

You Need Only Be Still

Many of you have the personality that when there is a problem, you want to fix it. This comes from a desire to want to help both ourselves and others. It comes from a desire to have a feeling of satisfaction in our work. We want to fix things. But what happens when there are problems you can't fix? 2020 is turning out to be a year we will never forget with major problems. When it comes to the big problems in our society today, problems in our nation, in our communities, we go to our leaders and we ask them, what are you going to do to fix this problem? And we always expect to hear an answer that shows work, that shows a step by step process that will bring about a resolution. But what happens when there is no solution? What happens when we can't fix it? What happens when our leaders don't have the answers that we want to hear? Today we are going to be looking at Moses who gave an answer to a problem that wouldn't have been sufficient for us, but was exactly what needed to happen. Today you are going to be challenged when it comes to your trust in the Lord.

So here's what has happened so far. God wanted to free the Israelites from slavery and he wanted to show the world who he was as the only true God, so he brought about the 10 plagues of Egypt. The Nile turned to blood. There were frogs, gnats, and flies. Livestock died. People got ulcers. There was hail. There were locusts. The sun stopped shining for three days. Egypt was completely devastated. You think 2020 is bad, look at what they went through. But the last plague, every first born male, of man and animals, would die. And that was it for Pharaoh. He told them to leave. And that's where this lesson picks up.

You can see God manipulating things so that it turns out according to his will. He knows how people are going to react in different circumstances so it says that God did not lead the Israelites through Philistine country, even though that was shorter. Because he knew that if they would face war, they would change their minds and turn around back to the Egyptians. In one commentary I read, it said that there were probably a lot of Egyptian military outposts along that other route. So instead God led them through the desert. Then God manipulates the thinking of the Egyptians as well, by making the Israelites double back to make Pharaoh think the Israelites were confused or lost and that would be what causes Pharaoh to go after them with his army. God is in total control, setting things up according to his plan. While both the Israelites and the Egyptians should have known that after the 10 plagues in Egypt, they still lacked trust in the Lord.

Why were the Egyptians chasing after the very people who just devastated their country. They saw first hand the power of God in these plagues. But they still didn't believe it. There was this odd competition back in these times between different gods of different nations and lands. The Egyptians believed their gods were real. And yet, everyone of the plagues attacked another one of their gods. We are going to look at that in our bible study on Wednesday. For example, the god of the sun for the Egyptians was the god "Ra". Yet the true God left the Egyptians sit in darkness for 3 days as one of the plagues while the Israelites in the land of Goshen had sunlight. God wanted to show the Egyptians as a nation that their gods don't exist. And the that the only true God is the Lord. That's what we see happening in our lesson as well. Even after all these plagues they still didn't completely believe this. So God had one more plan up his sleeve. And he says the purpose of this, "The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord." You see God is not pro-Israel. God does not see the Egyptians as the enemies. God tells us in the New Testament that he wants all people to be saved. But God had to do something to get the attention of the Egyptians and the world. He did it through Joseph, 500 years earlier through the interpretation of the dream that led to Joseph knowing about the famine, which we talked about a few weeks ago. Now he does it through this final act of power at the Red Sea.

To give you an idea what I'm talking about, this shows what outreach/evangelism looks like today. We go to people who don't know about Jesus. Jesus himself said, "Go, and make disciples." Not "Sit and wait for them to come to you, but go!" But this is what outreach looked like in Moses day. The world looked at the Israelites and their powerful God. What happened at the Red Sea would draw the attention of the world, both the remaining Egyptians and other nations. But even the Israelites needed assurance that their God was with them.

It says for the Israelites that God went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them. Fire at night, cloud during the day. So that they would always know that God is watching over them. Wouldn't that be nice? Wouldn't it be nice if we were questioning whether God was really with us, if we were afraid or worried about anything, we could just open up our windows and see that God was with us. Wouldn't that boost your morale? Wouldn't that take away all your fears about the future? Look, God is with me! There he is. You would also think that this pillar of cloud/fire would make it so that they wouldn't be afraid when the Egyptians pursued them. But that's not what happened. It says that when the Israelites saw the Egyptian army, they were terrified. They focused on the army of Egyptians behind them, rather than God's presence in a pillar of cloud in front of them.

So, they approach Moses, their leader, and ask him what are you going to do with this army that is coming to destroy us? Moses doesn't have a step by step solution that we would expect of a leader of a nation. Instead he says something mind-blowing. "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." ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still." (vs. 13-14)

Moses' plan was to do nothing. Be still. The Lord will fight for you. That's not what we expect from our leaders and politicians today. When there is a problem, we want to know what our leaders are going to do to fix it. And no leader would possibly say back, "My plan is to do nothing." And he says that's the best plan.

