

# Lessons from The Red Sea When Things Seem Darkest

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you . . . – Isaiah 43:2A

## Part I – When Bad Things Happen

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where life just seemed so incredibly difficult? You feel yourself overwhelmed with darkness and struggle. Maybe it is the result of something foolish that you have done that you find yourself in this predicament. Or maybe you are shocked by how all of a sudden everything seems to be crumbling around you.

Sometimes as Christians we are shocked when something bad happens to us, after all, we have given our lives to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. So, shouldn't that mean we have an extra protection and extra blessings? Actually, having Christ as our Lord does mean we are blessed beyond belief and protected from a multitude of things, but it does not mean that we are immune to all challenges and struggles. When we get to heaven – things will be perfect, but right now we live in a broken world

God never promised that we would never face difficulties...he just said that he would be with us and would help us through – even in those most challenging times. **Isaiah 43:2** says *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.*

But to be honest, there are times when I wonder where God is. Maybe because I am a pastor, I hear many of the problems and deep struggles that my friends here and around the world are having to face. And for some of those dear friends it seems as if before they can recover from one tragedy, the next crisis is on top of them. And I know God is big enough and powerful enough to have handled that situation before it got so bad, so why didn't he stop it, why didn't he protect them? What good can

possibly come out of those struggles? Or maybe, there is more to it than what we see.

## Part II – Lessons from the Bible

What I love about studying scripture is God has a way of opening his Word up to us and constantly teaching us new insights.

**Hebrews 4:12** says that *the word of God is living and active.* I see that over and over. It seems as if the Holy Spirit guides you to those passages that seem to answer your deepest questions and address those issues with which you are struggling. And often it is with those passages and stories that you have read over and over before, and yet this time when you read it God seems to point to a certain word or concept that you never even thought about before.

One of the most well-known stories in the Old Testament is about Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt and how God parted the Red Sea so that they could cross on dry ground. It is the salvation story for the nation of Israel. And maybe because it is so well-known is why we just skim over it thinking we already know all about it.

But in re-reading these passages I realized that there are some great lessons that we can *learn from the Red Sea.* We'll take a look at a few of them this morning.

Just to briefly recap how the Israelites came to be in this precarious position beside the Red Sea... The Israelites had gone to Egypt during the time of Joseph because there was a famine in their own land. They were welcomed there at that time because Joseph was in a position of leadership. But the book of Exodus begins by telling us that Joseph and all of his brothers and that generation died. Over the next 400 years the Israelites became the slaves of the Egyptians and the Egyptians were incredibly cruel to them. The Israelites cried out to the Lord for help. So, God spoke to Moses through

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a burning bush and sent him to Egypt to rescue his people from Pharaoh. The book of Exodus tells the amazing story of the Ten Plagues that God poured out on Egypt until finally after the last one the Egyptians were more than ready to let the Israelites go. And Moses began leading them into the desert.

## Part III – God’s Leading

But it wasn’t just Moses leading the people into the desert, in actuality it was God leading them. Exodus 13:21-22 says, *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.*

So God is leading them exactly where he wants them and he even tells them where he wants them to camp. Exodus 14:1-2 says, *Then the Lord said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hairoth, between Midgol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephron.* And then in verse 4 the Lord goes on to say, *And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them.*

OK, is this picture disturbing to anyone else? These are God’s people, the ones he supposedly loves and should be taking care of and protecting. Yet the Lord specifically leads them to this particular place, by the sea, to camp. And then God hardens Pharaoh’s heart so that he decides to gather up his entire army and pursue the Israelites. So here are the Israelites, the men, women, and children and everything they own sitting their trapped by the sea in front of them and the entire Egyptian army bearing down on top of them... and what is worse, this is from no fault of their own, but instead God led them into this dangerous position. Can you imagine how they felt? What kind of god would do such a thing to his people?

## Part IV – God Knows

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Take a deep breath and listen very closely... God did not make a mistake. It was not an accident that the Israelites were in this dangerous situation. We would say that they are “between a rock and a hard place” or even more specifically “between an army and a wet place.” There is absolutely nothing they can do to save themselves. And what we need to understand is 3 things: 1) God knew exactly where they were, 2) It is where God wanted them to be, and 3) It was not the end of the story.

Wow! Do you think those three things could also apply to our lives and particularly when it seems as if we are going through the darkest times of our lives? To be honest, I really find comfort in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> items.

For item number 1, I love the fact that God knows exactly where I am. Particularly if I am in a difficult or dangerous situation, I find it comforting that God is fully aware of what I am going through. And by the way, it is not just that God knows where we are, but we know from Scripture that God is with us. So even in that dark, scary place when it may seem like God is silent and may have forgotten us, the truth is that God is there with us.

And for item #3, it is great to know that it is not the end of the story. I will not be stranded in that challenging situation. Just like Daniel’s story did not end in the lion’s den; and Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego’s story did not end in the fiery furnace; and more importantly Jesus’ story did not end on the cross or in the tomb. God writes the rest of the story. So that is good.

## Part V – God’s Purpose

But the piece of the Red Sea story that made me squirm and feel uncomfortable was that 2<sup>nd</sup> realization – that God wanted them to be in the middle of that dangerous, difficult, frightening situation where they could not save themselves.

Yet God had a purpose for leading them into this position with the sea in front of them

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and the Egyptian army behind them. And God even explained it upfront as we read the rest of verse 4 when the Lord was speaking to Moses, *But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.*

God demonstrated his power not only so the Egyptians would know that he was Lord, but also so that he could remind his own people, the Israelites of his power so that they would put their trust fully in the Lord. Maybe we really have to be in those situations where we know we can't save ourselves so that we make sure that our focus and our faith is fully on the Lord.

So, at that moment when the Israelites were about to lose all hope is when God stepped in. And scripture tells us that the winds blew, and the sea split and God lovingly created a path for his people to walk though. Can you imagine what it would have been like walking through that passageway? And the scriptures (22) tell us that *the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground with a wall of water on their right and on their left.* It makes me wonder – was it loud like the roaring sound of raging water or was there an eerie silence as if they were in a protective sleeve. How close were they to the water, was it a narrow passage where they could almost reach out and touch the water and feel the wetness or was it a wide passage where God kept plenty of distance between the people and the walls of the water. And if you and I would have been there would our hearts have been racing in panic of let's hurry across before something happens or was there an amazing calmness that "God's got this" and let's just enjoy this miracle?

We do know that when the Egyptians did try to follow that the Lord allowed the water to flow back over all of the Egyptian army killing them.

Chapter 14 ends with this summary, (30-31) – *That day the Lord saved Israel from*

*the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. And when the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.*

## Part VI – For God's Glory

It is very clear when you read this chapter that God staged this particular event just as he wanted. And the reason why was to "gain glory so that everyone would know that he was the Lord." In fact, three times (4, 17, 18) the Lord says, *"The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen."*

So, allow me to toss this thought out there. If God would use such an elaborate scheme as parting the Red Sea to demonstrate his power in order for people to recognize that he is in fact the Lord God Almighty, then do you think that there might be some of the circumstances and situations in our lives where God might also choose to demonstrate that he is in fact God?

And let's be honest, when things are going smoothly in our lives we often forget about God. We tend to think we have it all under control. So maybe we are a lot like the Israelites in that it is when we find ourselves in those difficult places between a rock and hard place and can't imagine how to handle things on our own, that we finally turn to God and cry out for his help. And those are the times when God can demonstrate who he really is so that we can experience his glory.

So possibly instead of panicking and asking, "Why is this happening to me, Lord?" we could instead be asking, "How might you use this for your glory, Lord?"

We see in Scripture how God used suffering and difficulties to demonstrate his glory. In John 9 (2-3), Jesus' disciples saw a blind man and asked, *"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"*

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Jesus replied, “*Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.*” And Jesus healed him.

In John 11 (1,3) Lazarus became ill and his sisters Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus to come. (4) When Jesus heard this he said, “*This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.*” And you know the story, Lazarus died and was put in the tomb, four days later Jesus shows up and raises Lazarus from the dead... to the glory of God.

And then the ultimate was Jesus knowing that he would soon be crucified and yet he recognized that the reason he would go through all that pain and suffering was so that ultimately God would be glorified. John 12:27-28 red letter words – “*Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!’*”

## Part VII – The End of the Story

God is able to use any situation or circumstance so that it glorifies his name. So when you are in the middle of that difficult situation, don’t panic, just trust that God is there with you and is still working. There is more to the story.

You may have heard the story about a little boy who came home from Sunday School and his mother asked him what he had learned that day. He explained, “Well, Mom, our teacher told us how God sent Moses behind enemy lines on a rescue mission to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. When he got to the Red Sea, he had his army build a pontoon bridge and all the people walked across safely. Then, he radioed headquarters for reinforcements. They sent bombers to blow up the bridge and all the Israelites were saved.” “Now, Joey, is that really what your teacher taught you?” his

mother asked. “Well, no Mom, but if I told it the way the teacher did, you’d never believe it.”

You know, who could have possibly imagined that God would just part the Red Sea so that the Israelites could walk through to safety. And no matter what difficulty you are facing, there is more to the story and who knows what creative way God will use to handle it and glorify his name.

The Lord does not always deliver us from our problems and difficulties the way we want him to. Instead he does it *his way* and in the end his way is always so much better than we could have ever imagined. And he will do it in a way that lets us know that he is Lord and it will glorify his name.

So when things seem the very darkest, then do as God instructs us in our Memory Verse – Psalm 50:15 – *Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.* Trust God to write the end of the story... and to do it in a glorious way! Amen.

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