**CROSSING THE RED SEA**

May 16, 2021

Exodus 13:17-15:21

Key Verse 14:29 “But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.”

Another title could be “The day 2 million Israelites got baptized in the Red Sea.” This event corresponds according to New Testament to our baptism in water. The Israelites were set free by the blood of the lambs. They were on the way to the promised land. Now what God wanted to do was to baptize them. 1 Corinthians 10:1b-2 says, “Our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” Likewise after you were saved by the blood of Jesus, after you started out life of faith, a decisive and final break is needed between your old life of sin and new life. For the children of Israel, the Red Sea marked that break. We are baptized into Jesus our Lord. Our baptism signifies our declaration to the world, “I am a child of God. My old self is dead. I will live a new life in Christ from now on.” Another title could be “Faith that crosses the Red Sea.” The Red Sea symbolizes an obstacle in our life of faith. This passage shows faith that overcomes any obstacles like the Red Sea. There is a Red Sea in each person’s life. If a man remains in despair, looking at his roaring Red Sea, he will become a man of despair and die of despair. He will suffer from all kinds of fear throughout his lifetime and die in fear. Moreover, he cannot please God, nor can he be a child of God. But if, by faith, he crosses his own Red Sea, he will be called a child of God who pleases God. May God bless you to cross your own Red Sea by faith.

Last week, we learned that God sent the tenth plague, the destroyer of the firstborn. Pharaoh’s first born son perished, and so did all the firstborn of Egypt. But the Lord passed over the Israelites who marked the doorframes of their houses with the blood of the lambs, so that not a dog barked at man or animal in all of Goshen. Pharaoh sent word to Moses: “Go, all of you! And please, bless me!” The Egyptians begged the Israelites to leave, and gave them the articles of gold, silver and clothing they requested. Now the quickest road to get to Canaan was through the way of Philistines; the coastal road along the Mediterranean Sea that passed through the land of the Philistines. It would take just 2 weeks. However, that road was marked by a number of Egyptian military outposts and they had to pass through the territory of the warlike Philistines. God called 600,000 Israelites, “Israel’s army” (14:19). But in reality, they were full of bitterness, scars and sicknesses. They were people with slave mentality. They were undisciplined without any fighting experience. But God called them “Israel’s army” in the hope of raising them as his army of world conquest. Praise God! When God called them “Israel’s army,” he meant it. But the Israelites were not ready to fight, and would likely turn back if they faced opposition. So the Lord instructed Moses to lead them by the desert road that took them toward the Red Sea. Likewise, when we first believe in Jesus, God protects us from difficulties at first because we are not ready for trials. When we first believe in Jesus, it was wonderful. We were enveloped in God’s love. It looks as though we are in the Kingdom of God.

God gave the Israelites a tangible demonstration of his presence as they marched out of Egypt. Look at verses 13:21-22. “By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.” Moses had asked the Lord, “Who am I, that I should bring the Israelites up out of Egypt?” And the Lord had promised him, “I will be with you.” God was absolutely faithful to his promises to rescue his people from slavery in Egypt and to be with his servant Moses. He wanted the Israelites to know that he was with them in a very practical way. His presence with the Israelites in the pillar of cloud and of fire looked forward to the continual presence God provides his people through his Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is our light so that we never have to be afraid. The Holy Spirit is our guide so that we may never lose our way.

Look at verses 14:1-4. “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. 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.” Here we must face an uncomfortable truth about our lives under God’s sovereignty. The best route to take in our life of faith may not be the most obvious, not most straightforward; it is not the most convenient; it is not the easiest. God has his own purpose in taking us on the route he leads us, and there will certainly be Red Sea-like obstacles along the way. We live in God’s world, and his desire is to bless and prosper those who follow him in a way that glorifies himself. So, he leads his people along a complex path that allows him to fulfill his manifold purpose for all mankind and for all history. It is easy to complain that it is not fair! But the truth is that God is divinely fair in carrying out his will. To see his good will fully manifested in our lives, we must only be careful to humble ourselves, and obey his commands. We must obey and follow, even when he leads us to confront obstacles.

Look at verses 14:5-6. “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.” It would take 4 hours for a messenger pigeon to fly 400 km from the Egyptian watchtower in Migdol back to Egypt with the message that Israel was trapped and wandering aimlessly. Pharaoh forgot about all the 10 plagues that destroyed Egypt, and decided to pursue the Israelites. He thought that he could bring all the Israelites back to slavery. He gathered his best troops and chariots and pursued them and caught up with them at Pi Hahiroth.

