

Old Testament Lessons

OT Stories That Teach Us About God and Faith

April 05, 2020

I. Review

- A. Last Sunday, we talked about the Israelites fear-driven distrust of God and anger over being trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army – which was definitely coming to return them to slavery in Egypt.
 1. And as I pointed out last Sunday, this kind of fear is the enemy of faith. Yet in spite of that, we Christians tend to give in to this kind of fear when faced with what appears to be imminent danger, or the loss of what we believe we must have to feel safe and secure, or being denied those things that make us feel satisfied and happy.
 2. This “enemy of faith” kind of fear is easily recognizable because –
 - a. It is built on a victim/self-pity mentality – which is a mindset
 - (1) that believes your troubles and problems are overwhelming,
 - (2) and believes you are unable to change your circumstances, or cope with your troubles, or remain inwardly calm and peaceful in the midst of them,
 - (3) and believes that God, along with certain people are targeting you for mistreatment or denying you some deserved good while making life better for others – which leads to a low, critical, and often condemning view of God.
 - b. In addition, faith destroying fear feeds discouragement, despair, hopelessness, anger, and depression.
 - c. And finally, this kind of fear ignores or disputes truths in God’s word that show it to be irrational or simply unnecessary.
 3. As we saw in last weeks story, Israel allowed this kind of fear to rise up among them – even though God told Moses He was putting them in what seemed to be a hopelessly trapped position for the purpose of luring the Egyptians to their own destruction and death, and in spite of the fact that God was visibly with them in the cloud by day and pillar of fire by night.
 4. However, in spite of Israel’s misplaced distrust and anger at what appeared to be a disastrous situation – but wasn’t, both God and Moses were patient and kind to them. And herein is a picture of the mercy and grace of God toward all His children – and especially those who are new to the Christian life.
- B. Today, we are going to look at the story of Israel crossing the Red Sea and traveling three days into the wilderness.

C. Prayer

- II. The story of God's salvation in spite of our human weaknesses and failings
- A. This story has its roots in Egypt where the Israelites had at least enough comfort, security, and good food to make them want to return their when life outside of Egypt seemed worse than it was in Egypt.
1. The Israelites first showed this "**I wish I was in Egypt**" mindset when they were trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army. We read about this in **Exodus 14:10-12**, "As Pharaoh and his army approached, the Israelites...panicked...and they cried out to the LORD, [11] and...said to Moses, 'Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness? Weren't there enough graves for us in Egypt? What have you done to us? Why did you make us leave Egypt? [12] Didn't we tell you this would happen while we were still in Egypt? We said, Leave us alone! Let us be slaves to the Egyptians. It's better to be a slave in Egypt than a corpse in the wilderness!'"
 2. Have you ever wished you could live more like the world or return to certain sinful ways when the cost of godliness seemed more than you should have to pay or were willing to pay?
 3. Now as I said last Sunday, we ought not be too hard on the Israelites in that situation because they were new to trusting God, and their experiences of trusting Him in hard times were limited. After all, they had just come out of 80+ years of slavery and the systematic killing of their baby boys with no intervention by God.
 4. Yet the reality is, their distrust of God and anger at Moses was uncalled for – because they weren't trapped, it only looked that way. The reality is, God was working in ways they could not see to save them and destroy the Egyptian army.
- B. The story of God's salvation goes like this – **Exodus 14:15-20** . . . Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to Me (*that is, why are you talking to Me as if I am not already making a way to save you*)? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward (*that is, to continue moving away from Egypt even though returning to Egypt seems very tempting at this moment*). [16] **As for you** (Moses), lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land. [17] **As for Me** (God), behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored (*gain awe and respect*) through Pharaoh and all

his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. [18] Then the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen." [19] The **angel of God** (*the unseen yet active protection of God*), who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them (*as a guard between them and the Egyptian army*); and the **pillar of cloud** (*the visible presence of God*) moved from before them and stood behind them. [20] So **it came between** the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel (*in other words, God stood between His children and their enemy and prevented their enemy from harming them*); and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light (*to the Israelites for crossing the Red Sea*) at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night.

