

"The Lord Went Before Them"

AN OVERVIEW OF THE STORY (Exodus 13:17- 15:22)

- After 10th plague on Egypt, God softens Pharaoh's hard heart for the last time and he lets the people of Israel go...
- Once Pharaoh's heart was softened to let the people of Israel go they assembled at a place called Succoth (600,000 men, estimate of 2,000,000 men, women, and children...plus their flocks and herds)

God leads his people by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night

- (3:21-22) And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people."

WHAT TO KNOW

(1) The LORD goes before you and guides you through the wilderness.

- The object lesson behind the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night is simply this: The LORD clearly guides his people...no matter how we feel...no matter how bad our circumstances seem...
- Just because the LORD guides his people does not mean they know exactly where they are going. They knew the general end but not the specific means.
- The people of Israel *knew* where they were...Egypt...allegorically speaking...the world and it's enslavements.
- The people of Israel *knew* where they were going...The Promised Land...allegorically speaking...the Christian life.
- The people of Israel *didn't know* the path by which they were going to get there...The Wilderness...allegorically speaking...those circumstances that God uses to get us out of enslavement to the world and into the productive Christian Life.
- My personal story of the LORD'S guidance...
- We often have this distorted sense of the LORD'S guidance. When things are comfortable and going well we believe that the LORD is guiding us and when things are difficult and hard we think that we have somehow lost the LORD'S guidance. The truth is that the LORD is always guiding us!

Joshua 1:5 "...Just as I was with Moses so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you."

- There is no pillar of cloud here; no pillar of fire to guide him, but the LORD tells Joshua that he will be with him just as he was with Moses. But is that a guarantee that he will also be with us?

Hebrews 13:5 "Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said (quoting Joshua 1:5), "I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we can confidently say, (quoting Psalm 118:6) 'The Lord is my helper, I will not fear; what can man do to me?'"

Psalms 118:5-6 "Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me and **set me free**. The LORD is on my side; **I will not fear**. What can man do to me?"

- Notice what this knowledge that the LORD is guiding us does...it sets us free! Specifically it sets us free from fear!

Romans 8:15 "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"

- So, where are you at these days...?
- So the big question is what do we do with this knowledge? How do we behave when we know that the LORD, YAHWEH, the one true God is presently and actively guiding us?

WHAT TO DO

(a) Acknowledge the LORD.

- To acknowledge means "to admit to be real or true."
- The LORD knows exactly what path he is going to take you on to get you out of slavery in Egypt and safely into the Promised Land...he knows every hill and every valley; he knows every quiet stream and every green pasture; he knows every rock your foot will stumble upon and every miry pool into which you will

fall...and each of these are placed in your life with the explicit purpose of making you more fit for the Promised Land!

- Acknowledge the LORD, I AM!
- It is perhaps helpful here to understand the LORD'S primary concerns as he guide his people through the wilderness into their ultimate deliverance (taken directly from our text):
 - **That his people not turn back...**(i.e. that they actually make it to The Promised Land)
(Exodus 13:17 *"God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, "Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt."")*)
 - **That he gains the glory over the tyrannical leaders and their armies through their destruction.**
Exodus 14:3-4 *"For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, 'They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.' And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get the glory over Pharaoh and all his host..."*
 - **That the world learns that he is the LORD**
Exodus 14:4 *"...and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord."*
Joshua 2:9-11 *"I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away 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."*
 - **That his people learn to fear the LORD and believe on Him**
Exodus 14:31 *"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."*
 - **That he gains the glory over his people through their worship**
Exodus 15:1 *"Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD..."*

(b) Study His word with prayer and meditation.

- Pray for wisdom.
James 1:5 "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."
- Meditate on God's word and look for God's obvious commands.
Psalms 119:10 "With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!"
- Meditate on God's word and seek for God's not so obvious ways (principals).
Proverbs 1:2-6 "To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth-- Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles."

(c) Seek the counsel of wise counselors.

Pro 15:22 "Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed."

- [Caveat] The purpose of a wise counselor is not to avoid step (a) and (b) and just have someone tell us what to do (that is the mentality of a slave).
- The purpose of a wise counselor is not to absolve us of responsibility but to ensure that we have covered all the angles.
- The key here is (1) Older (look older, bear scars from doing battle, experience), (2) Wiser (Bible instructs them in every area of life – when you prick them they bleed bible; look for fruit), and (3) Humble.
- Why learn in the school of hard knocks when you can learn from someone else's hard knocks?

(d) Obey the LORD'S obvious commands and follow His not so obvious ways (principles).

- This is where the rubber meets the road. On the surface, the LORD'S ways may not always seem to be the most expedient, or pleasurable, or profitable. But the Christian life is not a pragmatic life!

(e) Make a decision and keep moving.

- The Christian Life is a tension between due caution and calculated risk.

- “To not make a decision is also to make a decision.”
- The rudder can only steer a ship if the ship is moving.
- Remember...the LORD goes before you!
- **Proverbs 16:33** “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.”

WHAT TO KNOW

(2) Sometimes the LORD intentionally guides His people into a hopeless situation where He is the only solution.

Exodus 14:2-10 “The LORD said to Moses “Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, ‘They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’ And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them...”

When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, “What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, and took six hundred chosen 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 pursued the people of Israel while the people of Israel were going out defiantly. The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon. When 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 (shrieked!) to the Lord...”

- An impossible situation...the only solution for the people of Israel in this situation was for the LORD to intervene.
- Remember, this piece of history is allegorical...it has a hidden meaning for us!
- It is meant to give us a picture of the Christian experience of moving from slavery to the world (Egypt...along with its various pharaohs and taskmasters and fleeting passions and pleasures) and into the productive Christian Life (Canaan...a life of complete submission to the LORD and his commandments and ways).
- So...what is your Egypt? What is your Pharaoh? What is your taskmaster, your fleeting passion, your pleasure, your vice? What is it that has you hemmed in, up against the Red Sea, and now threatens to destroy you?
- If you are the LORD’S, and he has given you the spirit of adoption to cry out “Abba! Father!”, then the LORD has a deliverance for you.

WHAT TO DO

(f) **Fear not, stand firm, be silent, and wait for your deliverance.**

Exodus 14:13-14 “Then 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. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.”

- You can’t fix the unsolvable problems...so don’t try!
- Pray and rest!

Exodus 14:19 “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, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night.

- The Lord moved from “guiding” to “defending”

(g) **Prepare to Worship the LORD!**

- It seems to me that the LORD is intent on having his people experience the full spectrum of our human emotions. Our emotions remind us that we are alive and that life is real!
- In many ways, life is like one long roller coaster ride of peaks and valleys, highs and lows, twists and turns...
- But what makes a roller coaster enjoyable? Faith!
- So what makes the roller coaster ride of life enjoyable? Faith, that no matter what the Lord will keep you, deliver you, and

- And what make the joy so real on the other side of the Red Sea?
- The fact that just a few hours ago
- As a matter of fact, show your faith and start the worship service early!