

Lesson 40
The Patience of Faith
Hebrews 11:29

What is the most difficult thing to do in the Christian life? After many years of being a Christian I can tell you from my own experience and from my contacts and counseling with other Christians, that the hardest thing to do in the Christian life is to wait patiently on God to work out what seems to be a humanly impossible situation. There is a tendency to get impatient and to run ahead of God's revealed plan, taking the matter into our own hands and by carnal, human reasoning attempting to solve the problem ourselves. Impatience is nothing more than a lack of faith in God, and when we run ahead of God, we will experience frustration, confusion, unrest and sometimes tragedy.

God allowed Moses and the children of Israel to cross the Red Sea that you and I might learn the patience of faith from example. The crossing of the Red Sea shows us the power of real faith in God to work supernaturally so as to overcome difficulties that seem impossible.

Israel exercised faith, and God honored that faith and did a miracle, and so significant was that faith that the covenant people, Israel, made the believer's Hall of Fame. ***“By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned”*** (Heb. 11:29).

THE DILEMMA OF ISRAEL - Exodus 14:1-12

“Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Tell the sons of Israel to turn back and camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you shall camp in front of Baal-zephon, opposite it, by the sea.’” -- Just as soon as Moses and Israel left Egypt, God gave them new orders. God turned them from their regular route to have them camp by the Red Sea. This was about six hours away from the original route, about a full day's journey for the nation of Israel of two million people.

Why did God change the route of Israel? There was no logical reason, but there was a divine reason. God wanted to test Israel and to judge the Egyptians. This test was absolutely necessary for the growth and maturity of the children of Israel.

“For Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, ‘They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’” -- Humanly speaking, Israel had done a very stupid thing, and when Pharaoh heard it he thought they were lost. Israel became a “sitting duck” for Pharaoh and his mighty armies.

God's plans often seem stupid to the unsaved world, but God has reasons for everything He does, and He in turn makes the world look stupid.

“Thus I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored

through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD.' And they did so.” At that time, Israel had no understanding of the great test it was to face. They had no idea that this test was designed by God so that all Egypt would know that God is God. Moses was told that God would harden Pharaoh’s heart again and that he would change his mind and come after the children of Israel.

The whole Red Sea incident was planned by God. He sent Israel to the sea and hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that he could only pursue Israel. God purposely brings crisis into the true Christian’s life to teach him lessons and to show the world the infinite power of God. God is somehow behind every crisis of life!

“When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people, and they said, “What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” So he made his chariot ready and took his people with him; and he took six hundred select chariots, and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he chased after the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out boldly (rejoicing).” -- In spite of the ten plagues brought upon Egypt, Pharaoh forgot and again defied the God of Israel. Pharaoh used only human reason and this would ultimately end in folly for him. The whole of Pharaoh’s cavalry was summoned to do battle against Israel. These were Pharaoh’s elite troops and, humanly speaking, there was no way Egypt’s army could lose to Israel who had no weapons of war and no trained soldiers.

“Then the Egyptians chased after them with all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.” -- This was an impossible situation. The Red Sea was to the east; high mountains were on the south and west and the Egyptians were blocking the only way of escape to the north. Israel was in deep trouble. Death was almost certain. Humanly speaking, this was an impossible situation.

“And as Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became frightened (afraid, frantic); so the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD.” -- When Israel saw the Egyptians coming, they became frantic and panicked. They had their eyes on the circumstances rather than on God who had a perfect plan. Israel doubted and fell apart at the seams. They had seen God do miracles and get them out of Egypt by the Passover, but in this hour of crisis, they panicked. They lost sight of God, His promises and His faithfulness.

Israel did make some kind of cry to God, but this was the cry of fear of circumstances and not the cry of confidence in God to deliver. Some people only cry to God when they are in trouble and then they wonder why He does not always answer their prayers.

“Then they said to Moses, ‘Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, “Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians”?’ For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to

die in the wilderness.” -- Doubt of God turned to murmuring and complaining on the part of Israel. When they felt that God had forsaken them, they took their unbelief out on their leadership. Moses became the object of attack because of the people’s unbelief. Moses had done a brilliant job, but unbelieving people are quick to find fault with everything but themselves. Leadership must always be ready to take criticism from people, for nothing is more unlovely than God’s people out of fellowship.

The people’s faith had faltered. They digressed spiritually, but Moses, the leader, was strong in faith. At this point, the people had to learn not only to trust the Lord, but also to trust their leader Moses. Moses’ task was to convince the people that if God had delivered them from Egyptian bondage, it was not His intention to let them die in the wilderness.

Moses must have had some second thoughts about his ability to lead the people at this point, but instead of quitting, he became strong in faith and put a tremendous challenge before the people. Instead of succumbing to the criticism of disobedient men, he rose to the occasion and believed God for the impossible.

THE DELIVERANCE OF ISRAEL. - Exodus 14:13-16; 21-28

“But Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation (deliverance) of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent (still).’” -- If the Israelites were to see God work supernaturally for them, they had to stop fearing, for all fear is a failure to trust God. They also had to stand by (steadfast, stand still); that is, they were to wait on God and use no fleshy, human means to solve this problem, but they were to trust wholly in God. They were not only to “fear not” and “stand by,” but they were also to see the salvation or deliverance of the Lord. The command “to see” means to anticipate; that is, they were to anxiously expect God to work supernaturally for them. Unless they expected God to act, He would not act. The lesson that Israel had to learn was that the Lord would fight for them and that the battle ultimately was the Lord’s!

