

INTRODUCTION

Acquiring knowledge and learning a skill are quite different. You can read all the books on driving, but you can never learn how to drive unless you spend time behind the steering wheel. You can watch videos about how to swim, but eventually you need to drink a few mouthfuls of water before you can master the technique. Many of you watched this two weeks ago (pictures on the screen). It is one thing to study the physics and chemistry of fireworks. It is dazzling to look at pictures, or even see fireworks on TV. It is a completely different experience to watch fireworks live. You see the changing colors, feel the explosion, and even smell the smoke if you stay close enough. Our knowledge of God is similar. It is a blessing to have child-like faith to read the Bible and believe every word of it. However, through some spectacular events we can know God at a different level. Then we realize: “Wow, God is so real!” In the Exodus account, the Israelites met this new God whom their ancestors worshipped. They witnessed God’s power in the ten plagues. The Israelites saw River Nile turned into blood and saw swarms of flies and locusts. Pretty amazing. They were about to experience God’s power in a way that they would never forget. Moses and Aaron led the Israelites out of Egypt. They were on their way to the Promised Land of Canaan. Little did they know that Pharaoh would soon send his troops to hunt them down. How could a band of slaves fight against the best Egyptian soldiers? They could not, but they did not need to. God came to their rescue. What was true to the Israelites is also true to us. God shows us that He is actively working in our lives when He saves us from troubles.

EXPLANATION

1. Pursuit by the Enemy 敵人的追趕

First, let us look at the pursuit of the enemy. Pharaoh just would not let the Israelites go so easily. At this point, perhaps a few days had passed after the Passover. The Egyptians took time to bury their deceased firstborns. Also, twice in the passage we are told that the Israelites pitched their camps. At that time, it was common for people to travel during the night to avoid the daylight heat. God asked Moses not to lead the Israelites to take the shorter route to Canaan. That could be heading northeast along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. God was merciful. He knew that His people would run into the Philistines if they went that way. They would very likely turn back to Egypt to avoid a battle with the Philistines. Therefore, God asked them to travel southeast toward the Red Sea instead. No one knows for sure the exact course the Israelites took. Many of the places along the way recorded in the Bible could be small towns where people stopped over in their journey. Back to the story. We see a hint that Pharaoh sent some messengers to track down the Israelites after they left. God told Moses in **verse 3**: “Pharaoh will think, ‘The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.’” Pharaoh might wonder if the Israelites got lost, or perhaps their God had abandoned them. Therefore, it was a good opportunity to pursue them. Pharaoh did not want to lose a large number of slave labors. He said to his officials in **verse 5**: ... “What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!” Therefore, the purpose of the pursuit was not to kill them, but for Pharaoh to reclaim his possessions. With the help of horses and an elite troop the Egyptians easily located

the Israelites. The passage tells us that there was actually a divine reason behind the pursuit. God told Moses in **verse 4**: “And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.”... There are three things mentioned in this verse that are repeated in the chapter – God hardened Pharaoh’s heart, God would get the glory and the Egyptians would know that Jehovah was God. The description of God hardening Pharaoh’s heart or Pharaoh’s hardened his heart was stated in all ten plagues. We cannot help but ask: whose fault was it? Should Pharaoh be held accountable for his sins, or was it God mysteriously doing something in Pharaoh’s heart and made him evil? Which way is it? God gave Pharaoh ten chances to yield to God and allow the Israelites to leave. Pharaoh clearly saw the hand of God judging the Egyptians and protecting the Israelites. Pharaoh was not ignorant; he was stubborn in his sins. Paul had something to say about such heart condition. He wrote in **Romans 1:28** - Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. The same Greek word translated as “gave them over” is used three times in this passage. Paul described people who know that God exists but they refuse to honor God as God. They do not want God to intervene their sinful lifestyle. God responds as if He were saying to those people: “You want it? You got it!” The Pharisees in Jesus’ time were like that. They evidently saw signs that Jesus was God. But they hardened their hearts, to the degree that they finally got rid of Jesus. Pharaoh could have humbled himself before God. He chose not to. Therefore, he and the Egyptians reaped the consequence of their sins. They learned that the Lord was God in a hard way. They were lost forever. You may know people like that. They can recite the gospel better than you do. The problem is not that they do not know the truth. The problem is that they do not care. You can spend a lot of time to debate with them about the Christian faith, but they will not budge. Instead, you can pray that God would show His truthfulness to them. Pray that God will soften their hearts, that one day they will humble before Him. If you are one of them, turn to Jesus before it is too late.

