

INTRODUCTION

I am preaching through the Old Testament and the continuation of the story of the Exodus. Last Sunday we talked about the Passover and how it is a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. Tonight we are going to talk about "Following the Fire"—how God set them free. This is not just an historical story about God delivering the children of Israel. It is a story about what has happened to every one of us who are children of God. We have been set free from the bondage the slavery of sin and that's the picture portrayed when the children of Israel come out of Egypt. As we follow the Lord and move toward his promise for us, that's a picture of what they are going through in these next few chapters. We're going to talk about two things tonight. First, about when God sets you free and then the characteristics of this freedom and how he deals with us in much the same way he dealt with the children of Israel.

Turn to Exodus 12:31. This is right after the Passover.

Exodus 12:31-37. "During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, 'Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me.' The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. 'For otherwise,' they said, 'we will all die!' So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The Lord had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians. The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children.

Lest you think that word *plundered* is a negative word, like a bunch of people coming into a village and plundering it, it's a word literally is translated "they made a shrewd business deal." And they made a good deal! Notice four things that happen in our lives when God frees us from the bondage of sin.

I. WHEN GOD FREES YOU, HE PROVIDES ALL YOU NEED FOR THE JOURNEY

Number one when God frees you, he provides all you need for the journey. Before they left, God said to the children of Israel, "I want you to ask the Egyptians and they're going to give you whatever you ask for." And they did. They asked for gold they asked for silver and the Egyptians were moved somehow by the Lord to be generous and they gave. So all throughout their journey they are going to have everything they need!

When you come to Jesus Christ in faith and you put your trust in him, you start on a journey. Being born again—salvation—is only the first step. Then there are other steps you take: baptism, church membership, obedience and service. But you are on a journey. If you have never read that wonderful allegory by John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, you should read it. For many years, it was the second best selling book in the world, second to the Bible, until it was surpassed in the 1960s by the novel, *Peyton Place*. That tells you something about our culture. *Pilgrim's*

Progress is a beautiful picture of how the Christian life is a journey and everything you and I need God has provided. If you say, "I don't think I have everything I need," James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus, says, "You have not because you ask not." You don't have because you don't ask. How do you think it would have been had God told the Israelites, "Okay now, before you leave go to your Egyptian neighbors ask for gold and silver?" What if someone had said, "Well, you know that's kind of bold," or "That's kind of forward," or "That's not being a good neighbor so you know what? I don't think I'm going to ask for anything." Then they would have had nothing on their journey. "You have not because you ask not!" If you have some needs in your life right now, you simply need to ask the Lord, who is abundant in mercy, and he will give you everything you need for the journey; not everything you *want* but everything you need!

II. WHEN GOD FREES YOU, HE SELDOM USES SHORTCUTS

Here's the second thing we learn: When God frees you, he seldom uses short cuts. Look at Exodus 13:17-18. Remember there are six hundred thousand men. If you multiply that by women and children the best estimates are there were three million children of Israel moving through the desert. Talk about a movement! And they are heading toward the Promised Land.

Exodus 13:17-18. "When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, 'If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.' So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle."

Sometime look in the back of your Bible and consult the maps, because just about every Bible that has maps has a map for the Exodus. The Promised Land is on the eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea. Obviously, the shortest distance between these two points is along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. People have estimated that even with a crowd of three million people, at the most it should have taken them about three weeks to get from Egypt up to the Promised Land. If we had been planning the trip, we would have taken the shortcut. But God doesn't always use shortcuts. In fact, he *seldom* uses shortcuts.

My wife can tell you I like shortcuts. I've got shortcuts figured out all over Tyler, Texas. I hardly ever get on the loop or Broadway anymore, because I have all my little short cuts worked out. The only thing is, sometimes my wife and I will be at the same place and we'll both be going home and I'll take my shortcuts and she'll go home the normal way and she'll get there a long time before I do. At least they're *my* short cuts. I have it figured out. Us guys don't like sitting still at a red light. We like to be moving! So, as long as we keep moving, we feel like it's a shortcut! There's a spiritual lesson here: We all want shortcuts. We want what I call "microwave" Christianity. We want it quick. We want it now! We want spiritual maturity overnight. God says, "There's no shortcut to spiritual maturity." Sometimes God takes us in a circuitous route to get us to where he wants us. There is not a pill you can take that will create spiritual maturity. It takes constant, continual, consistent, regular quiet time in the word in prayer day after day after day after day and we wish we could go straight there. God sometimes takes us on detours, but God knows what he's doing with the detours. He didn't send them straight to the Promised Land.