Do you understand that the Lord will fight for you in your problems? Are you convinced that God can and will work supernaturally for you as a follower of Jesus Christ? Have you learned the lesson of patience, so that you wait upon God to give you the answer or leading concerning your problem? It is possible to run ahead of God by taking matters into our own hands. Faith trusts God to work out the problem according to His perfect will.

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Why are you crying out to me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward.’” -- Moses was apparently praying silently to the Lord when God told him to have Israel move forward. When Israel had stood still, expecting God to act, God gave the commandment to go forward. The children of Israel had to claim the promise of God and move. ***“By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned”*** (Heb. 11:29). Faith always results in activity; true belief ends up in obedience. If Israel had not moved by faith-obedience, the Red Sea would never have opened up.

“And as for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land.” -- Moses also had the responsibility of raising the staff and if he had failed to do that act by faith, the sea would not have opened up.

“Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided.” -- God performed a mighty miracle and Israel went across the Red Sea, but God performed this miracle in response to faith. We can be absolutely sure that if the people had not believed and obeyed, the waters would not have rolled back.

“And the sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.” -- Israel moved forward towards the Red Sea. It is even possible that the first ranks had to step forward before the waters divided. Their movement forward in faith was necessary before God acted on their behalf.

The Israelites went across on dry land. There should have been hundreds of feet of silt, but it was dry land. When God does a miracle, He does it right.

“Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots and his horsemen went after them into the midst of the sea. And it came about at the morning watch, that the LORD looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion. And He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty; so the Egyptians said, ‘Let us flee from Israel, for the LORD is fighting for them against the Egyptians.’” -- When the Egyptians went into the corridor across the Red Sea, they were at first on dry ground, but then the ground began to moisten and their chariot wheels began to swerve and their cavalry bogged down right in the middle of the Red Sea. The Egyptians realized immediately that God was with Israel and fighting against Egypt.

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen.’” So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing right into it; then the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh’s entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained. But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.” -- Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea in obedience to God’s command and the sea closed up; consequently the Egyptians were destroyed. Pharaoh's best cavalry drowned and their bodies washed up on shore. What seemed to be an easy victory for Pharaoh and Egypt ended up a total disaster. Why? Because God was for Israel and against Egypt. Israel believed in the one, true God and Egypt rejected Him. God only works for true believers!

THE DELIGHT OF ISRAEL - Exodus 14:30-31

“Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. And when Israel saw the power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses.” -- This was a great victory for God, and it was also a great victory of faith for Moses. Israel would never have crossed the Red Sea unless Moses had had the patience of faith. The people identified themselves with Moses, their leader, and God, through his leadership, took them across the Red Sea. ***“For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea;...”*** (1 Cor. 10:1-2). God, through good leadership, delivered Israel from what seemed to be a humanly impossible situation.

This mighty victory caused the people to reverence God, believe God more and follow Moses their leader.

CONCLUSION

Saved:

God wants every Christian to learn the lesson that “the Lord will fight for you.” Trials, problems, and difficulties must be turned over to God, for “the battle is the Lord’s.” There are four basic steps to progressive victory in the Christian life: 1) “Do not fear.” -- We are to put away all fear because fear is the result of not trusting in God; 2) “Stand by,” or “Stand still.” -- We must admit honestly that there is no human solution to the problem and cease from any fleshly effort to solve the problem; then we must patiently wait for God to give us the answer, resting in God’s sovereign will; 3) “See the salvation (deliverance) of the Lord.” -- We must anticipate that God is going to work for us and anxiously expect Him to do so; 4) “Tell the sons of Israel to go forward.” -- When God speaks to us by His Word or prayer, then we must move forward by faith, trusting God to work the problem out for His own glory. We must go forward by faith or our crisis will not be solved.

Annie Johnson Flint wrote,

*“Have you come to the Red Sea place in your life,
Where in spite of all you can do,
There is no way out, there is no way back,
There is no other way but through?”*

*Then wait on the Lord with a trust serene,
Till the night of your fear is gone,
He will send the wind, He will heap the flood,
He will say to your soul, ‘Go on.’*

*And His hand will lead you through, clear through,
Ere the watery walls roll down,
No foe can reach you, no wave can touch,
No mighty sea can drown.*

*The toiling billows may rear their crest,
Their foam at your feet may break,
But over their bed you will walk dry shod,
In the path that your Lord shall make."*

Unsaved:

For you without Christ, who have not been born of God's Spirit, notice carefully that both Israel and Egypt went into the Red Sea. They both went down the same corridor and both walked on dry land (at least for a while), but one group was saved and made it across and the other was drowned and completely destroyed. What was the difference? The difference was faith. Israel believed God and Egypt rejected God. There are just two types of people in the world in God's eyes - believers and unbelievers. Those who place their faith in Jesus Christ shall be delivered from eternal destruction and those who reject Jesus Christ shall suffer eternal destruction. Which group are you in?