

Have you ever found yourself in a place where you think, I don't know where to go from here? Have you found yourself in a place where you're not sure you can get through the circumstances? We all know what it means to struggle, and most of us, when we step back and think of God, believe this is part of having faith in God—to have hope and confidence in the promises of God, even when we can't see a way forward.

The Exodus from Egypt is a story of God miraculously providing a way for his children. Our story is a powerful reminder that God, and there's a song we sing here often, that God is the way maker, that he makes a way. We don't know what trials await us in the future, but we know we serve a God who has promised to lead us through them.

As followers of Jesus, it's hard for us, as we go back to Exodus, to relate to the generational bondage that they've just been delivered from. But most of us know something about being held captive. Something such as a health issue or friends and family that are held captive by anxiety or depression. We have loved ones held captive by addiction. We understand that captivity. We also have an understanding of what traumatic experiences might cause in our lives, such as profound loss. The loss of a spouse, a child, a marriage, a job, or a dream.

So many difficult circumstances that we face that we can circle around this idea of bondage and say, "How are we going to get through this." I hope this text is an encouragement to you because it reveals to us that God provides a way. As we go through the message, I want you to think that whatever circumstance you're in, whatever desert, whatever wilderness, whatever dark place, whatever anxious place you find yourself in, God is about making way for you.

Our big idea is God shows us a way when we can't see a way. We pick up in chapter 13 and let's see what happens after Pharaoh let his people go in verse 17-18. I'll just summarize that God made a way for his people who had been in bondage for centuries and when they marched out of Egypt, they thought they were ready for any challenge that might lay ahead for them.

They left Egypt with this confidence that they were ready to do battle with anyone. But God knew that if they had to face a battle or face a war at this stage of the journey, they would likely panic and retreat back to Egypt. The shortest way to get to the promised land from Egypt was to head to the Northeast out of Egypt along the shoreline of the Mediterranean Sea.

It was estimated that it would take these 1.5 million Israelites probably one to two weeks to make it to Canaan, to make it to that promised land, if they took that northeast route. So you think one to two weeks, hiking along the shoreline, camping by the beach, that's got to beat 40 years in the wilderness I would imagine.

So why didn't God allow the shorter route? Because the shorter route along the sea was a major trade route and travel route. Any attacking army who wanted to attack Egypt would have to attack from that northeast route. The Egyptians were smart, they set up these series of forts along that area to protect their homeland. If the Israelites happened to go that shorter route, they would face Egyptian forts, and God knew they were not ready to go into battle.

He mentions another tribe, the Philistines, who were a warring people. They killed, plundered, and conquered. God knew that they weren't ready for the Philistines. The Israelites' interactions with the Philistines will come in a future sermon series in another book. So even though the shortest way made sense on the map, God had a lot of work to do in them to prepare them for the battles ahead.

He want them to recognize their weakness and learn to depend on God. And as followers of God, we need to understand that as well. His will, his way that he has you in now might not make sense to you. It may have you on a journey longer then you think is needed, but maybe it is for a greater purpose that you have yet to see.

So, instead of traveling north along the Mediterranean, God took them southeast out of Egypt into what's called the wilderness route toward the Sinai desert. It was no accident, no mistake, no misunderstanding; God knew that they needed the Red Sea experience

to prepare them as a nation. I don't think Moses was surprised by this at all. If you remember, back when we talked about the burning bush in Exodus 3, God said that when they were delivered out of Egypt, they would go to that mountain and worship him. That's where the 10 Commandments came from.

They could travel by day or night with the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. What is a pillar of cloud? I'm imagining this cloud hovering over them and moving ahead of them to guide them in the day, but also to shade them and comfort them from the desert sun like a cooling cloud. Then, this pillar of fire at night obviously would help them stay centered in the darkness of night, but it would also keep them warm because desert nights are typically cold.

Someone cleverer than I am called this pillar of cloud, God's GPS, God's positioning system, and it was this visible sign that God was making a way for them. It was also temperature controlled and cooled them in the desert. Wouldn't it be great if there was a pillar of cloud to remind us of God's presence and of his guidance for us? Imagine a cloud guiding you toward a particular college, to a particular girlfriend or boyfriend, a certain job interview, or when you enter the grocery store guiding you to the healthy food section. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have that?

But what we have as believers, I don't want us to draw this distinction that we don't have what they had. We are followers of Jesus, and we take up his offer to be in a close relationship with him. We trust that he is making a way for us even in times when we can't see it. He is the light of the world.

