

JULY 10, 1988

MAINTAINING CONFIDENCE IN GOD

Have you ever had a day when everything seemed to go just right and that no matter what you tried, it worked? Can't remember many of those, can you? What about a day when everything seems to go wrong and nothing works, no matter what you try? You probably had a couple of those last week. Actually, you've likely had more good days than you remember and the bad days were probably not as bad as they seemed. What did you do when you had a bad day? You didn't burn your house down or shoot yourself or decide to run away from it all. You may have been tempted to do all those things; however, you stuck with what you were doing because you had confidence that in the long run "things were going to work out OK." On the other hand, you have heard of people that did burn their house down or shoot themselves or run away from it all. Why? They had no hope or they had nothing in which to have confidence that life would get any better. Difficulties have been around as long as man has been around--these things are not new. People have been dealing with problems and options of how to approach them for a long time. In our study of the life of Moses we find the Children of Israel in a seemingly hopeless situation of difficulties. How will they deal these problems? What can we learn from what happened to them? That's what we want to talk about today.

You've heard of being between the devil and the deep blue sea. Moses and the Children of Israel found themselves literally between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea.

¹⁰When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD. ¹¹They said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? ¹²Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: '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." Exodus 14:10-12 (ESV)

What did they do? Panicked! This is worry -- big time worry. They cried out unto God, but it does not appear that they cried out in confidence but in fear and despair. Does worry work? Of course, it must! When you worry about something, about 95 percent of it never happens. On the other hand, about the same percentage of those things would not have happened if you had not worried about them. When we panic, then we lose perspective, we lose our reference point and forget all the lessons of the past. These people had just experienced the greatest series of miracles the world had ever seen as they witnessed the visitation of the ten plagues on Egypt. How could they doubt that God could handle this situation?

They said that it would have been better to remain slaves in Egypt rather than to die in the wilderness. Think about that. If they had remained slaves in Egypt, would they not have died, eventually? Of course, all will die. The question is not whether we will die or not die, the question is whether we will make a difference in life for having lived. This group of ragtag Hebrews were involved in a grand, historically significant happening to create a nation that would have impact on all the world -- even in today's modern world. So often, we miss out on the influence that we might have because we don't want to be inconvenienced. I think that this situation is a demonstration of the difference between preference and belief. They preferred to have freedom from Egypt and to go to the land of Canaan and start a new nation; but, they didn't really have a belief that this was their destiny and that it was more important than anything the world or Egypt could offer. What these people were saying to Moses was the equivalent of what we heard in the days of the Cold War when people would say "better Red than dead." There are some things worth dying for.

¹³And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. ¹⁴The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent." Exodus 14:13-14 (ESV)

Fear, it will make you do strange things. But notice what Moses said to them, "Fear not." Each of us can control our fears rather than have them control us. We must first realize that there is a possibility of controlling fear before we will attempt to do so. How can we do so? Listen to what Moses said next: "Stand still." In today's speech we would say, "Calm down." Panic feeds on itself and the best remedy is to interrupt the chain reaction. In other words, just stop. Once you interrupt the process, then a rational approach can be taken. What had they been doing? Looking at the Red Sea before them and the Egyptian army behind them. In other words, they had been focusing on the problem. The next thing Moses told them was to "see the salvation of the Lord." In other words, focus on the solution. What would be the outcome? PEACE would replace PANIC. "The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.

What should we do after we have calmed down and realized that the problem is not nearly as great as the ability to solve the problem? The obvious answer is to "get on with it." We may not be able to see clearly to the end of the road, but we can see the obvious next step. For the Children of Israel, they were to go to the land of Canaan which was in the direction of the Red Sea. This is what the Lord told Moses to do.

¹⁵The LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. ¹⁶Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. ¹⁸And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen." Exodus 14:15-18 (ESV)

There was no need for Moses to go back to God for further instructions at this point. In effect, God told Moses, "Why are you talking to Me, tell the people what to do!" Moses did not have to convince God to deliver these people from the Egyptians, it was His idea to start with. If they wanted deliverance, then they needed to be about the process that God had initiated for that deliverance. "Go forward." So many times, we hear people pray that God would bless us. God wants to bless us, He wants to see us succeed, He want us to be victorious and to overcome. Blessings, success, and victory come to those who walk in God's way, those who are obedient and put their trust in Him. You want blessing? Then love your neighbor as yourself. You want victory over problems, then realize that God is greater than any of your problems and that He is ready to supply strength to overcome if you will but cooperate with Him. In other words, GO FORWARD!

God was not asking them to "go forward" in their own strength but in His strength. Notice that He said to Moses to lift up the rod and stretch out his hand over the sea to divide it. The rod was symbolic of God's power that had been granted to Moses. The blessing, the success, and the victory that we seek depend on the source on which we rely for attaining these things. If we are relying on our own strength or on human resources, then we will eventually find them inadequate for the problems and challenges that we face. (We need to be careful in defining what are blessings, success, and victory and not get caught up in a false value system that is perpetrated by the world.)

The Biblical account indicates that a strong east wind came up and blew all night. The fact that God used natural forces to accomplish supernatural events does not lessen the significance of the miracle that happened. The waters separated and the ground dried up and the Hebrews walked through to the other side. However, Pharaoh's army could not follow even

though they felt compelled to do so. Throughout all of the plagues and miracles, the Egyptians did not acknowledge and worship God. They chose to rebel against Him rather than obey Him and, consequently, they could not participate in the means of salvation that God had provided for those who acknowledged Him as Lord. We may be seeing the same thing happening today in that many people attempt to follow the outward things of Christianity without ever having surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus and they become bogged down in attempting to do "churchy" things. For some it is disastrous as in the case of Jim Jones and the Guiana tragedy.

Each experience that we have with the Lord should make our faith stronger and cause us to believe more perfectly. As we see what has happened in our lives, do we see the hand of the Lord helping and guiding and giving us the victory or do we just think that all is happenstance. As we look for evidence of God's interaction in our lives we will see more and more and we will see greater and greater works that He will do on our behalf.