

Move Forward in Faith

- I. When the enemy is drawing near
- II. By putting your trust in the Lord

(Exodus 14:10-20) As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. {11} They said to Moses, Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? {12} Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert! "{13} Moses answered the people, Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. {14} The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still. "{15} Then the LORD said to Moses, Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. {16} Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. {17} I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. {18} The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen. "{19} Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, {20} coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.

I expect that you've heard the expression that someone is "caught between a rock and a hard place." It describes a person who basically has no good choices. He's stuck. Can't move forward. Can't go back. Sometimes that expression applies to someone who is physically hemmed in. He literally has no way out. Our text for today offers a good example of that. The Children of Israel were physically hemmed in by the waters of the Red Sea in front of them, and the army of the Egyptians behind them. They were stuck in between the proverbial rock and a hard place. But their dilemma was more than just physical. It was more than that they were geographically challenged. They were spiritually and emotionally challenged. When they were caught between the Egyptians and the Sea, their hearts were filled with fear and uncertainty. What would they do? Would they be paralyzed by fear? Or would they put their faith in God to lead them out of, and yes, through what appeared to be an insurmountable barrier?

My friends, you realize that what the Israelites encountered on the shores of the Red Sea is not unlike the situation that we find ourselves in in life. Sometimes we feel like the enemy is closing in on us. There are times when we may feel paralyzed by fear. It's at times like these that we would do well to take to heart the instructions which God gave through his servant, Moses. God says, in effect, Christian,

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First, move forward in faith, when the Enemy is drawing near. Certainly that was the case

with the nation of Israel, here in our text, wasn't it? After God sent the tenth plague against the Egyptians, namely, the death of every first born in the land, the Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, basically, "Get out of my country, you and all your people." And so they did. They fled Egypt, all 2 million of them.

But when the Pharaoh realized that he'd just lost his resident slave force, he had a major change of heart. He sent his army after the Israelites. And they caught up with the Israelites just as they reached the shores of the Red Sea. That's where our text for today picks up. We read, *As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up and there were the Egyptians, marching after them.* How did the Israelites react, seeing the Red Sea in front of them and the Egyptian army behind them? Moses tells us. *They were terrified.*

Tell me, can you relate? Are there times when you feel like the enemy is closing in on you? He's got you outflanked. It's like there's no way out. Maybe it has to do with a particular sin that you're struggling with. No matter where you turn, that temptation is there. You feel like you're trapped. You can't go forward, but you desperately don't want to go back. And that has you kind of paralyzed in fear. You're thinking, "God, what's going to happen to me? Is there any way out of this?" As St. Paul put it in Romans 7, *Who will rescue me from this body of death? (Romans 7:24)*

Or maybe what has you feeling trapped is some other circumstance in your life. You're working a dead-end job, but you feel like you have no other options. Your health is deteriorating, but the doctor says there's nothing more he can do. You're paying off some of your debt, but you're still falling further and further behind. You feel like you're stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Or maybe it's not just the circumstances of your life that has you feeling trapped. Maybe it's the world in general. When you think about what went on in Las Vegas. When you realize that our world is not only more and more non-Christian. It's becoming more and more anti-Christian. When you realize that that more and more people reject everything the Bible says, you can find yourself feeling paralyzed by fear—kind of like the Israelites along the Red Sea. "God, what am I supposed to do?"

But you see, that's where Moses' words to God's people back then still apply to God's people today. What does Moses say? *Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only be still.* In other words, "Don't fret. Don't worry. Don't complain." Why not? Because, as Moses puts it, the battle is the Lord's! God promises his people that he's not only going to protect them; he's going to fight for them. Isn't that what happened here in our text? First, God protected his people. Did you catch that part of our text? Verse 19 and 20: *Then the angel of God (often a term for the very Son of God), who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud (that is, that fiery representation of God's presence) also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side, so that neither went near the other all night long.*

Can you picture that? This massive, fiery thunderhead formed a barrier between the two armies. To the one side, it produced pitch darkness. To the other side, it produced light which allowed the Israelites to pass through the Red Sea throughout the night.