So, we pick up the story in chapter 14. *"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea' (Exodus 14:1).* Pi Hahiroth means literally mouth of canals. So it's around water. Between Migdal, which was a tower, it means tower or fort and the sea. That's the Red Sea, not the Mediterranean Sea. They had to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal-zephon.

Baal Zephon is the spot God picked to defeat the Egyptians. Why there? All throughout this region, people were worshipping Baal. And Zephon was a god of Baal, who was identified as the god who ruled the oceans. So if you got into a boat, or you were a fisherman, you went out and paid homage and worshipped Zephon, if you were a Baal worshiper. Zephon supposedly ruled from the mountain just adjacent to the Red Sea. So God's about to show the Israelites and the Egyptians that only *Yahweh* rules the sea.

Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.' And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord." So the Israelites did this. Exodus 14:3-4

So the Lord tells Moses to tell the Israelites to turn around. One and a half million people went back the way they came and then camped by the Red Sea just opposite Baal Zephon. It appeared like God had the Israelites walking into a trap, a dead end. If Pharaoh attacked them, here were their options. They couldn't go further north because they would run into the Egyptian forts and the Philistines. They couldn't flee to the south because they would all die of thirst in the Egyptian desert. They couldn't flee to the west because that was Goshen in Egypt, which is where they came from. And they couldn't go to the east because there was a big sea in the way.

They were visibly trapped. So you get the picture. They were hemmed in. God was designing what looked like an impossible situation. No way out. Then, of course, Pharaoh gets word of this and thinks the Israelites are lost and confused. They didn't have a plan.

When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, "What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!" So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. Exodus 14:5-7

Interestingly, to Pharaoh, this picture must have really got to his ego because he sees these former slaves marching boldly and defiantly.

The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly. The Egyptians—all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, horsemen and troops—pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon. As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. Exodus 14:8-10

So imagine the terror. Try to put yourself there. First, you hear 600 horses, their hooves pounding on the

desert floor. Then you hear the rushing sound of chariot wheels, wood and metal clashing. As the Egyptians got closer, they would see this cloud of dust coming closer and closer to them. When you think about this from another angle, God had the Israelites right where he wanted him, and the only weapon they had against the Egyptians was their faith in God. But the Israelites panicked. They stopped making sense. I don't think they were marching boldly anymore. If you look at verse 11, they said to Moses,

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? 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!" Exodus 14:11-12

Okay, now understand, they've been freed from Egypt for maybe about a week now. The sights and sounds and the smells of these plagues were still fresh in their senses. They were probably still snacking on leftovers from the Passover feast, and they accused Moses of having a premeditated plan to bring them all out into the desert. Like this was some grand plan he had so that they would all be slayed by the Egyptians. They were not making sense. They began to plan their surrender because returning to bondage was better for them than what they saw as certain death.

I think we're going to start to see a recurring theme in the Israelites. When things got tough, they looked back at their former lives. They would look back into their season of bondage and see it fondly. They continued to lack faith and continue to murmur to Moses, murmur to God for 40 years. Some of us struggle against the forces that pull us to return to the bondage of the past. I don't want us to underestimate this because we've got to understand there's a spiritual battle that's going on in our world, in our flesh, and Satan never wants to let go of us easily.

Why would he ever want to stop harassing, tempting, and deceiving us? We are set free from Satan because of Christ and what he did on the cross through his blood sacrifice and his resurrection power. He broke the power of sin; he broke the power of death once and for all. But Satan is like this dying fish that's flapping out there. He stays on the edges, tempting, planting doubts in our minds, questioning the goodness of God, questioning the power of God, questioning whether or not God is making a way for us.

It's so natural for us to selectively daydream. I've been connecting with some of my friends because our 45th high school reunion is coming up in September. We are all over the country. We keep asking each other if they are going. Yeah, we're going to go. But the reality is I found myself selectively daydreaming about what life was like back in high school. I only remembered the good things, but then, thinking about it, I remembered the hard times, too. I thought, "Man, there was a lot of hell that went on there." Because there was something going on in me that urged me to receive Christ's invitation to come in and have him come into my life.

So we have the tendency to daydream and think, "Oh, it was better back in Egypt." I love C.H. Mackintosh said, "Ten thousand mercies are forgotten in the presence of a single trifling privation." Moses answers the Israelites with a powerful lesson for any of us who are stuck, who are panicked, who are anxious, and can't find a way out.

