

POWER REVEALED

Exodus 14:19-31

When things work out well and we look back on the successes of life, we usually feel good about what we have accomplished. However, if we really took a close look at the circumstances surrounding what had happened, we would probably find that we went into that situation with a lot of uncertainty and perhaps fear. If you can remember your first real job, then you can probably remember that you weren't all that confident and sure of yourself. As the years passed, you developed skills and a lot of things worked together to produce a measure of success. One of the things that we have trouble seeing is the helping hand that God gave to us along the way. There may be one or two situations that we can point to and realize that God really was in the midst of what was happening; however, for most people, such help is rarely recognized. I believe that such help is often (or maybe always) there for us and we just fail to see it. Because we fail to see what God is doing, our uncertainty and fears keep us from doing great things that God wants to accomplish through us. As we look to the word of God, we can learn how He works through the lives of individuals and nations to accomplish His purposes. Learning how He has worked in and through the lives of others will help us recognize that the successes we have experienced are because of Him. These victories are given to us so that God's purposes will come to pass.

A good example of God working and accomplishing things through people is the great victory He gave the Children of Israel when they left Egypt. We've read about the plagues God sent on the Egyptian to get them to recognize and honor Him as God. The plagues **did** cause the Egyptians to recognize the power of God, but the Egyptians did not willingly submit to Him. Even after the final plague in which the first born of all the Egyptians were killed, they still were not willing to be obedient to God and let the Children of Israel go. Pharaoh did agree to let them go, but he then changed his mind. In the heat of the emotion, in the aftermath of the death of all the first-born sons, Pharaoh told them to leave. However, this was a decision made at the emotional level and did not represent a true change of heart. It is somewhat like the decisions people make to follow Jesus in the emotion of a revival meeting or at some other point of high stress in their lives. After the moment passes, so does their commitment.

The Children of Israel had already left by the time Pharaoh changed his mind. They were at the sea and the army of Egypt was on the way to capture them and return them to slavery. The Israelites panicked, called out to God, and complained to Moses. Their thoughts were along the lines of "It would be better to be a slave to the Egyptians than to die." They previously told Moses that he was about to get them all killed. In a spiritual sense, many people would rather be slaves to sin rather than take up their cross daily and die to self.

What could they do to save themselves? Nothing. The same is true for us spiritually. We can do nothing to save ourselves. What did Moses tell the people to do? Open their eyes and watch to see what God would do. This is good advice for us. We need to see what God has already done for us in Christ Jesus and then to participate in what He is still doing.

The Escape – 14:19-22

¹⁹ Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, ²⁰ coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night. ²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. ²² And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. Exodus 14:19–22 (ESV)

God's solution for protection of His chosen people from the Egyptians was separation provided by the pillar of cloud that had been leading them. This "angel" of God transitioned from "guide" to "guardian." There was only one way forward at that particular point, so the cloud was repositioned to guard them from the army of Egypt. The lesson for us is that God's help is appropriate for whatever is needed at the time of the need.

In the chapter 52 prophecy of Isaiah that looked toward the time of the church, Isaiah stated the lesson from that moment at the Red Sea as "But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the LORD will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard."

The character of this "separating protection" was that it appeared dark and foreboding to the pursuing army of the Egyptians and (at the same time) gave light to the Children of Israel. We might go so far as to say that every revelation of God has a dual appearance of light or darkness depending on the character of those who are exposed to the revelation. Other examples are that the Ark of Covenant in the possession of the Philistines brought about a plague and the fall of their god Dagon. When it was recovered and resided in the home of Obed-Edom it brought blessings. The very Word of God is seen by those who embrace worldly values as something that is oppressive and confining while it is seen by God's people as liberating and leading to victory.

If there is no separation between the church and the world or between Christians and nonbelievers, then there is likely to be an absence of that which brings about separation; that is, the manifestation of the presence of God.