III. WHEN GOD FREES YOU, HE GUIDES YOU 24 HOURS A DAY

Here's the third thing I want you to see. When God frees you, he guides you 24 hours a day.

Exodus 13:20-14:2a. "After leaving Succoth they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. 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. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea..."

I'm sure Moses and Aaron were thinking, "Well, where do we go from here? What do we do next? What's the next step? We want everything planned out step by step. We want to know what the next 30 or 40 steps are before we decide to commit to the journey. I want to know where I'm going to end up, how long it's going to take and how much it's going to cost me! But God said, "No. Just follow me! Just trust me!" "What do you mean?" "Just trust me!" God said, "I'm going to send you a pillar of cloud by day." What is a pillar of cloud? Well think about a pillar. That's like those beams extending up through the balcony. It's something tall and long and it is a cloud in the daytime but in the nighttime it looks like a pillar of fire! Later we're going to learn the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud was actually an angel or an angel was in the pillar of fire or the pillar of cloud. The lesson we learn is once you decide to follow God's directions by faith he's going to guide you step by step by step but he may not tell you exactly how you are going to get there.

That reminds me of the farmer who said to his son on a dark night, "Son. I need you to go into the barn and check on the cows!" The little boy who was afraid of the dark said, "But, Daddy I can't see the barn. It's too dark!" The father stood on the porch and said, "Son can you see the front gate in the yard?"

"Yeah, Daddy."

"Well, go to the gate."

So the little boy went to the gate because he could see it. He said, "But, Daddy, I still can't see the barn."

"Can you see the oak tree out in the yard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go to the oak tree."

He went to the oak tree. "But Daddy I still can't see the barn and I can't see you."

"Can you see the well?"

"Yes, sir. I can see the well."

"Go to the well."

So the little boy walked over to the well. His Daddy said, "Son now can you see the barn?"

"Yes, sir. I can see the barn. It's right over there."

"Well, then, go check on the cows."

Sometimes God leads us one step at a time and we don't know where we are going. We can't see where we are going. We can only see the very next thing. Sometimes we are saying, "Why do you want me to go to the gate?" "Why do you want me to go to the tree?" "Why do you want me

to go to the well?" God is leading us day-by-day, hour-by-hour. Don't you wish you had a cloud that would line up in front of you and when it moves you could follow it? When it turns right, you go right. When it turns left, you go left and at night it lights up like a fire! When the fire turns right, you go right. When the fire goes straight, you go straight. Don't you wish you could follow God that closely? You and I have something much better than that! It's no accident that in Acts 2, on the Day of Pentecost, the Bible says "There was a sound like a mighty, rushing wind!" (Does that remind you of a cloud?) And then it says, "little flames of fire appeared above the heads of the disciples." I think God was trying to say to the disciples on that day, "Listen! In the Old Testament I may be led by weather or wind or cloud and maybe by fire but now you are about to receive something much more consistent and reliable than that! You are going to receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit came and filled the Christians." You and I have something much more reliable than a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud—we have the Holy Spirit who leads within us. Jesus said when He is come; he will guide you into all truth. God is guiding us 24 hours a day through his Holy Spirit.

IV. WHEN GOD FREES US, HE OFTEN GIVES CONFUSING DIRECTIONS

Here's number four. When God frees us, He often gives confusing directions. I am going to say probably the majority of the time his directions are a little bit confusing.

Exodus 14:1-3. "Then the Lord said to Moses. 'Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. [Baal Zephon means god or lord of the north] Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.'"

Let me tell you how confusing this is. Consult your map from before. Here's the Mediterranean Sea. Here is Rameses at the mouth of the Nile River and here are the children of Israel, three million of them. When they leave and head for Succoth, they head southeast. They are getting away from Rameses. They are getting away from Pharaoh they are getting away from the heart of Egypt so they go this direction. They get down there and God says, "Now I want you to turn around and go back!" And that's what they did! Wouldn't you think they would want to get as far away from Pharaoh and Rameses as they can? But they turn around and go due north until they come to this place just opposite of Baal Zephon, which is basically right across the river from Rameses! Why did God do that? Remember God has a right to do whatever God wants to do. God and Pharaoh did not get along too well. God used the entire three million children of Israel to bait Pharaoh. So here they were. Pharaoh looks out and sees the cloud of dust created by three million people in the desert and he says, "Those people are crazy! They haven't gone off! They have come back, so I am going to go and destroy them.