C. At this point I have a few questions for you.

1. What do you look at when trapped in a seemingly disastrous or no-win or painful situation? Do you look only or mostly at the current, outwardly observable circumstances?
2. Or do you look at your current situation **while also** looking for God's presence in and around the situation, and relying on God's Word to tell you how to deal with the situation?
3. If you only or mostly look at the current, outwardly observable circumstances, it will be easy to conclude that God is either not there, or if He is there, He isn't doing enough to protect you.
4. If you look for God's presence in and around the situation, and if you rely on God's word to discern how to deal with the situation, you will find peace in the midst of turmoil and confident faith in the face of disaster.

D. **Exodus 14:21-30** . . . Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. [22] The sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. [23] Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea. [24] At the morning watch (*which indicates the Israelites crossed during the night with God as a pillar of fire giving them enough light to do so*), the Lord looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and **brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion**. [25] He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made

them drive with difficulty (*thus causing the army to get into the dry bed of the Red Sea but unable to get out*); so the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from Israel, for the Lord is fighting for them against the Egyptians (*in other words, they realized Israel's God had trapped them and they were in serious trouble*)." [26] Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen." [27] So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing right into it (*in other words, due to their God caused confusion, they thought they were fleeing but in reality they were running around in circles – as it were – on the dry bed of the Red Sea*); then the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. [28] The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh's entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained. [29] But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. [30] **Thus the Lord saved Israel that day** from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.

III. The fickleness of God's children goes like this

- A. **Exodus 14:31** . . . When Israel saw the great power which the Lord had used against the Egyptians, the people **feared the Lord**, and they **believed in the Lord** and in His servant Moses.
1. Imagine the worship service they had! It was probably filled with sighs of relief, tears of joy, shouts of Hallelujah, singing, praising God, and giving of thanks.
 2. Oh how easily and seemingly sincerely we think highly of God, pledge obedience to God, praise Him, adore Him, worship Him, and even listen to the spiritual leaders He has put over us when life is going well – from our perspective, or when we have personally experienced a life-saving, life-changing miracle of God.
 3. Yet sadly, just as easily and just as sincerely we grumble, complain, feel like a victim, take on an attitude of self-pity, see God as a failure, turn away from Him in disappointment or even anger, speak derogatorily about Him or to Him, and turn against our spiritual leaders when it looks like the worst is about to happen or when we feel like we have suffered too long already and there is no end to the suffering in sight.

- B. In a demonstration of the fickleness of God's people, Israel displayed both the of these behaviors – praise and complaining, complaining and praise – within twenty-four to forty-eight hours.
- C. What about you? (1) Do you believe in God's goodness, His love for you, and His faithfulness to you – regardless of what the circumstances seem to say? (2) Do you believe that God is at work working all things out for good when we love Him and live according to His will? (3) Or do you believe in yourself and your own happiness – so that God is good, loving, faithful and worthy of praise when life is going the way you want, **BUT** He is not so good, not so loving, not so faithful, and therefore not so worthy of of praise but rather criticism and anger when life isn't going the way you want? (4) In addition, are you aware that when you are feeling sorry for yourself, grumbling, and complaining, that your grumbling and complaining is against God, first and foremost, and that it is a manifestation of your distrust of God and discontentment with God? God affirms that this is the case in the next story.

IV. The threat of things getting worse in the face of an already uncomfortable situation feeds a victim mentality, self-pity, complaining, and an angry, blaming attitude toward the people you think are the cause of your troubles.

