

Israel at the Red Sea: Be Still, but GO FORWARD! Exodus 14.

Portions adapted from, "The Image Of Liberty Series," by Jeff Strite @ Sermon Central.Com

(showed a video portion from the C.B. DeMille's movie, *The 10 Commandments*. From 0 – 2.39 minutes @ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoQJMs-evQU>).

What a way to start a sermon. Did you know that the parting of the Red Sea was probably the largest, most observed miracle ever done by God in front of a viewing audience and I am not talking about Cecil B. DeMille's movie? In my thinking, God certainly has performed greater acts of what we would call miraculous, such as the creation of the universe, Noah's flood and raising Jesus Christ from the dead. But the parting of the Red Sea was witnessed not only the million plus escaping Israelites along with Pharaoh and his soon to be dead army of charioteers, but also – as we will learn later - this event was fearfully noted by the inhabitants of the land of Canaan where the Israelites were eventually headed.

The parting of the Red Sea also remains as perhaps the most largely contested miracle recorded in the Bible. This is not to say that the secular world believes the other miracles recorded in the Bible – which they don't – but to note that hardly a year goes by without some archeologist trying to prove that the parting of the Red Sea either never happened or was actually a swamp crossing, or something much less miraculous.

Recently, there have been some exciting new discoveries about both the event and even the location of the Red Sea crossing, which we will spend more time exploring this coming Tuesday during Something More. But for now, let's join Moses and the panicking Israelites as they stand on a beach with the Red Sea on one side and Pharaoh's army on the other.

Since departing their slave homes in Nile Delta, the Israelites have now walked for two days. But for reasons known only to God and Moses, they haven't taken the shortest route home to Canaan, but have instead wandered southward to where, having passed through a narrow valley, they are currently camped on a beach along the shore of the Red Sea. Pharaoh having interpreted their wandering as a sign that they are lost and leaderless, changes his mind once again and decides to recapture his escaping slaves. Thus, it comes to pass on the third day, as they are sitting on the beach wondering where they will go next, the Israelites look back to see 600 Egyptian war chariots coming up from behind, conveniently trapping them on that beach with no way of escape so both they ... and Moses think.

The people panic. Certainly they call upon God and Moses to do something, but they also let Moses know what they think of his liberation plans and leadership. They say...

'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, "Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians"? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.' (Exodus 14:11-12).

Just within the past month, these Israelites have quietly watched as God rained one plague after another down on the Egyptians. Just within the past week, they had sat quietly in their houses eating supper as God selectively killed every first born Egyptian. But now, three days later they have forgotten all that and are fearfully blaming Moses for what they think is their impending doom. To a certain extent we can understand their response, because fear does that to a person; scrambling any rational thoughts sending them into panic survival mode.

Now Moses must work quickly to calm their panic, before they rush him or do something else stupid – like surrendering themselves to return to Egypt. So Moses lifts his voice above the noise of the rabble and shouts, *'Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish 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 keep still.'* (Exodus 14:13-14).

"Stand firm, be still." When you don't know what else to do, this is good advice. When faced with what you first perceive as an overwhelming challenge -- as my favorite Psalm reminds us -- when your mountains begin to shake and the seas roar, when fear begins to take hold of your thinking, this is not the time to panic or worry but instead to *"be still and know that God is the Lord"* (46:10).

Nowhere in the Bible are believers told to 'worry about anything,' or 'figure it out for themselves.' But over and over the Bible clearly says: **'Be still ... trust God.'**

Why shouldn't I worry? Why shouldn't I be anxious? I mean – I'm in a terrible place... and I don't think I'll EVER get out of my problem! I've got a REASON to be anxious, what's wrong with that?

Well first, what's wrong with worrying is you can't change anything... by worrying!

Jesus asked: *"can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?"* (Matthew 6:27).

Here also is advice from the Dalai Lama: *"If a problem is fixable, if a situation is such that you can do something about it, then there is no need to worry. If it's not fixable, then there is no help in worrying. There is no benefit in worrying whatsoever."*

Worrying doesn't FIX anything. It just robs you of time and peace and strength. It makes you weak and vulnerable... and prone to things you ought not to do.

2ndly, what's wrong with worrying, is that it blinds us to the one Person who can fix the problem...or at least help us thru it. Perhaps the most powerful passage in Scripture says it this way: *Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff — they comfort me* (Psalm 23:4).

The valley - or in this case the beach - of the shadow of death.

That's exactly where Israel found itself at the Red Sea. It was a very REAL place of death. You know what God's answer was for these Israelites: "**stand firm in your faith, be still in your hearts, don't worry, I am with you!**" Moses may not have known what God was going to do next, but having seen what He has already done, Moses has come to the point where he knows that God even now can resolve this seemingly impossible crisis... because God had not brought these people to the shore of the Red Sea to just let them die.

Now here was my own "AHA" moment while studying this scripture. I have said a couple of times that I doubt, at this point, whether Moses even knew what God would do next. My opinion on this was formed by Moses first telling the people to "be still," but then himself apparently crying out to God..... *God what are you going to do now??!!*"

To which God replies, *'Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground* (14:15-16). God basically tells Moses, it's a good thing to have told the people to be still in their hearts – to not worry – and to witness how the Lord will fight for you, but I don't need them to just stand there... they need to be marching forward down the path I will now provide for them.