Here's the application of the lesson. On our journey as God is leading us, sometimes the directions are mighty confusing. There are some things Jesus tells us to do that just don't make sense reasonably and rationally. For instance, I can't understand how God says, "All right. You give me ten percent of all your income and I'll make that ninety percent that's left over be more than the one hundred percent before you give ten percent." That just doesn't make sense, does it? But God says, "That's the way I work." There are a lot of people in this room who know that is

exactly true! Jesus says, "If you want to gain your life, you have to lose it!" That doesn't make sense, does it? Lose your life? He says, "If you want to be exalted, you have to humble yourself but if you exalt yourself, you will be humbled but if you humble yourself, I'll exalt you." Those things don't make sense, do they? There are so many instructions in the New Testament we say, "Oh that doesn't make any sense." God always know what he is doing. Our job is not to reason *why* our job is, but to do it and live.

When God fights for you, how does he operate? We're going to see a battle that's going to take place, but it's going to be a very short battle. What we're going to see in just a moment is that God is going to deliver the children of Israel from Pharaoh and all of his armies.

Maybe you've heard the story about the kid who came home from Sunday School and his Daddy said, "What did you learn in Sunday School today?" The kid said, "The teacher talked about Moses and Pharaoh and how God destroyed the Egyptian army." The father said, "Tell me about it. How did the story come about? The little kid looked at his Daddy and said, "Well, Daddy. Moses and the children of Israel were on one side of the Red Sea. Suddenly, Pharaoh and all of his tanks and all of his artillery started coming down on them! So quickly Moses got all the Corp of Engineers for the Israeli Army and they built a pontoon bridge across the Red Sea. Then, while he used his helicopters and a line of riflemen to protect them, they all crossed the Red Sea on this pontoon bridge. Then, they pulled back and retreated and they all crossed on the pontoon bridge. Then, Pharaoh and his armies and his tanks they start coming across the same pontoon bridge and it was at that moment that Moses ordered artillery to fire on the pontoon bridge. The artillery sank the pontoon bridge and Pharaoh and all of his armies and tanks were sunk!" His Daddy said, "Are you sure that's the way your teacher told it?" The kid said, "Well not really but if I told you the way she told it you never would believe it!" It really is amazing the story of how God delivered the children of Israeli. The main thing is God was fighting for them.

1. When God fights for you, He calms your fears

Let's learn four quick lessons. When God fights for you, the first thing he does is he calms your fears.

Exodus 14:10-14. "As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, '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? 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!' Moses answered the people, 'Do not be afraid! Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring to you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need to be still!'"

God was saying, "Just trust me!" All the people are upset. They are afraid and they are calling out to Moses. "Moses. Moses. We need to go back! Let's go back to Egypt quickly and let's become slaves again!" Moses said, "Don't be afraid! Settle down! Be still! Be still!" What we don't read in the text but obviously it is there, is on the surface before the people, Moses is a

great, strong leader. "Don't be afraid! Everything is going to be okay!" But then he gets behind a tent or something and gets on his knees in prayer and he says, "Oh, Lord. What are we going to do now?" Really! You say, "How do you know that?" Look at verse 15. "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Why are you crying out to me?'" in other words Moses was crying out to the Lord! He said, "Tell the Israelites to move on!" So, when God fights for you, he calms your fears.