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. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." Exodus 14:13-14

Do Not Be Afraid

First, do not be afraid. Moses' answer came in response to the cries of the Israelites. As difficult as it might seem. When we're stuck, he says, the first thing is do not to fear. They were about to experience God's power in ways they'd never seen before. And what fear does is play havoc in our lives. It leads us to find fault. That's one thing it does, which is what we see here in this text blaming Moses. Fear causes us to lose a healthy perspective. It causes us to retreat or crumble, compromise values, blame shift or betray a friend, or cheat. And the opposite of fear in the scripture is not bravery. The opposite of fear is faith. It's trusting God. The Israelites were losing faith, and God was about to show them why they should not fear.

Stand Firm

The second thing he says is stand firm. Another transition translation says, stand still. When you are looking for a way out, he's saying the first thing is stand firm. When we're stuck, what is our inclination? It's to do something, to do anything. As we remember what David said in Psalm 40: "Be still and know that I'm God." When we are in crisis, God's first direction for us is often to just stop and be still. To me, this looks

like standing with confidence in God that we can react differently when we're stuck.

Think about a time when you felt stuck. This verse is warning us that if we react in fear, we will panic and retreat. If we react impatiently and don't stop, we'll act impulsively and usually regret it later. If we react in despair and just close down, we crumble. We will have no confidence even to stand at all. So he says to not fear, stand still.

Watch And See What the Lord Will Do

Then he says, watch and see what the Lord will do. The idea is for them to look to the Lord and take their eyes off of themselves and what's going on around them. To see that this is the Lord's battle and that they are going to be saved here. Not because they were entitled, not because they were skilled, but only because of God's grace and mercy. They were about to embark on about 40 years of intense humbling that'll go on in their lives. They needed to see that it was the Lord who fought for them.

"Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on" (v. 15). That's a fascinating response to me. We stand firm, stand still, watch, and waiting; Moses is praying, crying out; he's praying. These are all essential in times of crisis, but then the Lord gives this strange thing. He says, "Stop praying. It's time for you to move on."

Moses had to be wondering where to go forward. I take it as when I think about my life and the discipleship and accountability that I've received in my life, if we don't take a step forward, if we don't act obediently, we will likely miss out on the manifestation of God's power in that situation, the manifestation of his power amidst a crisis. It can be just a small step. He said, move on.

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. 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. The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen." 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, 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. Exodus 14:16-20

This awesome, massive cloud formation moved to the rear and blocked the Egyptians' view of the Israelites. The Egyptians couldn't see anything through that cloud. And then it says, "The angel of the Lord moved to the rear to protect their flank." He went from guiding to defending them. So not only did the angel of the Lord protect them, but the cloud also prevented the Israelites from seeing this intimidating sight of Egyptians charging toward them.

I couldn't help but think of Ephesians 6. *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12).* I find great comfort in this because I see that as God's angel protected them, God's angels protect us. They guard our flanks. They don't allow us to see some of the horrors that are around us. What would happen if God just removed that protection over the world, over the church, over us? We would see the gates of hell flung wide open. Just an extra reminder here: I think for all of us, it is a great reason to respond in praise for God protecting us and guarding our flanks.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. Exodus 14:21-22

So the east wind bore down all night and split the sea into two and the wind formed these two vertical walls with this large swath of dirt in the middle. And that hot east wind that blew all night dried the ground so they wouldn't have to walk through the mud.

The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. He jammed the wheels of their chariots so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites! The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt." Exodus 14:23-25

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen.” Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at day-break the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the Lord swept them into the sea. 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. vv. 26-28

You know, some who are more naturalistic in their thinking might say that the parting of the Red Sea for the Israelites was really just them walking through a very shallow bog area, maybe 18 inches deep, kind of swampy. I think the best answer to that is, I think that it would be an even greater miracle that these elite troops would drown in 18 inches of water. I just don't see that happening.

But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. 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 mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant. vv. 29-31

I mean, it had to have been a horrible sight. God's saying, “You need to take all this in. You need to understand this. You are free. You have been saved. You have been defended. You have been delivered.” But notice the passage doesn't say that the Israelites killed a single man because they didn't. It doesn't say they defended themselves. They didn't. It doesn't even say they fought because they didn't. They stood still. They watched. And then they walked through the sea on dry land, and God delivered them.

“And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant” (v. 31). So they learned on that shore that they could only be safe when they feared the Lord. We are not safe when we fear others around us. We are only safe when we fear the Lord. What is that thing that strikes fear in you, terrifies you? Don't fear man. God is bigger than Pharaoh. Fear God when you walk into your business meeting, into that doctor's appointment to discuss some consultation about a test, when you have a tough conversation, when you walk into class and you feel all alone, intimidated,

and underequipped. Look to Jesus, your deliverer, your way maker. Don't look back at your enemy. Hear God say to you, “Follow me, I will lead you, I will guard your flank.”