Moses was tuned to God and he listened to God. God told him to go forward and to stretch out his hand over the sea. God took care of the rest. The waters parted and the people crossed over to the other side. All that sounds pretty simple, if you just say it. However, it is one of the great miracles of all of human

history. People have tried to explain away the miraculous nature of what happened that night. Some have said there was a great earthquake upstream and the waters were diverted because of that. However, that does not explain the waters being a wall to the right and to the left of them. The earthquake does not explain the strong east wind and the dry ground. It certainly doesn't explain the fact that it happened just at the time it was needed for the Israelites to cross over.

How many times in your life have you seen things happening "just at the right time?" Have you ever noticed how many things appear to be strange coincidences? God works in our lives in such ways so that we can come to know Him through experiencing Him. These come first in the small things and as we are faithful to recognize and respond to Him, He will involve us in more significant things He is doing.

The Defeat – 14:23-28

²³ The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. ²⁴ And in the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, ²⁵ clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians." ²⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen." ²⁷ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the LORD threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. ²⁸ The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained. Exodus 14:23–28 (ESV)

The Egyptian army was still in pursuit and the people were still concerned and afraid. It seemed that the path of escape had also become the path of pursuit for the enemies of God's people. The Egyptians were strong and had the latest and greatest in the tools of war. However, God was still in charge. Just as the wisdom of man proves to be foolishness in the light of God's truth, the strength of man is found to be the very thing that traps and hinders real success in life.

The Egyptian army had been delayed by the separation caused by the dark cloud; however, they had not abandoned the pursuit. It seemed that the path of escape had also become the path of pursuit for the enemies of God's people. The Egyptians were strong and had the latest and greatest in the tools of war. However, God was still in charge. Just as the wisdom of man proves to be foolishness in the light of God's truth, the strength of man is sometimes found to be the very thing that traps and hinders real success in life.

Is it a good assumption that as the Israelites moved, the cloud also moved and that allowed the Egyptian army and their chariots to move in pursuit of the escaping slaves? As the chariots went into the dried-up sea bed, we are told that the Lord brought confusion by causing something to happen to their chariot wheels. Apparently, whatever happened was difficult to interpret and/or translate.

Various translations state that the wheels were turned aside, wheels came off, became stiff, locked up on the axles, and clogged the wheels. It would be likely that the crusty dried ground that supported human and animal foot traffic was not strong enough to support the heavy pressure of the iron wheels that carried the weight of an iron chariot and the wheels sank into the mire below the dried surface. Chariots with wheels that are bogged down are liabilities rather than assets.

God stands against anything that defies Him and prevents His people from doing the good that He wants them to do. Even the Egyptians recognized that the God of Israel was working to make things happen. They realized they had lost. God had looked from the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire and had troubled the Egyptians. Sometimes we are so caught up in the mercy of God and His grace that we tend to forget that He is also a God of wrath. We hear people saying that God doesn't cause terrible things to happen but that He lets them happen. Tell that to the Egyptians!

We see fearful and awesome lessons for those who would defy the God of the Universe. God gave the Egyptians ten other opportunities to recognize Him and to acknowledge Him as God. The first nine plagues were designed to get the Egyptians to change their minds. In other words, they were redemptive. The tenth plague (the death of all the first born) was destructive and this destruction was followed by further destruction of the entire army of the Egyptians when they refused to obey God. With its army devastated, Egypt was vulnerable to any and all invading raiders and the judgment upon that nation has continued throughout history. They have never become a dominant world power since their open defiance of God.

The Powerful One – 14:29-31

²⁹ But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. ³⁰ Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹ Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses. Exodus 14:29–31 (ESV)

We are shown the contrast of those who belong to God to those who reject His love. The same forces which destroyed those who reject Him protected those who belong to Him. The miraculous salvation and deliverance of the Israelites followed by the destruction of the enemies of God are pictures of God's judgment of the world that continues to reject and defy the Sovereign God. Those who belong to Him will see the destruction but they will be delivered from it. The mighty act of God caused the Israelites to reverence God. As we see the battles fought and won in our behalf by this loving God, we too should live in reverential fear of Him and respond to His great love with love for Him and others.