

Heb 11 29 The Faith of Israel at the Red Sea: Lessons for Trials

Begin with reading Exod. 14.

Just this week, I spoke with a lady, asked her how her day was going. She said, "It's difficult." So, I asked her what was going on. She said her son's best friend was killed on highway 85 in a motorcycle accident. He left a wife and two young girls. How difficult is that? And we all get it, especially those of us who are older. Life is short and full of troubles! And everyone has their coping mechanisms. Most just grin and bear and take it day by day as time passes slowly. And all of us are in the same boat, Christians and non-Christians alike. But for the Christian, we have the most precious help. It is faith . . . faith in the promises of God! Today, we come to the story of the Red Sea, arguably the greatest trial in the history of Israel. I would like to consider 4 lessons for God's people concerning trials (See A.W. Pink: *Hebrews*).

1. God's People Face Great trials. This truth is the most obvious. Life is full of trials. I am sure that living as slaves in Egypt, enduring under the rule of foreign king and foreign nation, the Hebrews experienced great trials. I can't imagine a government making laws that require a people to kill all their male children. But, no trial was as pressing and as severe as the Red Sea. After leaving Egypt, the Israelites came to the Red Sea. And they could not pass without going around. And behind them came the armies of Egypt. The people were not warriors. They had no chariots or horses or other weapons of war to defend themselves. I think the only thing they could see was death, or possibly a return to slavery.

In the same kind of way, God places very difficult trials in the lives of his people. Though these trials may happen at various times in our lives, I particularly think of new Christians. My first big trial after I became a Christian was how I would respond in godliness to my friends from the baseball team at ASU. My life changed drastically. And still nothing compares to those early trials as I had to make decisions of godliness. And yes, I failed, but slowly but surely, by the grace of God, I changed. And yes, I lost some good friends (at least close relationships). But, in those early couple years, faith in the promises of God prevailed. I think especially of young people in high school and college. I think of our young ones who go overseas and will face life-changing trials. And it is not that older Christians do not face difficult trials either. I think old age brings so many more trials. It is just that older folks are further along in their sanctification, and they have "learned" as Paul says, "***to be content in whatever situation***" (Phil. 4:11). I think this is a trait of a mature church that has been through many years together; the older people do not grumble and complain but endure with godliness, and this is by faith in the promises of God.

Examples abound of great trials. It may be in your own family as some or all of them are not Christians. Instead of peace, you find a sword. It may be in your work place as you may be asked to do something that goes against your conscience as a Christian. And standing up may mean the loss of your means to provide (at least until you can find something else). Personally, I see the entertainment culture (particularly sports) as a great trial in the lives of Christians. I'm afraid that many good Christian parents may lose their kids when they are older as realize they have aided a system of idolatry. As the Hebrews thought it would be easy after leaving Egypt, they never thought such a great trial would come so quickly!

2. God's People Are Often Terrified by Powerful Enemies. I cannot imagine how terrified the Israelites were on the shores of the Red Sea. There they were, with all their children, and no real weapons of war. Without a miracle there will be no escape. There is an uncrossable sea in the front and an army on the back. How natural would their terror be! The same can be said for the Christian. We have great fears as we trace the trials of this life. But I want to go a bit deeper here. It seems to me that when I read the entire Bible, most OT and NT people of faith do not fear PHYSICAL calamities. They do not fear so much what will happen to their physical bodies. They do not fear persecutions and the consequences of standing up for the God and the Gospel of Christ. They do not even fear death. I think of Jesus' words in Luke 12:4: **"I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do."**

I think of all the prophets of old who suffered great persecutions and faced their trials bravely without fear. I think of Daniel in the Lion's den or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who endured the wrath of the king in the furnace. I think of the early Christians who praised God when they were beaten with rods because they were counted worthy to suffer as Christ suffered. I think of Paul as he travelled to Jerusalem, knowing he would go through the greatest trials of his life (Eph. 20:22-23). Or even Heb. 11:35-38 which says: **"Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."** On and on we could go.

But when we consider Israel at the Red Sea, they were right at the beginning of their "salvation." They were "young" in the faith. I think of the new Christian (even my own example). In the beginning of my faith, I was filled with joy and relief and praise, etc. God saved my soul . . . not from physical slavery, but from slavery to sin and death. But, it wasn't long that I saw, as Paul says, **"another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bring me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members"** (Rom. 7:23). Brothers and sisters, our biggest battles, our biggest trials . . . are not so physical; they are spiritual. Satan pursues the young Christian . . . and the old Christian as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. And sin remains. This is obvious! Which of you has not struggled with your sin this week? And the more we grow, the more we experience this reality. Back in Egypt, the taskmasters used whips, but on the Red Sea they come with chariots and horses and weapons of destruction. Christian, the most powerful enemies are sin and death and our own struggles as we bear the enmity placed on this creation from the fall! Brothers and sisters, I find myself more terrified today of my own wanderings and my lack of devotion and love for God than I do of the physical trials that will come my way. Yet, it still FAITH in the promises of God that He will carry me all the way to heaven.

Application: In reality we do fear such physical trials. But, when we consider the promises of God, these fears lessen and even subside. Prov. 28:1 says **"The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion."** This is faith . . . Faith in the promises of God!

3. God's People Are Often Troubled with Faint Hearts. When the Hebrews looked back and saw the armies of Pharaoh, they were afraid. And then they looked forward and all they saw was the sea. And in their fear, they grumbled and complained against Moses (against God). Now, there was a real danger. As far as they could see, there was no escape. And they were driven to despair.