2. When God fights for you, he gives you orders

Then, number two he gives you marching orders! He says, "Move on! Go ahead! Don't be afraid!" Did you notice the three directions in this passage? The people said, "Let's go back!" Moses said, "Let's be still!" God said, "Move on ahead! March on! Keep on going!" Sometimes we think we're doing something really spiritual when we just sit still. I do believe the Bible says, "Be still and know that I am the Lord" in our personal relationship. But when it comes to following his will and service, sometimes God is saying, "Hey move ahead! Trust me!" I've discovered it is much easier for God to direct me when I am already moving in some certain direction but sometimes I am guilty of what I call "spiritual inertia." An object at rest tends to remain at rest until an outside force is applied. Sometimes when we sit still and analyze, we fossilize. We become afflicted with what I call, "the paralysis of analysis;" should I do this or should I do that? God says, "Move forward." Some of you older folks can remember before cars had locking steering wheels. Do you remember sometimes you had to push them to get them started? This was a long time before power steering. Remember how hard it was to turn the wheel when the car was sitting still? But you get that thing rolling the wheel turned easily. Sometimes God is saying, "Just get moving in the right direction and then I'll steer you where I want you to go, but when you are just sitting still like Moses said to do, sometimes I can't direct you." So when God is calling you to do something, move on!

3. When God fights for you, he frustrates your enemies

Here's the third thing we learn. When God fights for you, he frustrates your enemies.

Exodus 14:19-22. "Then the angel of the God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long. 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, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left."

That night when the people were terrified and God said, "Trust me. Move forward," he also was active to protect his people. Here are the children of Israel with this pillar of cloud and fire on one side directing them, but suddenly God moves this pillar between the Egyptians and the Hebrews. On the Egyptian side there is darkness, but on the Hebrew side there is light. Paul writes about the characteristics and quality of the gospel in the New Testament and he calls it "a sweet aroma," and he says, "for some it is the fragrance of death, and to others it is the fragrance of life." Isn't it amazing how God, who is God, can affect some people one way, but others

another way? The same sun in the sky that hardens clay, melts ice and God in his character for some people is "an ANGRY God; a God of WRATH" but for others who know him intimately he is "a God of justice, but he is a God of mercy and love." That's what we see in this pillar. It was darkness to some and light to others. The Egyptians are frustrated; they can't see through the cloud. "What are we going to do?" Meanwhile, God is in the process of delivering the children of Israel.

4. When God fights for you, he turns your obstacles into pathways

Here's the fourth thing I want you to see. When God fights for you, he turns your obstacles into pathways. Moses took the rod of God and held it over the water and the water stood up on either side. I believe it was a supernatural miracle of God. I believe the water stood up on either side and there was a 12-lane superhighway in the middle of the Red Sea. I believe if you had been there that night and had been one of the children of Israel walking along, it would have been like a trip to Seaworld! Looking in and seeing all those fish swimming in there, it would be just like walking by an aquarium. Isn't this amazing? They got to the other side and you know what happened. The next morning, Pharaoh and all the armies *did* see that the children of Israel were on the eastern side of the Red Sea and so Pharaoh and his armies said, "Charge!" and they took off across the same pathway. There is something amazing here. It says in verse 25, "God made the wheels of the chariots swerve." That's a word that means they went all out of kilter so they had difficulty driving. In other words, God was frustrating the enemies and they got out in the middle of the Red Sea and I can imagine Moses on the other side was saying, "Lord. Lord. You forgot something here! I mean you delivered us, but our enemies are in the process of catching up on us." I'm sure God said, "Well, what's that in your hand? One more time, Moses!" Moses took the rod of God, held it over the water and it came crashing down and the enemies of the children of God were destroyed. There is spiritual warfare around us all the time. You and I would be a fool to try to battle Satan and his demons because the Lord has said, "I will fight for you! I will be your guard! I will be your guide! I will be your strength!" So, we need to let the Lord fight the battle for us. We need to simply follow his marching orders.

CONCLUSION

Sometime you ought to read Exodus 15. It is the first recorded song in the Bible. They got to the other side and they said, "Moses! Moses! He's our man! If he can't do it, no one can! God you're a great God! What a wonderful God you are!" But don't be fooled. These people are so temperamental, that in the very same chapter, they start complaining against God and against Moses. You and I are on a journey. It is a Pilgrim's Progress and our job is to keep following the light God has given us. If you do that, you can enjoy your freedom and the Lord will fight for you in spiritual warfare.

OUTLINE

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II. SELDOM USES SHORTCUTS

III. GUIDES YOU 24 HOURS A DAY

IV. OFTEN GIVES CONFUSING DIRECTIONS

When God fights for you, He:

1. Calms your fears
2. Gives you orders
3. Frustrates your enemies
4. Turns your obstacles into pathways



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes