

God Leads His People

Exodus 13:17-14:31

Have you ever worked a really long day with nothing to show for it?

Peter did that when he was first getting to know Jesus.

Along with his brother Andrew and his business partners James and John Peter had been out in his boat working hard all night.

This is not the relaxing image of a man with a fishing pole reclined in a boat or fishing off a dock.

They fished with heavy nets, through them out and hauling them in, and time after time catching nothing.

Exhausted they meet Jesus who is teaching a crowd just on shore.

As they are washing their nets the LORD gets into Peter's boat and asks him to "put out a little from shore" and He continues to teach.

After He finishes teaching He says to Peter "Put out into the deep water, and let down your nets for a catch."

Peter answers the Lord like this in Luke 5:5, "**Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.**"

Shortly after nets are in the water they are so filled with fish that they begin to break. Peter calls to James and John to bring their boat to help and both boats end up so full of fish that they begin to sink.

Peter then says to the LORD, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man" and Jesus answers, "Don't be afraid, from now on you will catch men."

At that Peter leaves 'everything' and follows Jesus.

Then there is Matthew sitting in his tax collecting booth.

Jesus sees him and simply says, "Follow me!" Which is a command not a question.

When this tax collector hears the call he gets up from his booth, to which he could never return, and follows Jesus.

When the LORD calls Philip he goes to get his brother Nathanael who doubts that Jesus can be the Messiah because He is from Nazareth.

Jesus though very quickly shows Himself to be from God by showing that He knows things about Nathanael that could only be known by the all-knowing present everywhere LORD of all.

And so Nathanael follows the Lord as well.

[I find it striking how these men leave everything and follow Jesus. That is really the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It means to follow the LORD wherever He leads. Interestingly that has less to do with where you are and much more to do with being obedient to Him

wherever you happen to be. In our text this morning **Exodus 13:17-14:31** we see the people of Israel being led out of Egypt by the visible presence of God (How cool is that?). That is where we are going to focus our attention this morning. We see here some important lessons about the LORD leading His people. These are lessons that we need to keep in mind as followers of Jesus. Lesson number one is this...]

Point #1 – God leads His people with wisdom and faithfulness.

The Lord knows what it takes to keep all His promises far better than we do.

We see the LORD's wisdom in 13:17-18.

In most bibles you can find maps at the back like the one on the screen at the moment.

I've marked with a black line the way to the Promised Land by way to the road through the Philistine country, the blue line represents the path marked in most bibles, and the yellow line is the path I believe they took.

The black line is the shortest and quickest route to get there.

I don't know about you but that is the way I would want to go.

I never plan a trip thinking, "How can I take longer to get where I am going?"

God knows the shorter way but He also knows His people are not ready to take that road, so instead He leads them into the "desert" toward the Red Sea.

While it says in verse 18 that the Israelites "went out of Egypt armed for battle" they would high tail it back to Egypt if they actually had to fight.

Their weaponry would have been very limited to farming implements and some of the things that the Egyptians gave them on their way out of town.

As slaves they would not have trained for war and would be no match (humanly speaking) for a people used to fighting.

Now they need something far more important than weapons or formal training, what they need most is to trust in the power of God.

Despite the fact that they had already witnessed a great deal in Egypt, they still needed to grow in their faith and so God in His Wisdom takes them into the desert leading them towards the Red Sea (Most literally 'Sea of Reeds').

In addition to God's wisdom we also see His faithfulness in **Verses 19-22.**

God had used Joseph to bring the people into Egypt in the first place and while they enjoyed great prosperity there during his life, he knew this was not their home and that one day they would leave Egypt and go to Canaan.

In faith (according to Hebrews 11:22) Joseph made the people promise to take his remains back to the Promised Land.

400 years later, as about 2 million Israelites leave Egypt with the bones of Joseph it is a sure sign that God always does what He says.

We also see God's faithfulness in His abiding presence with the people.

The description here in verses 21-22 is amazing.

Yahweh makes His presence visible in a pillar of cloud and fire.