2. Panic at the Calamity 危難的驚嚇

The Israelites thought they would be free forever. Now the Egyptian army was pursuing them. It was natural for the Israelites to feel panic at the imminent calamity. While panic is a natural response to danger, the way we deal with panic reflects our faith in God. The Israelites did the right thing to cry out to God for help. But what they said to Moses next did not show much faith in God. Listen to **verses 11-12**: 11 “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? 12 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!” How ungrateful they were of the leadership of Moses and Aaron. More seriously, how forgetful they were of God’s grace? If it was not because of God’s deliverance they still had no hope. They would rather go back to Egypt to remain as slaves. Haven’t we often felt the same way? We grumble when we face hardship after we believed in Jesus. Would it be better to dump God and live as a non-Christian? Change requires faith and courage. In the past the Israelites suffered as slaves. But at least they had a place to live and food to eat. Now they had to follow this new God to an unknown place. Soon after they left Egypt they were under the threat of calamity. Was God still with them? Complacency has its attractiveness. Still remember in John chapter 5 Jesus healed a man who had been crippled for 38 years? Jesus asked the patient what we may consider a dumb question

in 5:6: ...“Do you want to get well?” The man was sitting by a pool all day. In fact, many patients with various diseases were there too. They believed in a myth that once in a while an angel would come down and stir the water. Whoever jumped into the pool first when the water moved would be healed. If I were the man I would reply Jesus: “Duh! If I don’t want to get well then why I trouble people to carry me here every day?” Jesus did not only question his desire to get well, but also his determination. If the man could walk again then he had to stop begging and start working. Was he ready to change? Similarly, the Israelites they had to change to trust God. In the next forty years the Israelites had much to learn. They had to deal with external dangers and internal struggles. The pursuit of the Egyptian army was the first test. This was the first of the ten occasions when the Israelites grumbled against God in the wilderness. They did not like the situation God put them in. They wondered if God had their best interest in mind. A Bible commentator said it wisely: “(God) was not telling them everything they wanted to know. He told them what they needed to know in order to become His covenant people and in order to receive His salvation.” God taught them the only two words they had to keep in mind: “Trust me.” Throughout the Bible different authors mentioned the exodus experience. The psalmists, prophets, Paul and other authors asked the Jews to remember God’s grace. If God could rescue them from the hands of the Egyptians, is there any problem He is unable to deal with? We as Christians also need to constantly re-visit Jesus’ salvation of us. Paul put it this way in **Romans 8:32** - He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? God gave us the best possible blessing we can get – He gave us His own Son. Then Paul gave a list of issues that may separate us from the love of God. Paul concluded in **verse 39** that nothing ...will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Jesus delivered us from the bondage of sin and hell. Is there any problem too big for Him? Faith is the complete trust that God is still leading us despite the problems we face. We will feel panic next time we face any calamity. But don’t be paralyzed by fear. Come to Jesus, remember His salvation and lean on Him. God will open a way for us. That was exactly how He guided the Israelites.

3. Power of the Almighty 大能的彰顯

The Israelites were pursued by their enemy. They felt panic at the possible calamity. The Red Sea was in front of them, the Egyptian army was closing in. There was nowhere to escape. But here comes the hero! The Almighty God was about to manifest His power. Moses encouraged the people in **verses 13-14**: 13... “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. 14 The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.” Moses comforted the people because he knew that God would step in. How did Moses know? It was because God told him so back in verse 4. God would gain glory over the Egyptians. He would fight this battle for His people. God helped Moses grow in his faith ever since He appeared to Moses at the burning bush. God cared about the suffering of His people. He remembered the covenant He made with Abraham. God’s actions verified His words. It is like your parents can tell you a thousand times that they love you. You tell them: “Yeah, I got it the first time. You can save your breath.” Then when you are sick like a dog and your mom still hugs and kisses you without any worry of getting your germs. When the tornado siren was blaring, and you dad huddled everyone in the bath tub. You realized: “My parents truly walk the talk!” Our parents may break their promises. Dads might assure their kids to take them to the zoo. Then the next day he said: “I’m busy.” But God does what He says!

