

“The Faith of Israel”
(Hebrews 11:29)

Introduction: The Lord had done many great things for the sake of His people Israel. He brought them into Egypt during the famine and provided for them there through Joseph. He caused them to multiply in Egypt, even when they were oppressed by the new Pharaoh. When the time for their departure was drawing near, He raised up Moses to be their deliverer. He took him away from Egypt for a time, so He could teach Moses how to be a shepherd for His lambs. And then He brought him back into Egypt to bring His people out with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm. He kept them safe from all of the plagues which He unleashed upon the Egyptians. He put it upon the hearts of the Egyptians to favor His people and to give them articles of silver and of gold when they asked. He also highly exalted Moses in their eyes so that he was greatly esteemed. And when the Lord sent His final plague upon Egypt, the one which would take the life of the first-born in every house, the Lord separated His people through the blood of the Passover Lamb, which was a picture of Christ, and spared their households the loss of their first-born. Yes, the Lord had done many wonderful things for His people. If ever a people was favored with miracles, these people were. But one of the most spectacular of His wonders was yet to come. And that was His deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian army through the parting of the Red Sea. This is what we will look at this evening. But first, let us look again at those events which led up to the crossing of the sea.

I. Last week we saw the faith of Moses and Israel as they believed the word of the Lord that He would spare their first-born.

- A. And so they prepared the Passover.
 - 1. They took their lambs, according to their households, killed them, and placed the blood on the door posts and lintels.
 - 2. And they observed the Passover feast, according to the commandment of the Lord.
 - a. In the Old Covenant, the Lord gave the Israelites many ceremonies and feasts which were to be celebrated annually which would help remind them of the work He had done in delivering them out of all their afflictions. He did not want them to forget to be thankful to Him for all that He had done.
 - b. But He also gave these to them to be pictures of the coming Messiah. They were types and shadows of His person and work. He wanted them to look forward to Him in faith, that they might receive what it was that He was bringing to them, namely, salvation.
 - c. But now that Christ has come and has done His work, the Lord even more does not want us to forget what He has done for us in Christ.
 - (i) And so He appointed two memorials which are to be observed even more frequently: the Lord’s Supper and the Lord’s Day.
 - (ii) The Lord’s Supper is a sacrament which we are to observe often to remember the death of our Lord. We are to see in it that act of

redemption, which has brought about the salvation of our souls. We talk about the need we have of both a perfect righteousness and the removal of our sins if we are to be saved. And we know that Jesus has come and has become one with us that He might fulfill the Law for us and die to atone for our sins. Both of these are important and necessary for our salvation. But in Scripture, the redemption of Christ is most often linked to the cross, rather than to His keeping of the Law. This is what we are especially to remember in the Lord's Supper. It is through His death that you and I have life. I want you to think about this during the upcoming week, for it will help prepare you to come to the table this next Lord's Day. The Father does not want us to forget what our salvation cost Him and His beloved Son.

- (iii) The Lord's Day is also a memorial in which the Lord wants us to remember His resurrection. If Jesus had remained in the tomb after the crucifixion, and had not risen from the dead, then death would have overcome Him, it would have been the victor, and our doom would have been sure. But Christ did rise again from the dead. In His resurrection, He overcame death, not only for Himself, but for us, His people. This day too is to be observed more frequently than any other of the feast days. It is to be observed every seventh day, according to the fourth commandment, and on this day we are to remember Christ's victory over the grave, and to stir ourselves up to thankfulness and praise, which we are to give to Him publicly as we meet together for worship.
- (iv) These are the things Christ has given us to observe as His church. And these are the only two memorials which He has given. We must be careful therefore not to let them lose their importance by allowing other days or traditions to be elevated above them. There is nothing on earth that has as near as much significance for you as these two events.

