go of their preconceived notions about what God’s law meant. They refused to let go of the political and religious power they possessed, and they were too afraid of their Roman oppressors to allow Jesus Christ to be their king. They simply could not let it go; but Jesus could. Jesus let go of His fear, His anger, His doubts, and His pain. Jesus chose to let go that He might fully embrace who and what Jesus is. Church, who is Jesus? **(wait for this response: Jesus is God).**

We are to follow their great example. We are to follow the example of the Israelites who let go of their Egyptian culture that they may become the people God called and created them to be. It took a while. After 40 years of wandering through the wilderness they came to the edge of the Promised Land. For Israel this was the part of God’s promise they most wanted fulfilled, but it was not the fulfillment of their purpose. Israel was supposed to be a blessing to the nations. Israel was supposed to be a priesthood to the nations. My sisters and brothers do you remember what the priests of Israel are supposed to do? **(wait for answers)** The priest were supposed to deliver human prayers to God. The prophets were to deliver God’s messages to the people. The kings of Israel were to govern, lead armies, protect Israel’s borders, but only while putting God first. Jesus completes all three. As a result we, who are not Jews, have been washed clean in the blood of Christ. Through prevenient grace we are brought to the cross of Jesus Christ. By Justifying grace all of our sins are forgiven. In Sanctifying grace we find the strength and the guidance not to make those same mistakes again. In this way God has in fact become our strength and our song. God has become our salvation.

I am tremendously grateful for all that God has done for all of us. I am grateful for all God for all that God is doing to become the strength to stand against the powers of sin and evil all around us in the lives of the people of our congregation and out in our community. I am grateful for our Confirmands. There are seven Confirmands. Due to scheduling conflicts I was only able to track down six for this morning’s video. Five of these confirmands are from families in this church. One confirmand’s family does not regularly attend church anywhere, and I am so extremely grateful to have them in our class and to have them in our church this morning. The seventh student in our class comes to us from First United Methodist Church. Let me introduce our confirmands to you now.

#### **(Play Confirmand Video)**

Over the last 12 weeks we have talked about what it means to be a part of a Christian community. We have talked about the history of the church. We have visited Bethel AME church in Greensboro, and we have begun studying about worship. In December I hope to take them to visit Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Church in Lexington, and in the spring I hope to take them to a Jewish Synagogue in time for Passover. All of this has been made possible through your faithfulness and generosity. Your tithes and offerings make it possible for me to offer

this kind of Confirmation class that reaches not only the children in our church, but to provide an opportunity for the unchurched and children in other churches in our Community. You have helped make all of this possible and I want to say thank you. There is an opportunity for our Confirmands to go on a Confirmation retreat at Mt. Shepherd in January. We will be talking shortly about how to pay for that as the cost per confirmand is just over a \$100 bucks a head. Next year I hope to offer a high school aged confirmation class. Then, one to two years after that I hope to offer confirmation again to the kids who are in Evan, Jada, Caris, and Landen's age group. The video you have seen today represents a glimpse of where our confirmation group is today. Your tithes and offerings help to make these groups possible. My question is what will the next confirmation programs look like? What will we as a congregation of disciples of Jesus Christ be willing to let go of to make those groups happen? I have only been able to go bigger with this confirmation group because of your support. Please prayerfully consider the ways God has blessed your family and respond to this simple call. If God is your strength and your song how are you sharing that gift with others?

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen