

## 9. Encouragement to the faint hearted

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I must admit that being a pastor is not as easy as I used to think. Just like anyone of you, I also get discouraged for the situations that occur around the ministries or even my personal life.

But I have learned that God allows me to go through those discouraging times to strengthen me and to teach me valuable lessons to be more like Jesus my Lord.

In my walk with Christ last twenty years, I've learned God's faithfulness is the best encouragement for any situation. God uses His infallible Word, the Bible to speak to me directly or He simply dispatches one of you guys to speak to me so lovingly and gently. I am supposed to be the pastor who gives the blessings from the Lord to you all, but I feel like that I am the one who get more blessings than I give to you guys. For that I thank God and thank you.

When we remember God's faithfulness in our lives, it is very easy to trust Him for the next difficult issue. But we often forget that. The people of Israel who were coming out Egypt were no different than us. Right after the ten major plagues against Egypt and practically destroyed the country, these people started to enjoy a sweet taste of freedom from the bondage of slavery as they were leaving Egypt. But Pharaoh would not sit on his hands and take this defeat. Soon the faith of the Israelites would be challenged and God again brings in His encouragement to the faint hearted through His faithfulness.

### A. THE FIRSTBORN BELONGS TO THE LORD

*Exodus 13:1-10 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine." 3 And Moses said to the people: "Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out of this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. 4 On this day you are going out, in the month Abib. 5 And it shall be, when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall keep this service in this month. 6 Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord. 7 Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters. 8 And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, 'This is done because of what the Lord did for me when I came up from Egypt.' 9 It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the Lord's law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt. 10 You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year.*

God claims the firstborn of Israel as His own. He wants the first from believers today, also. He wants first place in our lives, but many believers put Him last, and that creates a problem. We usually give the Lord what is left over – left over time, left over stuff and left over money after we pay bills and spend for our pleasure if there is anything left.

The Jews used v9 to institute the practice the wearing of phylacteries – small boxes holding parchment with scriptures on them, held to the forehead or hand with leather straps. Later, Jesus condemned abuse of the wearing of phylacteries among the Pharisees in Matthew 23. They made their phylactery boxes large and ostentatious as a display of greater spirituality. When you go to the Western Wall of Jerusalem, you still can see the Orthodox Jews wearing these.

In the Tribulation times there will be a satanic imitation of this practice when '666' the number of the antichrist will be applied to either the hand or forehead of all who will take it.

## **B. THE WILDERNESS INSTEAD OF A SHORT CUT**

*Exodus 13:17-22 Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, "Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt." 18 So God led the people around by way of the wilderness of the Red Sea. And the children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt. 19 And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you." 20 So they took their journey from Succoth and camped in Etham at the edge of the wilderness. 21 And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. 22 He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people.*

It would have been easy for the Israelites to think that the coastal route was the way to go, because it had good, easy roads and the shortest distance. But the dangers of the way were too great, even though they could not see them.

The same is true of our walk with God – a way that seems right to us may turn out to be full of danger we can't even think of. What we need to do is simply depend on God's direction and follow Him without any argument. Easy to say, hard to do.

We need to understand that there was a legitimate wilderness experience for the children of Israel. Coming out of the bondage of Egypt, before they could come into the full, rich Land of Promise, there was the wilderness to pass through, legitimately, where they were to learn so many aspects of the nature and character of God. But there was also a forty-year illegitimate wilderness experience. The Israelites didn't trust God for the protection, provision and promises of God. Because of their unbelief, they spent the forty years in the wilderness, which was an illegitimate wilderness experience.

There are too many Christians who are doing the same thing like these Israelites. Their Christian lives go from hot to cold, following God for a month or so and all of sudden dump Him like a dirty sack of laundry. Later you can find them in the spiritual gutter, so to speak. Many Christians have up and down, up and down yo-yo lives by their own choices.

What a comfort it must have been for the Israel people to have the pillar of cloud by day to give them shade from the scorching rays of the sun and the pillar of fire by night to give them warmth in the cold desert air and light in the wilderness. It was like having a gigantic night light without paying for electricity. The pillar of cloud and fire were with them through the whole forty years that they wandered in the wilderness.

Some of us might say, "They were more blessed than us to have the pillar of cloud and fire around them all the time, since we have nothing like that." I respectfully disagree. As born-again Christians, we have the Holy Spirit, the third person in the Trinity in our heart. I'd rather have God the Spirit with me any day than the pillar of cloud and fire all my life. We do not need the visible presence of God in order to walk by faith.

### **C. SETTING AN AMBUSH FOR PHARAOH**

*Exodus 14:1-9 Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn and camp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon; you shall camp before it by the sea. 3 For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, 'They are bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in.' 4 Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord." And they did so. 5 Now it was told the king of Egypt that the people had fled, and the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was turned against the people; and they said, "Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" 6 So he made ready his chariot and took his people with him. 7 Also, he took six hundred choice chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt with captains over every one of them. 8 And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel; and the children of Israel went out with boldness. 9 So the Egyptians pursued them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and overtook them camping by the sea beside Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon.*

If I am the one who heard what the Lord said to Moses, I have to wonder if God is an adrenaline junkie, not having enough excitements in a day.

