

***Exodus 16:10 ...they looked...and there was the glory of the LORD...***

Let's be honest with ourselves, not all of us love movies that have a surprise ending. In fact, I would argue that *most* of us enjoy it *most* when the superhero defeats the supervillain in spectacular fashion.

That's because the *unexpected* leaves us *unsettled*. But, I suppose, that's the point. There's a certain level of entertainment value when the movie ends with a twist, particularly when it means sequel potential for our favorite characters and storylines.

But again, let's be honest. As often as some of us like the twist ending in our entertainment, none of us like twist endings in our own personal storylines. In fact, many of us spend a lot of time in prayer attempting to convince the Lord how our storyline *should* go. Sometimes, those attempts turn to desperation, even, as we see our storylines begin to veer from where we think that they should NOT go.

Consider the children of Israel in our text for today from the Book of Exodus. 400 years before these verses of our text take place, the patriarch Jacob had moved his entire family, 70 people in all, to Egypt. There, they escaped a devastating famine under the care and protection of Jacob's son Joseph. The intent had always been to return to the land of Canaan, the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants. In fact, son Joseph made his brothers promise to take his body back to Canaan when they and their descendants would finally return to the land of promise. (You can read all about it the Book of Genesis chapters 12-50.)

But as time passed, and the family grew into a nation, they stayed put. Roots

were planted. Homes were built. Life was good...until there was a twist.

You see, at some point, the descendants of Jacob – the children of Israel as they would be called – were put to work by their Egyptian neighbors and eventually full-out enslaved. Comfort and plenty were replaced by cruelty and degradation. The worse it got, the more the people cried out to the God of their fathers – the LORD – for deliverance.

And in his mercy, the LORD heard their cry. Through extraordinary means and in circuitous fashion, he raised up for them a reluctant prophet and leader named Moses. (You can all about this in the Book of Exodus chapters 1-15). Emboldened by the LORD, Moses pressured Egypt into releasing the Israelites to return to their homeland. Surely, the people thought, they would be able to leave. These were God's people. He had promised.

But in another twist, pharaoh – the ruler of Egypt – refused to let the people go. Ten destructive plagues later, bowing to the mighty hand of the LORD, Pharaoh relented and the people were free to go.

The 1956 movie *The Ten Commandments* captures the moment well. [movie clip, if possible]

The joy, the anticipation, the promised land – the script practically writes itself...or so the people thought. “Yeah, we take a few months to bring this nation of 2 million people out of Egypt, across the Sinai peninsula, and up into the land of Canaan – easy, breezy, heaven pleasy.”

But in yet another twist, Pharaoh regretted his decision and pursued the Israelites. Catching up with them on the shore of the Red Sea, Pharaoh threatened to force the people back to Egypt, back into slavery.

Once again, the mighty hand of the LORD delivered his people. Piling up the water on either side, the Lord led his people

through the waters of the Red Sea, bringing them safely to the other side on dry land. When the Egyptians attempted to follow, the waters came rushing back, wiping out the forces of Pharaoh. On the far shore the people sang and danced and gave thanks for God's powerful deliverance. The LORD – the God of free and faithful grace – even provided water for them...in the desert. Surely, now, from here on, things would go as planned...right?

Many of you already know where this is going, don't you? Even if you're not familiar with the account, you know what's coming next, right? Yes, another twist.

You see, everything was OK for a couple of months as they slowly made their way towards the Promised Land. But as the stores of food dwindled to nothing and the people thought the storyline wasn't going the way they thought it should, the situation turned ugly. We're told, ***In the desert the whole community grumbled ... "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."***

I find it interesting that the Bible doesn't record Moses' reaction. If it was me, I probably would have burst out laughing at their ridiculously selective memories, and then said something like, "Oh, wait. You're serious. Really? You don't remember the beatings and the executions and backbreaking work? You don't remember the Lord bringing Egypt to its knees for you? You don't remember walking through the Red Sea? C'mon, be serious."

Actually, it seems as if the LORD doesn't give Moses a *chance* to react. ***The LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you."*** Yes, *panis Angelicum* – the bread of angels as it is called in the psalms (78:25). Talk about a twist. Because they couldn't see beyond

their stomachs, the Israelites couldn't see what the LORD had in store. And not only that, as a further sign of the LORD's goodness, he was also going to send them meat each day in the form of flocks of quail. All of it, just so that they would know ***that it was the LORD...***

... ***because*** [as Moses put it] ***he has heard your grumbling against him.*** It does make one wonder, doesn't it? Which came first, the quail or the egg? What I mean is, did the people grumble and God respond with deliverance, or did God allow the situation to happen, cause their need if you will, in order to display for them his almighty power to satisfy?

Again, we love when our lives go according to *our* script. We don't like twists and turns and unexpected situations. But what if, when they do happen (and they will), what if, instead of grumbling, complaining, worrying, challenging, sinning against the Lord...what if we saw all of these twists in our storylines as yet *another* opportunity for our good and gracious God to display the might of his power and the depth of his love...for you.

Over the last few weeks, we have been blessed to have some landscape work done on our home. We have enjoyed getting to know the men who have been doing the work, Dick and Chico. I shared my sermon theme with them from a few weeks ago – The Yeahbuts Live. Dick watched the sermon online and has since been coming up with new sermon themes for me. In fact, he was so concentrating the other day on sermon themes, that he missed the exit to our house.

But all was NOT for naught (yes, that's a double-negative...which now leads to a positive). Dick suggested the theme *What, not Why?* Dick, if you're watching, I didn't run with your theme for the over-all message, but it certainly fits with this point. You see, like the Israelites, we so often get

caught up in asking *why* things are happening, that we forget to ask *what's next?*

Oh, we may think that life needs to go a certain way. We may want our storyline to unfold according to our direction. But it is the LORD who already knows how your story goes. Rather than ask why, he invites you to look to him in order to see *what's next*. For the Israelites, ***They looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord as That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.*** <sup>14</sup> ***When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor.*** <sup>15</sup> ***When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat."*** Need satisfied...with a twist.

Sadly, this wasn't the end of the twists and turns for the children of Israel. What should have taken months, ultimately took 40 years...and the death of an ungrateful generation. But reach the Promised Land they did. And so will we. Because even though we don't know what twists and turns *our* storylines will take, in Christ, we know *exactly* how the story ends. And in the meantime, we can be sure that no matter the twists and turns, God's forgiveness, God's providence, God's love will be on display as he satisfies our every need. Then, like the Israelites of old, we too can look at life now...and forever...as we see ***the glory of the Lord*** in our own promised land. Amen.

*Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,  
Pilgrim through this barren land.  
I am weak, but thou art mighty;  
Hold me with thy pow'rful hand.  
Bread of heaven,  
Feed me till I want no more. Amen.*