Clouds don't stay as pillars in one place and they are certainly not filled with fire that gives enough light to make travel for such a massive group of people possible at night.

Notice that neither during the day nor during the night does the pillar leave "Its place in front of the people."

God is constantly present because He is constantly faithful.

[Both of the times we travelled to Africa I was never worried about finding our way to where we needed to be. Both times one of the Missionaries named Adam picked us up at the airport and drove us where we needed to go. He knows the language, he knows the culture, he knows a lot of people, he knows where he is going, and he was with us the whole time.]

Isn't that what everyone wants in someone they are following?

Someone who knows where to go and makes sure you get to where you are going?

Who is wiser than the LORD?

He knows all of our weaknesses. He knows exactly where we need to be and what we need to experience for our highest good.

He has given us a clear road map in His Word and best of all He never expects us to go through anything on our own.

He promises to be with His people in every moment and since He is infinite in His Being He is able to be everywhere at once for all of His people.

[God leads His people in wisdom and faithfulness and we ought to rejoice in that wherever we may find ourselves. That is good news but we must be careful to avoid the mistake of making ourselves the most important factor in our relationship with the LORD. We see Israel make that mistake here and we would be wise to avoid it ourselves. God makes it abundantly clear here that...]

Point #2 – God leads His people for the sake of His glory.

If we love the Lord, then we must understand that when God acts to preserve/make known the greatness of Who He is, it is always for our good.

In reading God's reason for taking the people through the desert instead of going the short way to Canaan we might conclude that He is taking them this way because it is safer, but the opposite is true.

The Lord tells the people to turn and end up in a place where they are 'hemmed in by the desert' (14:3) Carl Keil suggests that this give a picture of being "in a prison upon which the door is shut."

Looking again at the map you will notice the yellow line which represents the path I believe the Israelites take from Egypt.

That would make the place they camped at a place called Nuweibaa Beach which is on the west coast of the Sea of Aqaba and very much fits the idea of a prison.

There is only one way in and out on account of the mountains there.

In other words God leads them to a place where they have nowhere to run and He does this in part to encourage the king of Egypt to go after the people to bring them back to Egypt.

Why do this? God gives a clear answer in **14:4**.

Things go exactly as God says they will but when the Egyptian army shows up and they have nowhere to run this is how the people reacts (14:10-12).

Why such a reaction? Look back at **14:8**.

The word translated 'boldly' there has the sense of pride or exaltation.

I think the main issue here is that the people of Israel were thinking highly of themselves and not nearly highly enough about God.

They literally have the pillar of cloud/fire right in front of their eyes and they are afraid of the Egyptians.

Perhaps the worst part of what the people say here is in the second part of verse 12, "It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians."

You mean you would rather live and die as a slave than enjoy the visible presence of God?

God doesn't bring them here because it is safe or easy, He brings them here to display His glory.

[Climbing mountains is neither safe nor easy. It often strains the muscles and mistakes can prove to be fatal. If you have ever seen a mountain climber being interviewed they are almost always asked, "Why do you do this?" One of the most common answers is, "For the view." They go through the struggle to see something amazing.]

Following the Lord can sometimes feel like climbing a mountain (big difference is God is carrying us) and we need to know that God leads us in these ways to show us more of Himself.

We should be extremely happy that God is unwavering in His commitment to His own glory.

Because He is far greater than anything in creation and by giving His people the gift of Himself He is giving us an eternal reward far better than anything else we could possibly desire.

I don't want to spend my life longing for Egypt, I want my heart's delight to be in the LORD.

That's why Jesus died and rose again.

You can be dead in your sins and enjoy a land "flowing with milk and honey."

What good is that?

Faith in Christ on the other hand makes us right with God and that is gift beyond measure because He is infinitely more precious than everything else.

[God sometimes takes us to places that on the surface seem really bad, but what we need in those moments is to trust that God leads us to those places so that we might have a clearer vision of Who He is and see Him as our greatest treasure so that we might have eternal joy. I admit that God acting for the sake of His own glory will at times not make sense to us. When the people here look up and see the chariots of Egypt it's not making sense to them, but in what happens next we learn a third important lesson about God leading His people which is that...]