Both the Egyptians and the Israelites needed to understand the power and love of the true God. So God was setting this up for the benefit of both of them. So he first of all, makes sure that there is no fighting between these two armies. He doesn't want to give the Egyptians, the Israelites or anyone in the world, the impression that this victory was because of someone's work and effort. He wanted the world to know that this would be a victory of the Lord. So God moved the pillar of cloud and fire to separate the two armies. It says that the Egyptians were left in darkness and the Israelites had light. No one crossed that line all night long. Not a drop of blood would be on any of their weapons.

All through the night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong wind and it turned into dry land. Could you imagine waking up the next day and seeing a path, an escape route - a wall of water on each side and dry land in the middle? When they went to bed they were trapped between the sea and the most powerful army in the world. When they woke up they had a path through the sea. They did nothing and God provided a path. One commentator said that it could have been a path around ½ a mile wide so that the nation of Israel could pass through that water.

The Egyptians foolishly went after them and they knew there was something divine about this. Not only was a sea divided with walls of water on each side, but their chariots weren't working correctly. They knew that the Lord was involved in this. They saw it in the plagues. It's amazing any of them wanted to continue to pursue these Israelites when they had already known about and seen the power of God. But it would be too late. God had Moses stretch out his hand and all the Egyptians died. Not one of them survived, including Pharaoh himself. Pharaoh was considered a God to the Egyptians, but the God of Israel showed who the true God was. They saw the entire Egyptian army in broad daylight washing up on the shores of the sea. Moses was right. Just be still. Do nothing. God will fight for you. God will make a path for you.

Many of you know what it's like to have struggles come into your life that you can't do anything about. Problems that you can't fix. A bad diagnosis, a surgery, a pandemic, mental health issues, financial issues, there comes a point where there is only so much we can do, and we hit a point where we have to say I can't do anything else to fix this problem. And God says, "Be still. I'll fight for you." But it's hard for us to be still. One of the verses in the bible says, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7) Easier said than done. If we trusted God to take care of our problems, we would never worry. But we do. We wonder how those Israelites struggled to trust in the Lord, but we do the same thing they did. How do you give to God your problems? How do you be still and trust that the Lord will take care of things?

This victory of the Lord at the Red Sea wouldn't be all that different from another victory that we would see taking place many years later on a cross. The world was faced with a much greater problem than slavery. They were faced with spiritual slavery to sin. Just as God fought this battle alone at the Red Sea, Jesus went to the cross by himself. He said to the world, "The Lord will fight for you; you need only be still." And in the strangest battle ever, even more strange than what happened at the Red Sea, Jesus fought for us and he won. When we look at Christ, that's where this passage, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" that's where it makes sense. Our inability to fix so many of our problems is solved with God's ability and desire to take care of them all, starting with the greatest problem of all, our sins.

That's the heart of the message of Christianity and it's what separates us from every other religion in the world. Every other religion says you have to do something to get closer to God. You have to be better, you have to try harder. Even some Christian churches can fall into this without realizing it. They'll say, "You have to make a decision for him. You have to repent. You have to be better. You have to change." And God says, "No, you be still, and watch God work." He sent his Son. He fought for you. He won the victory for you. Before he died, he didn't say, "It is started. Now finish it." He said, "It is finished." Nothing more needs to be done. You see it in baptism too. Baptism isn't something that we do for God, but it's something that he did for us. And it leaves our sinful nature looking like the Egyptian army washing up on shores of the Red Sea. It drowned. It's dead. And we are left celebrating like those Israelites in awe of all that their God did for them.

This is true when it comes to our biggest problem of sin, and it's true when it comes to our much smaller, but still serious problems in life. That's not to say that we aren't to do anything when problems come up. When you lose your job. Search for another one. When you get hurt go to the doctor. But know that God is behind everything that happens in life. That there is truly no reason to ever worry or be stressed. Casting your anxiety on him, means that you know that the Lord is already taking care of this problem in some way. God didn't have to produce these amazing miracles during Moses day, with the 10 plague and the Red Sea, but he wanted the Egyptians, the Israelites and the world to see the only God in this universe, who is powerful and loving and has things under control. I know 2020 has been a strange year. It has left a lot of people with worry and fear. If we could fix it, we would, but we can't. And so find comfort in God's promise where he says to you. "The Lord will fight for you; you need only be still." Amen.