MESSAGE

When There Is No Way Forward *Exodus 14*

[SLIDE — No Way Forward]

Have you ever stayed awake, running through the same problem over and over? You've weighed every option, made your lists, and rehearsed the conversations —yet you can't see a way forward.

The Israelites knew this feeling well. With the sea before them and Pharaoh's chariots behind them, they had no bridge, no boat, and no visible way out.

They were trapped. But the surprising part is that God led them there on purpose. Imagine that! God deliberately leading them towards danger. A lot of people think God would never do something like that, but here it is.

This chapter of Exodus is personal for me, because recently I have felt like I am caught between things I have little ability to do much about, and I have been asking God if he really has led me there.

A Route God Chose

[SLIDE — When there seems no way forward]

So where are these people? The Lord directed Moses where Israel should camp, knowing Pharaoh would see them as trapped and pursue them. God had previously declared He would harden Pharaoh's heart and that he would overcome Pharaoh's army, thus revealing His ultimate power to the Egyptians. But looking one way at the sea, and the other way at the fast-approaching chariots in their thousands, and the Isrealites are not saying how great it is that God has trapped them to give Him a chance to show how great He is.

This account is not about finding a way through difficulty; it reveals who rules when earthly powers believe they do. Moses trusted God would deliver, even if all those people did not.

This does not make Israel's fear foolish. The pursuing army and the sea were genuine threats. However, fear can twist a frightening reality into a false conclusion: the thinking that danger means God has abandoned us. I know folk in this village who abandoned God because they had trouble, and blamed God for it.

Exodus shows otherwise. Israel was in that specific place by God's design. While we cannot always know why God permits our hardships, we must not assume a difficult path is proof of His absence.

When Fear Looks Back

As Pharaoh draws near, the people cry out to the Lord before turning on Moses: "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?"

They even claim they would have preferred to become slaves for the Egyptians again, to this. Talk about being passive aggressive.

Fear has a way of making slavery sound safe. They remember the security of Egypt but have aready forgotten its cruelty.

We can do the same when following Christ becomes costly. It is easily done. The old habits and compromises we left behind suddenly start to look like a refuge.

Moses responds, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today." And he goes off to talk with the Lord again.

Stand Firm. Move Forward.

[SLIDE — The Lord Will Fight]

I imagine Moses is praying strenously for God to deliver them from this dilemma. The Lord says to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on."

We know Israel cried out earlier, but the text doesn't record what Moses said in prayer. We don't need to invent a private conversation to understand God's instruction. 'I already told you I have heard your cries, and I am on the case, what's the problem?

"Stand firm" and "move on" belong together. Israel had to stop relying on their own strength and obey the Lord's command. That's all. Sometimes we find it hard to obey what God's word tells us to do. Moses was told to raise his staff and stretch out his hand, and God would divide the sea.

True faith isn't frantic self-rescue, but it's not a passive refusal to move, either. There are two common reactions to a crisis: trying to fix everything yourself through sheer panic, or doing nothing and expecting a miracle.

Genuine faith lies somewhere in the middle—trusting enough to let go of the panic, while being willing to take the steps you are called to make. Are you faithful to God?

When trouble comes, there are things we should do: we pray, we seek wise help, we accept treatment, we apologise, we make that difficult call.

But we cannot save ourselves from sin, and we cannot conquer death. That's why God the Father sent God the Son to become flesh and live among us. In Jesus Christ, God acted where we could not. Christ bears our sin, He dies, and He rises again.

Our deepest hope isn't that we will in some way discover hidden strength within ourselves. Our deepest hope is that we have a Saviour who has done all the heavy lifting with our burden of sin.

A Doorway in the Water

[SLIDE — A Doorway in the Water]

Before the sea parts, the angel of God and the pillar of cloud move behind Israel, standing between them and the Egyptian army. I am sure some of you have never noticed that in this story. The cloud brings darkness to one side and light to the other, keeping the armies apart through the night. God is guarding his people before they can even see the path ahead.

Moses stretches out his hand. All night the Lord drives back the sea with a strong east wind. The waters divide, and Israel crosses on dry ground. This wind is not an alternative to God's action—the text tells us the Lord himself sends it. There is no magic power in Moses, just faith and obedience.

The Egyptians follow. The Lord throws their army into confusion, making their chariots heavy and difficult to drive. At last, the Egyptians themselves recognise what is happening: "The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt." At daybreak, the waters return over the pursuing army. Pharaoh's power is broken. God's people are saved. And even their enemies are forced to acknowledge the Lord, the God of the Israelites - Jehovah.

Paul later writes that Israel was baptised "into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" as we heard in our NT reading. He is speaking about their identification with Moses, the leader God gave them—not saying their crossing was Christian baptism, but perhaps a foreshadowing of the deliverance of the Cross of Jesus.

In Romans, Paul speaks of believers baptised into Christ, whose death and resurrection open the way to new life. The connection is rich, but we must keep the two passages distinct. Paul also warns us that Israel's deliverance did not excuse their later disobedience. God's grace always calls for our continuing trust.

What Will We Do Now?

[SLIDE — The Far Shore]

Exodus 14 ends not with a song, but with Israel seeing the Lord's great work, fearing him, and trusting him and his servant Moses. In the next chapter, Moses and the Israelites sing, "The Lord is my strength and my defence; he has become my salvation." Miriam takes a tambourine, and the women join in. Their song responds to the rescue Exodus 14 describes.

The wilderness still lies ahead. This passage does not promise that every problem will be solved by morning. Instead, it calls us to know and trust the Lord who makes himself known through his saving acts—and whom Christians know through Jesus Christ.

What is fear telling you today? That God has abandoned you because the road is hard? That an old captivity would be safer? That you must solve everything yourself before you can take a step?

Bring that fear honestly to God. Trust Christ with what you cannot save or control. Then, do the next thing he has made clear. Stand firm in his power, not your own. And when he says, “Move on,” follow him.

Amen.

(silence for reflection)

Benediction and blessing