But not only did God protect Israel from their enemies, he actually fought the battle for them. After the entire nation of Israel had travelled the bottom of the sea and made it to the other

side, what did God do? He had Moses once again stretch his hand over the sea, and... *the water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.* Can you imagine? The very army that stuck fear into the hearts of the Israelites, in one fell swoop, was completely destroyed. God fought the battle for them and delivered them from harm.

My friends, couldn't the same thing be said for you and me today? God has fought the battle for us. He has defeated our enemy the devil and has us delivered us from the fear of death forever. How does the writer to the Hebrews put it? *Jesus shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free them who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death (Hebrews 2:14 15).*

Do you realize what a powerful thing that is? To be set free from the fear of death? To know that nothing can separate you from God's love in Christ? Not some lunatic spraying gunfire into a crowd. Not a hurricane that leaves you without a home to live in. Not the loss of a job or the diagnosis of cancer—nothing can change the fact that God has redeemed, bought you with his blood, and now turns even our death into nothing but the entrance to heaven.

In fact, isn't it that fact—both what God has done for us in the past and what he promises to do for us in the future—isn't that what allows us to move forward in faith? That certainly was the case with the children of Israel. After telling the people that he would be the one fighting for them, what did God say to Moses? *Tell the people to move on.* And that's exactly what they did. They literally took a step of faith. I mean, let's not miss the faith it took to walk down into the bottom of the Red Sea. I mean, can you imagine, walls of water towering on each side of you? Every one of them must have been thinking, "God, my life is in your hands. There is not a single thing I can do to keep that water piled up there. All I can do is put my trust in you." Again, isn't the same thing true for you and me? When it comes to moving forward in faith, it's all about:

II. By putting our trust in the Lord

When the Children of Israel faced a major obstacle in their path, they trusted that the Lord would lead them through it. So it is with this congregation of believers. As you think about the challenge that faces us as a congregation, as you think about the number of people in our world who do not know Jesus as their savior, as you think about the number of families who want and need a Christ-centered education for their children, as you think about our desire to leave a spiritual legacy for the next generation—you realize the challenge we face as a congregation. The idea of Mount Olive taking on a multimillion-dollar building project can be more than a little daunting to us. We may feel a little like the Israelites looking up those walls of water, thinking, "Are we going to make it?"

But you see, that's why we chose the theme that we did for our capital stewardship campaign. Notice, it's "Forward in Faith". As a congregation of believers, we're going to need to trust that God will guide the process. We're going to trust that God will bring us safely through this challenge, just as he brought his Old Testament Church through the challenge that faced them.

And yet, I think it's important to understand that the theme Forward in Faith applies to more than just what we plan to do together as a congregation. It also applies to what we do as individual believers. Remember, the Children of Israel did not cross the Red Sea with one giant corporate step of faith. No they crossed the Red Sea with a whole lot of individuals taking their personal steps of faith. Every one of them said in effect, "God, I'm putting my trust in you. I'm putting my life, my future, my children—I'm putting everything I have into your hands."

Do you see why the crossing of the Red Sea was such a major event in the history of the

Jewish Nation? Not only because of the miracle that God performed for them. But also because of the effect that miracle had on God's people. The crossing of the Red Sea gave the Children of Israel a reason and the opportunity to put their trust in their Savior God. In fact, isn't that what the Bible records as kind of an epilogue of this entire account? Exodus 14:30: *That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. And when the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him (Exodus 14:30).*

My friends, the question is, will you and I walk in the footsteps of those Israelites? Will we take a step of faith? Granted, the challenge that we face as a congregation may not be quite as scary as walking between two walls of water, but it will require no less of a step of faith to get us through. Not only as a congregation but as individuals. As you think about how God has rescued you from the clutches of the evil one, as you think about the promises God has made to you to provide for all your needs like he does the flowers of the field and the birds of the air, as you think about the purpose God is giving you and the Promised Land that awaits you in heaven, then you will realize that you and I are not stuck between a rock and a hard place. We don't need to be paralyzed by fear. No rather, because of the God we have—the one who created us, who redeemed us and preserves us to this day—we can, together and as individuals, move Forward in Faith! God grant it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.