B. Well the Israelites prepared the Passover. But the Egyptians did not.

- 1. But why didn't they?
 - a. Well, we're not told anywhere in the Scriptures that any of them were even offered the Passover by the Lord. This was strictly given to the Hebrews. It was their deliverance, but judgment for the Egyptians.
 - b. Even if they had known about it, which some of them probably did, they wouldn't have done anything about it. And if they had acted on what they heard, they probably wouldn't have been saved, for they needed faith in order to embrace the promise. Moses, the covenant head of Israel, kept the Passover by faith, as we saw in verse 28, so that Israel might be delivered from the destroyer. While Pharaoh, the covenant head of the Egyptians, did not, because he had no faith. This faith only comes from God, and God did not give it to Pharaoh.
 - c. And here again we see the difference God's sovereignty makes in the salvation of men.
 - (i) We had the promise of Christ held out to us, and we embraced Him by

faith. And this has brought about the salvation of our eternal soul from hell.

- (ii) But how many are there in the world who know about Jesus and what He did to bring about salvation, through His incarnation, death and resurrection, but do nothing about it? There are quite a few.
- (iii) But why haven't they found in Jesus anything desirable enough to reach out and take hold of Him? Why haven't they come? It's because they don't have faith. Faith is the gift of God. Faith is that which makes Christ lovely to a man. Faith not only opens the eyes to see that Christ is the Savior from sin, it also opens the eyes to the surpassing glory and beauty of this Holy One who is the exact image of God Himself. Only God can effect this change in the heart of a man and make him willing to come to Christ.
- (iv) Those whose eyes He does not open, are destined by Him to judgment, not because He did not give them the gift of faith, but for their sins. God "has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires" (Rom. 9:18).

- d. God destined the Egyptians to judgment, and so he hardened the heart of Pharaoh to sin against Him, that He might destroy Egypt's first-born, even as Pharaoh had destroyed the infant boys of His people.

2. And what was the result?

- a. We read in Exodus 12:29-33, "Now it came about at midnight that the LORD struck all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of cattle. And Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was no home where there was not someone dead. Then he called for Moses and Aaron at night and said, 'Rise up, get out from among my people, both you and the sons of Israel; and go, worship the LORD, as you have said. Take both your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and go, and bless me also.' And the Egyptians urged the people, to send them out of the land in haste, for they said, 'We shall all be dead.'"
- b. And so the people left. Moses writes, "Now the sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children. And a mixed multitude also went up with them, along with flocks and herds, a very large number of livestock" (vv. 37-38).
- c. Then the Lord led them around the way of the wilderness by the Red Sea, and they camped there.

II. And this brings us to the last act of faith which the author takes from the time of Moses, namely, the crossing of the Red Sea.

- A. Before the sons of Israel camped by the sea, the Lord told Moses what He intended to do.

1. He said you will camp here, ““For Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, “They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.” Thus I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.’ And they did so” (14:1-4).
 - a. Notice here again what I said about God exposing Pharaoh to those things which He knew would cause Pharaoh to harden his heart. He had them camp where He did, because He knew the effect it would have on Pharaoh. So even though God is the One who hardens Pharaoh’s heart, it is Pharaoh’s own fault that it is hardened.
 - b. Notice secondly the reason why the Lord does this: it was so He might receive honor through Pharaoh and all his army, and that the Egyptians would know that He is the Lord. God does not do what He does for the glory or well-being or comfort of men. He does what He does for His own glory. Again, as Paul writes in Romans 11:36, “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

2. And so we read next, “When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people, and they said, ‘What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?’ So he made his chariot ready and took his people with him; and he took six hundred select chariots, and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he chased after the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out boldly. Then the Egyptians chased after them with all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon” (Ex. 14:5-9).

- B. And here is where we see another example of faith in the crossing of Israel through the Red Sea.
 1. But before we come to this, there is something else we must consider.
 - a. Not all of the Israelites had faith. When the author to the Hebrews says, “By faith they passed through the Red Sea,” he is not talking about all of them.
 - b. How do we know this? Well, consider what happened, when they saw Pharaoh’s army. They were very frightened. They cried out to the Lord. “Then they said to Moses, ‘Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, “Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians”?’ For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness” (vv. 10-12). These are not the words of trust nor of faith.
 - c. But we also know that when the people of Israel reached Mt. Sinai and waited for Moses to bring down the commandments, that before he came back down the Mount, the people corrupted themselves by making a golden calf, worshipping the Lord through it, and committing acts of immorality in

their worship, thinking that these things would somehow please God. For this, the Lord almost destroyed them all (Ex. 32).