What happened to the Israelites next? God told Moses to lead the people to walk through the Red Sea. Look at **verses 21-22**: 21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, 22 and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. Every time I read this account I could not help but admit that our God was very thoughtful. Not only that He separated the water but He also made the seabed a dry ground. Think about it: how does a bare-ground look like after a storm, even when the rain-water has receded? It would still be muddy. That kind of condition would slow down the pace of the Israelites. God paved the way for His people. The Egyptians had to be very surprised to see the Israelites walking into the water. They must be thinking: "If you can do it, so can we." Therefore, they followed suit. We know the result. Skip down to **verses 27-28**: 27 Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the Lord swept them into the sea. 28 The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen - the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived. God gained glory by surpassing the strength of the horses and soldiers. No one knows for sure where exactly the Israelites crossed the Red Sea. Some scholars suggested that the Red Sea here was actually the Reed Sea. The water there was no deeper than a few inches. Anyone could walk through it. When people cannot accept the possibility of miracle then they will try to put together rational explanations for supernatural phenomena. I like the rebuttal of some Bible scholars. They responded: "If the Egyptian army was drowned by merely a few inches of water, then that would truly be a miracle! If we believe that God has mighty power that transcends the natural laws, then it is not that hard to accept that God can perform miracles. The universe was created in six days, God became a man and was born through a virgin, Jesus died on the cross and rose on the third day, so on and so forth. God said in **Jeremiah 32:27** that: "I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?" At that time the whole Israel had fallen to Babylon. It was unthinkable that God would allow His people to go into exile. But it was beyond anyone's imagination that the Jews would come back to their homeland 70 years later. We should not restrict God's power by our finite mind and the reality. Indeed, the problems we face are real. It can be a diagnostic report from the doctor, a notice from the immigration or a letter from an attorney. But no difficulty can negate the fact that our God is powerful. He loves His children and watches over them. I am not saying that our every trouble will be resolved in miraculous ways. He is God but we are not. But we can have peace when we are in a critical situation. We cannot predict how and when God would resolve our circumstances. We know for sure that He is powerful and He is sovereign. He cares about His children.

CONCLUSION

God shows us that He is actively working in our lives when He saves us from troubles. There may be times when we feel hopeless. Our spiritual enemy, Satan, tries to pursue after us. He uses different tricks to weaken our faith. We are panic by the coming calamity. The reality looks gloomy. But fear not. God has mighty power over our circumstance. Let me conclude with a true story. This testimony happens to be from one of us. I encouraged brother Jimmy Dunn to share his journey about his recent heart surgery. It would be whole lot better if he stands here to speak for himself. But he prefers to have me share his experience. "It is by God's will and love that I am here today. On November 15, 2017 I had a triple bypass surgery. As I look back I have no

doubt that it was God who ministered His grace to me through the medical teams. God literally gave me back my life. Because of some complications I actually went through 2 back to back surgeries on the same day. I was transfused 12 units of blood and 4 units of platelets. There was a span of 7 hours when my family members did not hear any update from the doctors. They were told later that there were two incidents when I was very close to not being able to make it. After the surgery I was in an induced coma for 2 days. I just lied there and could not communicate with anyone. Gradually I woke up and was subsequently transferred to a stepdown unit. When I looked up from my bed I saw a plaque with Psalm 23 written on it. The words have a fresh meaning to me. I was like a sheep that followed the Good Shepherd. He led me to where I could find food and water. Even when I was so close to death He saved me. He always has my wellbeing in His mind. In my former business I had been through many hardships, like robbery and attack. God was always on my side. This time was no exception. After a long process of recovery and rehab I was finally able to go home. One doctor called me a “miracle patient.” Another one commented that “with God’s help, not smoking, not drinking, being physically fit and not over weight save my life.” Jeannie and I are thankful for our FCBC family for your prayers, love and support. But above all, we thank God for His mercy and love.” That is Jimmy’s experience. He can truly marvel: “Wow, God is so real!” The God who saved the Israelites from Pharaoh’s army is the same who healed Jimmy. God has never changed. No matter what difficulty you are now facing put your trust in the Lord!