- A. This next story takes place over the three days following Israel's crossing of the Red Sea, the destruction of the Egyptian army, and the worship service where the Israelites acknowledged their fear of God, trust in God, and willingness to accept Moses as God's chosen leader.
- B. **Exodus 15:22-25a** . . . Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. [23] When they came to Marah (*MAH ruh*), they could not drink the waters, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah (*bitter*). [24] **So the people grumbled at Moses**, saying, "What shall we drink?" [25] Then he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet.
 - 1. As we look at this story, lets keep in mind that these Israelites were both new to trusting God and spiritually immature – which gives us a reason to sympathize with their weaknesses – just as Jesus, our High Priest, sympathizes with ours.
 - 2. However, in spite of their newness to trusting God and in spite of their spiritual immaturity, they had seen God's power in the ten plagues. They had walked across the Red Sea, on dry ground. And

they had witnessed the destruction of the Egyptian army by the very same water they had just safely passed through.

- a. In addition, the presence of God was visible to them – 24/7 – in the form of the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.
 - b. In other words, in a compressed amount of time and in spite of how bad things looked in the moment, they had witnessed some unimaginable miracles and life-saving acts of God – on their behalf. And they could see that God was with them – all of which should have been enough for them to trust Him with their current situation. But it wasn't.
- C. Instead of focusing on trusting God to provide in sufficient time to meet the need, and instead of bolstering their faith by recalling the ways God had worked to free them and save them when things seemed hopeless, they looked at their lack of water and the fact that their need wasn't being met right then and there.
1. Trusting God implicitly and waiting patiently for Him to act was not on their list of options.
 2. What they wanted was water right now. And they decided that the right thing for God to do was to meet their need right now – even though no one was dying of thirst.
 3. And they concluded that if He didn't, He was failing them – and that was reason enough to grumble and turn on Moses, and in so doing, grumble and turn against God.
 4. Now you may be wondering why I am saying their grumbling was against God when they were taking their frustration out on Moses.
 - a. In **Exodus 16:8**, Moses affirms this when he says, "...the LORD hears your grumbings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumbings are not against us but against the LORD." The reality is, **Moses wasn't their provider and protector, God was.**
 - b. So to turn on Moses they had to first be discontent with God's provision and protection, and frustrated at God for not doing enough to give them what they wanted or believed they had to have to be happy and secure.
 - c. **The same is true for us.** Our grumbling and complaining over not having what we want or believe we have to have to be happy and secure is first and foremost directed at God, and then at the situation or the people involved.

V. The kindness of God in spite of our unbelief, discontentment, and complaining.

A. Reading on in **Exodus 15**, we learn that God was only testing them. They were never in trouble. No one was going to die of thirst that day. True, they had to endure the uncomfortableness of being tested, but the challenges of the test were only for a time and never for their hurt. They had nothing to fear or complain about because they were totally and completely safe.

1. And beyond these facts, instead of chastising them or punishing them for grumbling, God made a deal with them that was favorable to them.
2. We read about this in **Exodus 15:25a - 26 . . .** There [God] made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them. [26] And [God] said, "If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the Lord, am your healer (*Jehovah-Rophe*)."
3. Yes, it is true, this agreement is conditional. It is based on the Israelites behaving in a godly manner. But notice, it also promises to protect them – **and us** – from the chastising consequences that God brings on those who openly reject Him, distrust Him, and grumble against Him.

VI. Conclusion

- A. In this story, Israel simply needed water, yet God responded by making an agreement that promised protection from certain kinds of health issues **if** they would live godly, faith based lives. And then God called Himself their healer (*Jehovah-Rophe*) – for when they need healing.
- B. The reality is, Israel endured 80+ years of slavery, during which time their sons were systematically killed. They were trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army. They were running out of water at Marah, and the Marah water was undrinkable. This is real life.
- C. In the same way, the Christian life will have hardships, sickness, temptations, and testing. Yet, like the cloud and pillar of fire, God is with us, often working behind the scenes to save us, provide for us, protect us, and transform us, in order to bring us into a life of confident faith and godly living – which is the healthiest life – mentally, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually that any one can live in this world.