- d. And finally, when they reached the land and sent out the twelve spies, they believed the ten who came back with an evil report, and did not believe the report of faith which was brought back by Caleb and Joshua. The ten spies were subsequently put to death by the Lord, and the people sentenced to wander in the wilderness for forty years until that whole generation of men from twenty years old and upward, who grumbled against the Lord, were destroyed (Num. 13-14).
 - e. Since we know from John that those who are born again of God practice righteousness (1 John 3:7, 10), whether in the New Covenant or the Old, we must conclude that many of those who crossed the Red Sea did not have faith.
 - f. But when we take into account that this must have been the case at the Passover as well, and that these people were spared, we must conclude that it is not necessary for all of them to have faith in order for the Lord to bring about this great deliverance. The faith of a few, perhaps very few, was enough for the Lord to save them. Ten righteous men was all that was needed for the Lord to spare Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:32). In this case, it is perhaps most important that their covenant head, Moses, had faith. Now this faith of the few saved the people from the temporal danger of Pharaoh and his army, but it did not save them from God's eternal judgment, for God must grant the gift of saving faith to each person individually who will ever be saved. We are never saved from the wrath of God through the faith of another.
2. But here is where we come to the final act of faith.
 - a. When the people cried out, Moses told them to not be afraid, only to stand by and see the salvation of the Lord.
 - b. And with this, the Lord commanded Moses to have the people move forward. Then He told him to lift up his staff and to stretch out his hand over the water. And when he did, the Lord caused a very strong east wind to sweep the sea back, and to dry the ground at the bottom. Then the sons of Israel, in their full number and with their flocks and herds, spent the whole night crossing the sea, while the Egyptians were held back by the pillar of cloud.
 - c. But once they were across, the Lord moved the pillar of cloud and allowed the Egyptians to take up the pursuit. And all of Pharaoh's army went in after them into the sea. But when the Lord looked down in the morning watch, He brought the army into confusion and caused their chariot wheels to swerve. When they realized that the Lord was fighting against them, they tried to turn back. But before they could, the Lord told Moses to stretch his hand again over the sea. And when he did, the Sea returned to its normal position and drowned the whole Egyptian army.
 - d. And what made the difference? Why was Israel able to cross the Sea, but the Egyptians were not? It was because of faith.

- (i) God promised them that He would bring them across. They believed that promise and were enabled by Him to get safely through.
- (ii) But again the Egyptians had no such promise. They made an attempt. They did not act in faith. They presumed that they could get across, before the water closed over. But they were wrong. They should never have presumed upon God.
- (iii) The same thing is true in the matters of eternity. There are those who have faith in Christ who embrace the promises of God for everlasting life in Him and then cross that great chasm at death into the eternal arms of God. But there are also those who make an attempt to enter into heaven, not by faith in the promises of God, but on the presumption that God will receive them because of their own works. They never really close with Christ, by taking Him as their all in all. And when they step out into eternity at death, they fall off the great cliff into the bottomless pit from which they will ever escape.
- (iv) Where do you stand tonight? Are you resting in the promises of God? Have you taken hold of them in Christ Jesus? Does your life show that you have by bringing forth the fruits of righteousness? Then you will be able to cross that chasm into heaven in perfect safety when you die.
- (v) But if on the other hand your faith is nothing but presumption, you are not truly resting in Christ, but really trusting in your works to save you, then when you step out into eternity at death, you will fall into perdition. It is only by faith in Christ that anyone has or ever shall enter into heaven. You must therefore turn from everything else, and trust in Him to save you. If this describes you this evening, I pray that you will turn to Christ while there is still time. May the Lord grant you the grace you need to do so. Amen.