

MOVING ON WITH CONFIDENCE!

"Moses answered the people, "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. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still." Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on.""

One of the greatest fears is the fear of the unknown. Imagine this. You just had your annual physical. A few days later you find a message on your answering machine. It is your doctor's nurse and the doctor wants to see you first thing in the morning in his office. Why? You don't know, and that is what scares you. It could be nothing; it could something major. Maybe you forgot to sign something. Maybe he found something serious in your tests. That's the problem. You don't know.

Tomorrow starts a new year. But I don't what will happen in the next twelve months. 2020 could be a stellar year for you personally and for the church, or it could be a year we would rather forget. I don't know. That's the problem.

But one thing I do know, the Lord will go with us through this year. The words the Lord spoke on the banks of the Red Sea are words we need to hear on the threshold of another new year. The Lord tells us to move on in confidence. And that is exactly what we will do.

I. The enemies we face.

The Israelites in our text found themselves between the proverbial rock and hard place. God freed them from their slavery with the ten plagues. But something wasn't right. Instead of leading them along the northern highway which hugged the Mediterranean Sea all the way to the promised land, God led them due east, towards the desert. What God did next goes against all rules on tactics. He brought his people to the banks of the Red Sea. No good leader would ever do that because if the enemy should ever come, you have no way to escape.

And that is exactly what happened. Pharaoh changed his mind again and mobilized his army. Listen now to the verses right before our text. ***"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!"***

The Israelites did exactly what God told them to do. They followed the pillar of cloud out into the desert. They did exactly what God expected of them, and what happened? They were going to be destroyed. Ahead of them was the Red Sea and behind them was Pharaoh's army. They didn't stand a chance.

Fear does things to people. Look at what it did to the Israelites. They blamed Moses. They wished they didn't listen to him or God. They wished they never left Egypt. They wished they never prayed to God all those years for help and deliverance. That's what fear does, it makes us feel sorry for ourselves. It fills us with despair to the point we even blame God and others for our problems. No wonder the devil wants to plague us with fear as an attempt to drive a wedge between God and the believer.

Friends, I can't predict what will happen in 2020. But one thing I can predict with absolute certainty, your enemies are waiting. I know for a fact that the devil will not let up. He is intensifying his efforts because it is closer now than ever to the day Jesus will return. I know there are sadly many in this world who refuse to believe or worship God and they, too, will not take the year off. The pressure to become secularized is greater than before. And they may not attack the Church directly, but they are trying to dismantle it stone by stone. Marriage, the unborn, what to do with the elderly and the infirmed, the gift of sex, even love for one's neighbor are all being compromised. Stone by stone, member by member, it seems the Church is being dismantled.

And not to mention the fact that you and I are our own worse enemies. We will commit sins this year. We will listen, look at, and consider in our hearts the temptations of the devil and the world. Many sins will remain hidden in our hearts. Others will affect others and strain our marriages, families and friends. Come to think of it, 2020 sounds like a bleak year.

Let's get back to our text and see what God does in situations like this.

II. The Lord will rescue us.

Panic was spreading, but it stopped at Moses. ***"Moses answered the people, "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. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still." Under the present circumstances, these words must have sounded like foolishness. The equivalent of over three modern armored divisions is about to tear into the people, and Moses is telling them they have nothing to fear. "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on." Move on? Where? Towards the Egyptians? No, but towards the Red Sea. Impossible. The Red Sea was a barrier. But listen to the verses that follow our text.***

“Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.” Then the angel of 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.”

And you know the rest of the story. Pharaoh’s army pursued the Israelites, once God let them, and they were all drowned. No movie, no computerized special effects can capture what this must have looked like. Some fools have tried to offer natural explanations for this, that the tide was down, that an unusual wind dried it up enough to cross, blah, blah, blah. No, this is the hand of God. This is a miracle.

So God didn’t make a mistake or a tactical blunder in leading his people to the Red Sea. He knew exactly what he was doing. I don’t know why God delivered them this way. I mean, he could have done it a thousand different ways. He could have afflicted the entire Egyptian army with hemorrhoids like he did the Philistines one time, or allowed an outbreak of dysentery to paralyze the men from moving forward. He could have had an enemy army descend on them or even his own angels. But in this instance God chose to deliver his people in this miraculous way.

Sometimes I wish God would part a Red Sea once in a while so the world could see it, or give us a burning bush. I sometimes wish God would pull the curtain back like he did on the Mount of Transfiguration and let his glory shine.

But God knows what is best, and often he chooses to keep his promises in the most mundane way. A person is gravely ill and we all pray for a miracle and God answers our prayers, not with beams shooting down from heaven, but from a surgery where he quietly directed the hands of the surgeons. God could rain manna and money down from heaven, but often he chooses to provide through work, or through government or family or friends. We pray for a miracle and God instead does something better. He takes our loved home to heaven. God likes to wear a mask so we don’t actually see that it is he behind something.

That is how he fought the most important battle in our lives, our salvation and forgiveness of sins. If God told us to climb the highest mountain or to sacrifice animals, if God said we first had to do good works and help people across the street in order to be considered for heaven, that would make sense to us. That’s the gut instinct of sinful man. Do good, get rewarded; do bad, get punished.

But God doesn’t do that. Who would have thought of the virgin birth or God becoming man. What mind would have conceived the cross and resurrection? It goes against all logic that God should freely give us heaven without first demanding some sort of payment or worthiness on our part. But that is how God crushes the head of Satan and that is how we are saved. It is foolishness to the world, but it God’s way, the only way.

It is in this spirit that we move forward. 2020 looks like any other year. But the Lord tells us to stop standing around and get going. We can because we know, trust that somehow, someday, he will get us through it, either to the year 2021 or heaven. He parts the sea before us, or he may have something completely different in store for us. I don’t know, but I can say what Moses said. Stand firm. The Lord will fight your battles. Don’t panic. Just move on. INJ Amen.