One of the best examples in the NT is found in Mark 4. You know the story. **“And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, ‘Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?’ And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’”** (Mark 4:36–41).

When the Hebrews saw the imminent threat and danger, when the disciples saw the storm and realized they were going to die, what happened to their faith. The Israelites had just seen the 10 plagues and the great power of God to deliver them from Egypt. The disciples had seen the power of Jesus to heal, to cast out demons; they saw his authority to teach with power. And in both cases, their acts did not accord with faith. Jesus said to the disciples, **“*Have you still no faith.*”**

So, how are we doing? How is your faith? Such a big question! It is true that Christians (those of faith) can be troubled with a faint heart when the trials of life hits us. When death in the family comes. When sickness shows up again, and this time the sickness is more permanent. When anxiety or depression seems to be the norm. When you look around and see all the idolatry, all the anti-God, anti-truth claims being made. When your job overwhelms you. When your kids are not Christians, they are not trusting the Lord. And I haven't even mentioned persecutions as Christians (which is still relatively minimal in comparison to the stories of the early church). Brothers and sisters, Christians will be troubled with faint hearts.

Now, I know this is not science. Speaking of faith is not so “black” and “white.” We are all at different places in our sanctification. Jesus says some faith produces 10 fold, some 20 fold, some 30 fold, etc. But, rest assured, when faith is low or “dim,” life will be much harder on you in every way. A.W. Pink says, *“When faith is dormant the most insignificant stream will make us quiver and cry . . . saying, ‘I shall be drowned in the flood.’”* But a strong faith will not fear the oceans of difficulties in our lives. How we handle life's trials is directly linked to faith. Do you believe the promises of God in Christ? Let's move on as this next lesson will help us apply this truth.

4. God's People Know How to Act During Trials. Now, it is kind of obvious that the Hebrews didn't know what to do. They should have. But they did not. So Moses reminds them. In our story, as the people feared the Egyptians and the Sea and they grumbled against Moses, he says to them, **“Fear not and stand firm . . . See the salvation of the Lord . . . And then, “Go forward”** (vv. 13-15). It is like he is saying, *“take a deep breath, do not fear, don't try and run, stand still*

and don't move. See what God will do." And then, "go forward." So, "STAND firm." "SEE the salvation of the Lord." And then "GO forward." This is what faith looks like in trials.

STAND FIRM! To stand firm is to know that God is in control. God knows exactly their danger. For He brought them there. And He was not about to abandon them to destruction. From Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God had promised, He made a covenant with these "Fathers," with this people . . . that He would be their God and they would be his people. There is no way he would leave them to destruction. Brothers and sisters, this is the message of the Bible! God will not forsake his people! He has promised. Is. 41:8-10 says, "**But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off"; fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.**" Do not fear! STAND FIRM! Is. 43:1-3: "**But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."**"

SEE the salvation of the Lord! Now, all miracles are miracles. They all go against natural laws. But, the Red Sea is a big one! Here, God opens up the waters for Israel to pass through to the other side. Up to that point, all the Hebrews could do was WATCH and SEE what God would do. And then he says, "GO FORWARD." Here, we must observe the order of these three things as we understand faith displayed during trials. We cannot go forward unless we see the salvation of the Lord. And the salvation of the Lord cannot be seen properly until our fears are calmed and we stand still. A.W. Pink says, "*until we give up all the feverish activities of the flesh.*"

So, let's think about this in the context of the Gospel of Christ. Fear not! Stand still! Look back at Heb. 11:6: "**And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists, and that he rewards those who seek him.**" We must know that God is God and we are not! He is the sovereign ONE. We are creatures. And we must know that all allegiance belongs to him. To serve anyone else or anything else is idolatry. And as sinners who are separated from God, we cannot save ourselves. In fact, without his mercy and his working to save us, we will perish. Such was Israel at the Red Sea. ALL authority in heaven and earth belongs to God. This is the first step of faith! And, what we are reminded of in trials. God is still sovereign. He brings the trials, he ordains the tribulations, even though they come through the effects of sin. This is what it means to STAND STILL. And when we do, fear subsides, and can even go away.

Next, SEE the Salvation of the Lord. For the Hebrews it was the parting of the Red Sea as they passed through . . . And the destruction of the Egyptian army. They were safe. They were delivered. They were saved. Today, the Bible says, "**God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life**" (John 3:16). "**And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved**" (Acts 4:12). The Red Sea crossing was a

picture of God delivering his people through his Son. This is what the Book of Hebrews is about: There is but one sacrifice for sins! This is what faith is made for: to find salvation in the Son! This is the need of every person, every sinner born from Adam! If you are not a Christian, look to Christ. He will save you. If you are a Christian, look to Christ now, love him, worship him, obey his commands, knowing that apart from him you can do nothing.

And the final command is “Go forward.” This is always the command for the Christian: GO FORWARD. In Matt. 18:18-20 Jesus says, “Go therefore and make disciples . . .” “Teach those you baptize to ‘obey’ his commands.” Why? Because all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Christ. And, He will be with us, always! As Christians, we do not fear. Our Lord has conquered. And by faith we are united to Him. We are seated in the heavenly places. We STAND FIRM in the righteousness of Christ because we have SEEN his salvation. And our orders are to GO forward. This is a good and simple way to break down our marching orders in this life, which is short and full of trials.