Some closing thoughts on this. None of us will escape the trying circumstances of life. Most of us have lived long enough to know and had enough experience to affirm this truth. Somewhere along the way in your life, the Red Sea is going to be stretching out in front of you, and you are going to feel a pharaoh's hot pursuit. What happens in those trying circumstances? They reveal things about us.

In the trying circumstances of life, the only place to look, as the Israelites were instructed, is up. In other words, he likely has something very valuable for you to learn within those trying circumstances. I think it's very appropriate for us to ask the Lord if there is something in us, some area of my life that's broken, that needs to be healed. “Lord, is there some bad habit that I've learned in my Egypt?” In a trying circumstance, we have to ask ourselves, “Am I living like an Egyptian?” As Steve Martin said, “Am I walking like an Egyptian?” Am I reacting, or am I reading too much Egyptian perspective on events in our world? Am I engaging too much in Egyptian entertainment? Am I conducting business like an Egyptian?

It's a prayer. Lord, as I stand before you. Help me to be quiet and listen. Are there things in me that I have no business taking with me into the promised land? So when you're in trying circumstances, remember that you've been saved, you've been delivered, you've been protected, and you've been set free from Pharaoh. Egypt is dead to you. Egypt has no authority over you.

Also, it's in trying circumstances that we are most vulnerable. In the day-to-day struggles to try to live out this freedom that we've been given, these difficulties may make us feel vulnerable and weak, maybe ashamed. To combat this, I want you to recall what we just read, this vivid picture of hundreds of Egyptians dead and washed up on the shore. I want you to imagine that your old way of life, whatever has enslaved you and you still struggle with, has no authority over you. It's dead to you. It may beckon you back, but you have to ask, back to what? Do you really want that old dead life again?

We've got to remember that it was Jesus who put to death the power of sin that seeks to enslave. Maybe it's a habitual sin, an addiction that you struggle to shake, an unforgiving spirit that's holding on to you. God wants to set you free. I look forward to a day for

anyone who can identify with this that you're going to wake up; maybe it's that day you meet the Lord in person, maybe it's a day through your healing journey and see what had been a stronghold over you is really just a dead Egyptian on the shore, dead to you. It has no more authority, no more power over you.

Victory Is In Jesus

Finally, in the struggle between good and evil, which is really what this is, victory is in Jesus. Bring it back to him. For God to get the glory, he's got to do the fighting. There will be times when he will back us into a corner where we have nothing left to fight with, and these are the times when he wants us to surrender so he can fight for us. When that victory is had, the applause goes to him.

I don't want us to miss this connection between the crossing of the Red Sea and the resurrection of Jesus. We are set free by Jesus the Lamb. We are set free to walk by the power of Jesus' resurrection. Let me explain. The Israelites were set free from bondage by the blood of the Passover Lamb. We are set free from bondage by the blood of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Lamb of God. We've been given this resurrection power so we can walk on like God told Moses to tell the Israelites in verse 15, knowing that we are saved, knowing that we are delivered, knowing that we are defended, we can move on. We can walk in freedom in the way that God has planned for us.

God's way forward may not look like what you're hoping it will look like. I get that. You're standing, you're waiting, you're praying, you're trusting, you're watching, you're taking those little steps of faith, and it doesn't always include the outcome you were hoping for. Maybe some of you are silently offering a prayer to God, a confession, "To be honest, God, that thing going on in my life that you know all about, I just disagree with your plan. Your outcome just doesn't look like a win for me."

I want to close with a quote: a young pastor named Jonathan Evans was struggling with his prayers for his mother. His mother was dying of cancer, and he was praying for a Red Sea parting moment for his mom to be healed. He kept praying and imagining this, and he just saw that this was God's way. However, she did die; the cancer took her life. And as he was preparing the

eulogy for his mother, God spoke to him in his grief. God revealed something and told him to share it at his mom's memorial. May God's message to Jonathan Evans encourage you.

You don't understand the nature of my victory, Jonathan. Just because I didn't answer your prayer your way doesn't mean I haven't already answered your prayer anyway because victory was already given to your mom. You don't understand. There were always only two answers to your prayers. Either she was going to be healed, or she was going to be healed. Either she was going to live, or she was going to live. Either she was going to be with family, or she was going to be with family. Either she was going to be well taken care of, or she was going to be well taken care of. Victory belongs to me because of what I have already done for you. The two answers to your prayer are yes and yes. Jonathan Evans

Be encouraged today because God shows us a way when we can't see any way. And may we have the faith to trust that God's way is the better way.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2024 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No.1484-8FC