Point #3 – God's people can fully trust His leadership.

Belonging to the LORD means we can rest in His control over everything.

In verses 13 & 14 of chapter fourteen Moses attempts to calm the fears of the people telling them that God will deliver them and then he turns to the LORD and God responds in Verse 15-18.

There is nowhere to go except through the Egyptian army or into the sea.

They are in a situation where they are completely helpless but also a place where they will see that the LORD is completely trustworthy.

In verses 19-22 we are told that the 'Angel of the God' and 'the pillar of cloud' moves from in front of the people to behind them standing in between the Egyptians and the Israelites keeping them safe.

It doesn't stop there. At God's command Moses stretches his staff over the sea and the waters part.

As I mentioned earlier I think this happens at a place called Nuweiba Beach on the west coast of the Gulf of Aqaba.

This place seems to fit the description best for a few reasons.

First the water there is deep enough to both require a clear display of a miraculous wall of water on both the left and right of the Israelites and be more than sufficient to destroy the entire Egyptian army.

Isaiah 51:10 describes the event as drying up the “waters of the great deep.”

Another reason this location fits the description is that the grade of sea bed at that location is gradual enough grade entering the water and exiting the water that it would be very manageable, according to commentators, for such a large number of people to cross in 4-6 hours with an opening about ½ mile wide.

As if parting the sea wasn't enough God further highlights the miraculous by making the ground completely dry (Psalm 106:9).

This location also fits the biblical usage of the Hebrew name of the sea given in 13:18.

Commentator Roy Honeycutt points out that the name is used 24 times, 11 times the body of water is uncertain, 5 times it refers to the 'sea behind Israel', and 8 times it is a clear reference to the Gulf of Aqaba making it a strong possibility for the sea that is referred to here.

There is also evidence in the coral on the sea floor that some people think is the remains of the Egyptian army.

It would also make the most sense to place Mt. Sinai on the East side of Aqaba because that is where the region of Midian is located which is where Moses was when he first met the Lord at the burning bush.

These reasons lead me to think Nuweiba Beach is the place of the crossing and if it is, it would absolutely require an incredible miracle which would display God's unmatched power.

While God is doing the miracle of parting the sea, there is the cloud keeping the Egyptians back as the Israelites travel through.

One half of the cloud is casting darkness upon the Egyptians and light for the Israelites as they travel through the early hours of the morning.

Sometime during the last watch of the night (2-6am) verse 24 says God threw the Egyptian army into confusion.

They had followed the Israelites into the sea, but now they were losing control of their chariots and decide to turn back only it is too late because the LORD brings the walls of water crashing down upon them wiping out the entire army in a matter of seconds so that we are told in verse 28 that “Not one of them survived.”

Now listen to the reaction of the people in **Verse 31**.

At least here in this moment they rightly realize that they can trust the LORD.

[A couple of weeks ago I saw a story about a man named Doug White who along with his wife and two children boarded a chartered flight on board a King Air aircraft. A few minutes after

takeoff the pilot died and Doug was forced to take over flying the airplane. With only limited flying experience in a different kind of aircraft he had to totally depend on the air traffic controller to land the airplane. He did everything he was told and was able to land safely at the airport. The number one reason that plane landed safely is that Doug White trusted in the air traffic controller.]

God brothers and sisters is most trustworthy no matter where He leads us.

He is the creator and sustainer and the whole universe.

He made the universe out of nothing (give them some serious reflection sometime).

Is it a hard thing for God to part a massive body of water? Not at all.

God brothers and sisters is completely worthy of our trust and if we believe that, then that removes every reason we could possibly come up with for complaining and disobedience.

Don't let this miracle be small in your heart and mind, but know that it was an easy thing for God to do.

Is it the cry of your heart to follow the LORD?

That is the best decision we can every make.

He leads His people in wisdom and faithfulness.

He leads His people for the sake of His glory which is our highest good.

And He is most worthy of our trust.