

Lessons from The Red Sea

Doing Our Part

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on.” – Exodus 14:15

Part I – Last Week’s Lessons

Last week we were looking at the book of Exodus and trying to see what **Lessons we could learn from the story of the Red Sea**. Just as a reminder, the book of Exodus begins by saying that the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, and they cried out to the Lord God Almighty to rescue them. Certainly, God could have just looked down from heaven and “poof” they were free. But instead what we see over and over in the Bible is how God will use people to do his work. And God does not use people because the Lord is not capable of doing things on his own, but so that we can experience God in all of his glory.

So, God spoke to Moses, who at that time was just a shepherd out tending his sheep, and God appeared to him in a way that would really get his attention – from a burning bush, and told him to go back to Egypt and confront Pharaoh and say, “Let my people go.” And certainly, God could have made it such a convincing request that the first time Moses asked that Pharaoh said, “Why of course! Go enjoy yourselves. Have a wonderful trip – have a wonderful life! Thanks to all of you for all your great years of service!”

But instead, God drug the process out long enough to demonstrate his magnificent power by doing the Ten Amazing Plagues of blood, frogs, gnats, flies, livestock, boils, hail, locust, darkness, and the death of the firstborn. You realize of course that any one of those could have been the straw that broke the camel’s back so that Pharaoh said, “Get out of here!” But God wanted everyone to know without a doubt who he really is.

And it was the same thing with God intentionally putting the Israelites in the frightening, difficult position of being trapped with the Red Sea in front of them and the

Egyptian army rushing up from behind them. God could have made it simple and easy, but he wanted there to be no doubt in anyone’s mind that God is the Lord of the Universe and for us all to glorify his name.

So last week we learned that sometimes, just like the Israelites, we can find ourselves in difficult, frightening situations and maybe it is God about to show us that he is Lord and we need to be glorifying his name.

Part II – More Lessons

But there are still so many **more lessons** that we can learn from this part of the Bible. I encourage you to pray and read it on your own because I know God will speak directly to you and what is going on in your life. But I also wanted to take one more Sunday on this topic to point out some really great lessons that we can apply to our lives.

When we study the Bible, we see both those things that are good that demonstrate what will be helpful in our lives, but there are also those stories or situations where someone does something that is not wise, and we can learn from that what we don’t want to be doing. And that is certainly true of this story as we watch Moses and the Israelites and what they do and how that can give us hints and advice of what would be helpful in our own lives.

Remember, the Bible is the one book that is not just intended to be read – it should be read *and* applied. And if you don’t bother applying the lessons to your own life then you are missing out on the wisest lessons ever given. So, let’s see what additional lessons we can learn.

Part III – Listen to God

The **first lesson** we can learn is how important it is to **listen to God**. We looked at these verses last week, but I want to point them

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out to you again, so you learn from them and apply them to your life.

In the first four verses in Exodus 14, God tells Moses and the Israelites three things: 1) God tells them what they need to do, 2) God says what he will do, and then 3) God explains exactly why he is doing it. 1) He tells them where to camp, 2) God tells them that he will harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will pursue the Israelites, and 3) God explains that the whole reason he is doing all of this is so that God can gain glory, and everyone will know that he is Lord.

So, God told them everything up front. How well do you think the Israelites listened? God told them 3 things, but they only heard the 1st one. But to their credit, at least they were paying enough attention that they listened and obeyed the first part when God explained to them and led them to the place by the Red Sea where they were supposed to camp. In fact, the final statement in **verse 4** is a confirmation to their obedience – *So the Israelites did this.*

But apparently the Israelites did not hear or pay attention to all that God said. (Certainly, you and I always listen and comprehend all that God tells us. Right?) We see in **verse 10** that the Israelites look up and apparently, they are shocked that the Egyptians are marching after them. And it says that, *They were terrified and cried out to the Lord.* I would expect that they would be pretty uncomfortable with the situation, but if they had really listened closely to everything the Lord told them up front then they would have known everything that was going to happen and *why* it was happening, and they could have trusted that God knows what he is doing and has it all under control.

So, what we need to learn from this is that you and I really need to be listening to God so that we know what to do in life and we are not caught off guard when other things pop-up. And the best way for us to listen to God is to spend time with God – studying God's Word

and praying so that we better know who God is and we hear his voice clearer when he directs our steps.

Part VI – Pray and Trust

The **next lesson** we need to learn is to **pray and trust**. Those two things go together. Why would you even bother praying to God if you will not also have faith and trust God to answer your prayers. **Hebrews 11:6** says *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.* It just does not make sense, you must have enough faith to know that God exists and hears your prayers and can answer your prayers, or why would you ever bother praying in the first place. Now he may not answer our prayers the way we tell him to do it, after all he is God, and so he knows what is best for us and the situation. But we can definitely pray and trust that God is God and he's got this.

Now I want you to notice what the Israelites did. They did (10b) **"cry out to the Lord."** That was their version of a panicked prayer. But instead of keeping their eyes on the Lord and trusting God, they immediately turn their eyes on Moses and start blaming him for everything. **Verses 11 and 12** – *They said to Moses, "Was it because there were not 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!"*

I wonder, do you and I do the same thing? Do we toss a quick panicked prayer up to the Lord – "God help me!" and then immediately start running around like a chicken with its head cut off and panicking and blaming everyone and in such a state of fear that we cannot think straight? Or do we trust God enough to pray and know that our help comes from the Lord and so even if we don't know

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what to do or what the solution will be, we know that God is big enough to handle everything. That whatever we are facing is tiny compared to God's power and so we can relax and look with expectation of what God is about to do in our lives. We simply need to pray and trust.

Part V – Stand Firm & Move Forward

The next lesson I had to pray over for a while because it seemed to be two contradictive messages. Let me show you the scriptures and what I am talking about. In verses 13 and 14 it says, *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 be still."* I believe that with all my heart that there is nothing that we need to be afraid of because it is the Lord who delivers us and comes to our rescue and if we watch we can see that it is God, in his own power making the difference. It is not anything that we can do on our own.

But my struggle was in the fact that Moses said, "Stand firm...you need only be still." And yet in the very next verse (15) *the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on."* And then God tells Moses (16), *"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."*

So my question in all of this was, which is it – "stand firm" or "move on"? Moses tells the Israelites, "you need only be still" while God is saying, "hurry up and raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea so that Israelites can go through." If you and I want to learn a lesson to apply to our lives, then which should it be – "be still" or "take action"?

Actually, I felt like God gave me the answer in the middle of the night on Thursday night. And the answer was so simple – the

answer was that there is a time for both! There are times in our lives where we need to just, as God says in Psalm 46:10 – *"Be still, and know that I am God."* We need that time to recognize God is God and that we are going to allow him to direct our steps rather than just rushing around thinking that we are in control and know what is right.

But what God reminded me in the middle of the night was ...after we have given it to God *then* that is when we move forward and when we move forward it is in the wisdom and the power of God.

Part VI – Take Action – Step by Step

In fact, our Memory Verse this week is verse 15. *Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on."* I know usually I give you those nice, comforting, encouraging scriptures for you to memorize. But, I think as Christians in this culture our biggest fault is that we sit back waiting for God to do everything, when what God really wants is for us to pray and trust him and then *take action in his power*. Actually, the phrase I heard in the middle of the night was *"move forward... in the power of God."*

Sometimes I wonder if God is waiting for us to step out in faith before he demonstrates his power and miracles. If you remember another water-parting story in the book of Joshua chapter 3, when the Israelites were getting ready to cross into the Promised Land, (15-16) *God did not stop the flow of water in the Jordan river until the priest's feet touched the water's edge.*

But it makes me wonder about something with the Red Sea, could the Israelites stand on the west shore of the Red Sea and see a clear, dry path all the way over to the east shore or could they only see the next few steps. **Charles Henry Mackintosh** was a nineteenth-century preacher and writer of Bible commentaries. And according to his writings he believed that the Red Sea did not divide

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throughout all at once, but opened progressively as Israel moved forward, so that they needed to trust God for each step. Mackintosh wrote, “God never gives guidance for two steps at a time. I must take one step, and then I get light for the next. This keeps the heart in abiding dependence upon God.”

I think the same is true for us. God may not clear the path totally and make it easy for us to see where we will ultimately end up, but if we trust him, he will show us step by step the most glorious path ever. And it will be perfect!

Part VII – Our Part

We are called to do our part. You see, we have a part to play in this life. God never intended us to just sit on the sidelines and take it easy while we watch God do everything. Life is not a “spectator sport” it is a “participation sport.” And if you are not fully involved, then you are not fully living.

The Israelites played their part in their own salvation by moving forward, not just by sitting on the beach watching God’s magnificent tricks with wind and water. There comes a time for all of us when you have to take action. And when we take action, while depending on God, then that is when God can adjust our steps and give us his power, and that is when we really experience his glory. That applies to our personal lives, and our church, and our community, and in all areas.

It is like watching this church grow and attendance increase, it is because some people have made it a point to take action and continually invite others to be a part of this church family and experience what God is doing. And because of that they have been in the center of God’s glory of being able to enjoy sitting and worshiping with family and friends. That is so much better than sitting back thinking that if God wanted to, he could bring other people. He could, but he most often allows us to participate in his blessed ministries.

Or it is like some of the difficulties in our community and our world. We can wonder why God hasn’t done something, or we can recognize that he did – he put us in a position to help. And some of you recognize that God has called you to *take action in his power* and you have helped with Bridges and Cedar Hill Shares and the school district and the Educational Foundation and the Library and a multitude of other areas.

God never intended for us to stand on the shore crying and wringing our hands about the difficult things going on around us. Instead, there are some **wonderful lessons** we can learn about doing our part: we need to listen to God, when we pray - we need to trust the Lord, and there are times we need to be still and remember who God is, and then we need to take action and move forward in the power of God. May we learn these lessons so that we might truly recognize and know that God is the Lord God Almighty. Glory to God. Amen.