Actually, we could say that God set an ambush for Pharaoh. Even after the horror of the death of the firstborn, the change in Pharaoh's heart was only temporary. He was quick to strike at Israel when he had the chance.

For the question in v5 by the Egyptians, I could give them ten good reasons why they should not pursue the Israelites by reminding them about the ten plagues. But obviously they didn't have enough punishments from God.

Satan is not pleased when sinners are set free from his grasp, and he pursues the Christian to try to get him back into bondage. New Christians in particular must be warned that their adversary is after them.

Mobilizing 600 chariots and horsemen is like having 600 Abrams M1A1 tanks in the battle field. Chariot was a very sophisticated weapon at that time and brought a tremendous amount of fear to anyone on the other side of the battle line.

### **D. SHORT TERM MEMORY**

*Exodus 14:10 And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord. 11 Then they said to Moses, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? 12 Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?' For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness."*

Somehow we have tendency to think that we are trapped when the things in our lives don't go the way we want. Like these Israelites, they felt that they were trapped between the hot-footed Egyptians and the Red Sea. They felt that God let them down and they were about to be killed.

Fear is an emotion with which we are all quite familiar. That shiver down the spine, the hairs standing on the back of your neck, your stomach sinking, cold sweat on your body and then your mouth goes dry. We have all experienced that in life on different times.

Fear and faith cannot co-exist in the same heart. If we trust God, we need not be afraid. Whatever you call it – worry, anxiety or concern, it is nothing more than doubting God's faithfulness. It is a sin against God. When a person fears what might happen to him, he should go back to all the promises God that were fulfilled in his life and see how faithful God was. It is a matter of spiritual battle.

*2 Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

By the way, the majority of our "what if" theory never comes to reality. In other words, we worry all that for nothing. You know what they say about worry: Worry is like a rocking chair. It doesn't go anywhere, but it sure gives you something to do.

## **E. GOD'S INTERVENTION**

*Exodus 14:13-20 And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. 14 The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace." 15 And the Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. 16 But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. 17 And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. 18 Then the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained honor for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen." 19 And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. 20 So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night.*

God is going to literally intervene between the Egyptian army and the Israelites and saves His people.

Safety is not the absence of danger but the presence of God. God is not telling us to pick up our spiritual armors and swords and start to fight against the evil. Rather, He tells us to put on the full armor of God and hold up the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God and stand. We all wonder, "OK, stand. Then what?" Then, God will take care of the rest.

Another thing we must remember is that we don't fight for a victory. The victory has been achieved on the Cross by Jesus. Thus we fight from the victory. The actual fight we do in spiritual warfare is simply obeying what God teaches us from the Bible.

## F. THE RED SEA CROSSING

*Exodus 14:21-31 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. 22 So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 23 And the Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. 24 Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the Lord looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians. 25 And He took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty; and the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the face of 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 waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen." 27 And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it. So the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. 28 Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained. 29 But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 30 So the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31 Thus Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt; so the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and His servant Moses.*

We don't know exactly where the Red Sea crossing happened. This is especially true because an area like this will change geography every flood or drought season. To me, it really doesn't matter. If the Bible says that the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, that is good enough for me. Because there is nobody else I'd rather trust than God and His Word the Bible. He has proved Himself to be true to me time after time.

Many Bible critics who don't believe the crossing the Red Sea argue that what the Israelites did can be easily explained by natural phenomena. They suggest that there was one little stream called "The Sea of Reeds" which was only one foot deep and that a strong wind would sometimes come along and push the water out of the way, making it dry.

If that is the case, I say what they claim is a bigger miracle than what the Bible says. Because the entire brave and mighty Egyptian soldiers who were on the chariots and horseback stuck their heads in one foot deep water and drown themselves to death. I'd love to see that scene. That would have been more funnier than any American Home Videos. These Bible critics are such geniuses. There is a great Hebrew word for them, "Morons".

Passover illustrates Christ's death for us, and the crossing of the Red Sea pictures His resurrection. The blood of the Lamb of God has delivered us from the penalty of sin and death. The first experience is substitution, because He died in the place of the sinners. The second experience of crossing of the Red Sea is identification, because we are identified with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection.

## **G. APPLICATIONS**

**1) We cannot have victorious Christian living unless we learn to trust God and follow His ways. Otherwise, we are wasting our time.**

There are a legitimate wilderness experience for God's people and an illegitimate one. Legitimate wilderness experience is important parts of our growth as children of God, but illegitimate one is a complete waste of time and effort.

**2) The actual fight we do in spiritual warfare is simply obeying what God teaches us from the Bible.**

**3) God is so faithful to all of us to protect us and to provide us strength to go on and to point us to the right direction. All we have to do is trust Him.**

Here are a few Scriptures for you to memorize for the time when fear starts to sneak into your heart:

Psalm 37:4	2 Corinthians 12:9	2 Corinthians 10:12	2 Timothy 1:7
Proverbs 3:5-6	Philippians 4:6-7	John 10:14	Jeremiah 29:11
Hebrews 13:5	Psalm 37:25	Psalm 27:1	1 John 4:4
Psalm 34:4	Proverbs 1:33	Isaiah 41:10	Isaiah 43:1-2
2 Timothy 1:7			