So while the angel of the Lord forms a fiery barricade between Pharaoh's chariots and the Israelites, as instructed Moses raises "the staff of the Lord" over the waters causing the sea to part and the ground to dry enough for the people to walk across safely to the other side. Remember, Moses had originally called it "just a stick" but when given up to the Lord it became the "Staff of God" (4:20). After the people had safely crossed over, the Angel of the Lord then released the Egyptians to race their war chariots down onto the same path where their wheels got so mired in the mud that they couldn't even retreat. Too late they again realize, *'Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt'* (14:25). Then, with one more lifting of

the "staff of God," the sea closed back over the top of the chariots, drowning Pharaoh's entire army so that not one of them remained alive.

But you might want to ask, after getting the Israelites safely out of Egypt, why did God set them up for this final spectacle? Piecing together several hints that you can get from these verses you will learn that God had several good reasons for this.

- First, though the Israelites left Egypt thinking they were prepared for battle, God knew otherwise and was taking them on a course that would avoid conflict (13:17-18).
- So God decided both to end any further Egyptian threat to the departing Israelites, while once more proving to Pharaoh that He was the only God. That is why He again prompted Pharaoh's into chasing after the Israelites (14:4).
- Thirdly, this sea spanning miracle dramatically proved to the Israelites that God could protect them even in the wilderness. *So, the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses* (14:31).
- Fourthly, there was also another group to whom God was signaling a warning from this Red Sea spectacle. Forty years later, just before Joshua led the people into the Promised Land he sent two spies to look over the area and especially to give him a report on the city of Jericho. But while they were sneaking through Jericho they were discovered and ended up hiding on the roof a woman's house. The Bible names her as Rahab the Harlot. Up there on the roof, Rahab tells them ...

'I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan ... As soon as we heard it, our hearts failed, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below. Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the Lord that you in turn will deal kindly with my family. (Joshua 2:9-12)

Did you hear what she said?

She was saying that everyone in the land had heard about Israel's miraculous crossing of the Red Sea and what they had militarily accomplished since then. THIS IS 40 YEARS LATER, yet the Red Sea story was still circulating and the citizens of Jericho knew that it would only be a matter of time before Israel and their God came knocking at Jericho's door; they were terrified.

Since Rahab's apartment was built into Jericho's wall, with their promise of protection, she then let the spies down through a window outside the walls so that they could escape. Later, when the people of Israel marched around Jericho and God caused its

walls to fall down, Joshua sent the spies back into the city to bring Rahab and her family safely out. The rest of her story is that Rahab marries an Israelite and lives happily ever after. The Gospel of Matthew later finds her name along with Ruth's included in the lineage of King David and eventually Jesus of Nazareth (1:5).

But if the walls of Jericho all fell down, how then did Rahab and her family in their in-wall apartment survive? Though this is just archeological speculation, just a coincidence, while the ruins of Jericho were being excavated, they found a small portion of the outer wall that had not fallen down --- and this portion had included an apartment with outside window.

Let's now conclude this story with Moses and the people of Israel on the other side of the Red Sea with a safe path ahead of them through the wilderness to the Mountain of God. The mess in which Israel found itself that day at the Red Sea became their message. Their trial became their triumph. Because of the power of God, they who had been victims in Egypt, received the victory over their enemies. All they had to do was be still in their hearts, to not worry and at God's command "go forward" walking down a seemingly impossible path leading right through the midst of the Red Sea. There will be plenty of tests and trials for Israel down the road – most of them self-inflicted – but those are stories for another day.

Your take home lesson for today is quite simple, but let's not take it home, let's apply it right here and now. When you came in this morning you were given a **stewardship envelope** with your name on it. Among the other things in that envelope – which I hope you will pray about and act on – is a brightly colored "**time and talent**" card. Find that card, take it out, and hold it in your hand.

In these next few moments, I want you write your name on top of that card and then quietly read through it – on both sides – checking off those talents and abilities that you could be using for the Lord. For those of you watching at home, your envelope is either in the mail or waiting for you in the Church office.

But first listen to this... Just last week, a person who had long been a friend of this church finally decided to become a member. They told me their motivation to do so now was that they figured the next few months for this land, for the church, might get crazy and they figured we needed everyone on board for the church to go forward.

I agree completely. Hopefully we will face nothing seemingly as catastrophic as the Israelites did staring at Red Sea, but I do believe we face an extraordinarily challenging future, when the people of God who have such hope and faith, can speak and live their faith out for the benefit of their panicky neighbors.

Whatever we face, God's word to us will be the same as it was to the Israelites, standing on that beach with Pharaoh on one side and the Red Sea on the other: **Be still, don't worry, but also go forward**, trusting that God will either take us around or right through the middle of whatever awaits us.

When God first asked Moses what he held in his hand, he replied "just a stick," but when he gave that stick to the Lord it became the "staff of God." All Moses had to do was in faith to raise the Staff of God over the water and the unthinkably impossible tragedy before them became a path through the sea to victory.

So what's that in your hand? Just a card. Just a sampling of your abilities. Certainly you can take that card home with you to further pray over it, but I am asking you instead to fill that card out right now and to give that card to the Lord. There is a basket by the door as you leave; just drop your card in there, give it to the Lord and watch what He can do with it.

And whatever is worrying you today. In your heart be still, trust the Lord to take you through it, but also get going... Forward!

Let's pray about this.