Look at verses 14:10-12. “As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. 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!’” The Israelites had followed Moses’ leading with a kind of thankful and unquestioning obedience. After all, they didn’t know where to go or what to do. Then, they looked up and saw the pursuing Egyptians. They began to panic. They were blocked by the sea. They were caught between the Egyptian army and the sea. They grumbled against Moses. They had been following him assuming he knew what he was doing. They had voiced their concerns, but Moses had assured them that the Lord would be with them and bring them out of their misery in Egypt and into the Promised Land. They had been a people without hope for so long. But step by step, plague by plague, Moses renewed the Israelites’ hope in the Lord as their God. That hope, however, was still ever so fragile. When the Egyptian chariots came roaring from behind, and the vast and deep Red Sea stretched out before them, their hope in God collapsed like a house of cards. Their dark and sarcastic humor was the expression of years of pain living without hope, and having the hope that had been offered suddenly pulled away like a cruel joke. They saw Moses as the cause of their pain. But it was the fruit of years of living under the cruel bondage of slavery to Pharaoh. They had lived without hope until it seemed they were destined to die without hope. With such a fatalistic heart, they preferred to live as slaves, enjoying slave comforts, over dying in pursuit of false hopes. It is the tragedy of everyone living in a world under the power of sin.

Look at verses 14:13-14. “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.’” The Israelites were going to run back to Egypt. They were going to run to the Pharaoh and begged him to take them back as slaves. They wanted to save their lives. When you face the Red Sea, the temptation is to panic, complain, and go back to your old life. Moses was the target of the people’s rage and distress. It was a crisis of Moses’ leadership. But Moses had been well-trained by God. He was not swayed by the situation. He held on to his hope and faith in God, in spite of the Egyptians, the Red Sea, and the fomenting rebellion by his people. How could Moses stand fast in that critical situation? It was because he remembered what God had said to him explaining why they were going to encamp by the sea. He remembered everything that God had done for him and for his people. The situation was terrifying. But Moses believed that God would do what he had promised. Moses stood between them and Egyptians and told them to stand still. Stand still. Do not move. Just wait. Don’t panic.

Then, Moses turned and cried out to God for help. Look at verses 14:15-18. “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to 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.’” Time for praying was over. It was time for action. The Lord rebuked Moses for crying out to him! Then he told Moses to order the people to cross the Red Sea, after he had raised his staff to divide the waters. There is time to stand still and be quiet before the Lord but there is time to move. Sometimes we use prayer as a delaying tactic. When we know what to do, but do not want to do it, we say, “Let’s pray about it more.” At that time, God says, “Stop praying and get moving.”

What happened next? Look at verses 14:21-22. “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.” By his mighty power, God divided the waters of the sea and made a pathway of dry ground for the Israelites to cross. It didn’t look safe at all, with a wall of water on the right and on the left. But it was absolutely safe and secure because it was held in place by the Lord’s hand. It is a picture of the life of faith and obedience to God’s call to mission. It seems precarious and leaves no room for error. But we must be sure that the hand of God is the only sure and lasting protection against the evils and troubles of this world. And by God’s grace, the people of Israel made their way to the other side on dry ground. Look at verses 14:26-29. “The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea…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 daybreak 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. But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.” The Egyptians thought, “If these Israelite slaves can pass through the Red Sea unharmed, so can we.” So the Egyptians depended on their chariots and tried to cross the Red Sea. They all drowned. The Israelites crossed the Red Sea by faith. What God’s people can do by faith, no one can do by any other power. The Israelites saw the dead bodies of the Egyptians washing up on the shore. What did they realize? Look at verse 14:31. “And when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.” Now Israel knew that the Lord was their God, and they were his people. They also acknowledged that Moses was his servant.

Chapter 15 is the song of Moses. The song of Moses is the song of redemption. The Israelites looked and saw all the dead bodies on the shore and they sang and danced. If you and your ancestors had been a slave for 430 years and you saw your tormentors dead, you will sing and dance also. In heaven, we will all sing the song of Moses, because of God’s deliverance from our sins, and God’s destruction on his enemies. When we get to heaven, we will see Jesus and we will sing and shout the victory.

We can cross our own Red Sea by faith. May God help us to experience his mighty power in crossing the Red Sea, and to put our trust in him!

Big Idea: Cross the Red Sea by faith