

**It's God's Time!**

Exodus 14:19-31

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I think it's fair to say that all of us have at least once wondered why God sometimes allows hardship in our lives. Regardless of our faith and maturity, life seems to have a way of finding a spot in us that aches. Are you going through something that makes you question, "Why God?"

We all know the story in today's reading. I mean, even non-Christians have heard this story at least once. Now, what many of us don't know is the hand of God behind all of these. When the Israelites came out of Egypt, it says, "God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was nearer; for God thought, 'If the people face war, they may change their minds and return to Egypt.' So God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea" (Exodus 13:17-18). So, when the Israelites came out of Egypt, their first target destination was Mount Sinai, where Moses first met God, and there was an easy way to go from Egypt to Mount Sinai. Instead, God led them through a detour and made them come to the Red Sea. Then, Exodus 14:1-2 says, "Then the Lord said to Moses: Tell the Israelites to turn back and camp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall camp opposite it, by the sea." So, here God is intentionally asking Moses and the Israelites to camp by the sea, and hence if there was ever an Egyptian army coming after them, the Israelites would now be sandwiched by the Red Sea in front of them and the Egyptian army behind them. If you are the commanding officer of the retreating army, then this is absolutely a foolish plan. You are slowing yourself by going through a detour and you are camping by the sea, cutting off an escape route. Instead of having the Israelites escape out of Egypt as fast as possible, God himself was boxing them into a corner. To us, who know the ending, God is setting up a stage to do something amazing. But, to the Israelites, it is clear God is pushing them to die in the wilderness. No wonder they complained.

God, however, had a purpose in this set up. And this is true for us as well. God often boxes us into a corner for a purpose, for our good. It seems at the time God is pushing us to die in the wilderness, but in reality God is actually setting up a stage for something spectacular. He secretly reveals his plan to Moses in verses 3-4: "Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, 'They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them.' I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, so that I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord." You see, when God sets up something like this, everyone will think we are wandering aimlessly in the land and the wilderness has closed in on us. We may be fooled ourselves and think God has pushed us this far and made us die in the wilderness. But, God has a purpose in our trials. We need to believe that our trials actually have divine purposes regardless of whether we know what God is up to or not, and when we believe, we can persevere.

Here are two things God does for us in the times of trial. First, God protects us. You see, the Israelites thought it was only a matter of time for the Egyptians' swords to come upon them. But the

reality was there was the pillar of cloud that would not allow the Egyptian army to put a finger on the Israelites. You see, we are often afraid that something bad would happen to us. The reality is, however, we are safe and secure in God's hand. It's amazing that the Israelites were walking on the dry ground when there were two giant walls of sea on their left and right and the strong army behind them. It's as if they were experiencing peace and blessing right in the middle of storm and chaos. So, we also can be assured that, even in the midst of storm and chaos, God can pour his peace and blessing upon us.

Second, God fights for us. Do you realize that God actually led the Israelites to camp by the sea and to be sandwiched by the sea and the Egyptian army, so that he could show them he would fight for them and that he is mighty and strong. When the Israelites came out of Egypt, God had one concern and that was their fear of Egyptians. Despite all of the miracles God performed in Egypt, they were still afraid of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Many of them even felt more secure if they were enslaved by the Egyptians again. God had to do something about this, because he wanted his people, not to fear men, but to fear only God. He wanted to replace their fear of men with the fear of God. But, God couldn't just have them face the Egyptians in an open area, because he knew they would simply flee. Instead, God intentionally drove them to a corner and forced them to face what they must face. When they finally had to face the Egyptian army without being able to flee, they saw the hand of God, working and fighting for them. The Red Sea was opened and in front of them the Egyptian army was drowned in the very sea they walked across. What do you think happened to their fear of the Egyptians? What do you think replaced their fear of the Egyptians? The fear of God. The knowledge of the Almighty and Strong God. When they faced enemies in the wilderness afterwards, do you think they were afraid anymore? No! Having experienced this at the Red Sea, how could they? What seemed a harsh and terrible circumstance turned out to be a place of learning who their God truly is and increasing their trust in the God who fought for them.

To finish this sermon, I have a video clip of the interview I recently did with my good friend named Harry Soedermasto, who kindly shared about his experience.

(Interview with Harry)

People of God, when God seems to box you into a corner, know that it is God's time. In the wilderness, where you think is the place of death, God is about to do something only he can do. He will prove to you who he truly is and what his power can accomplish. May God's hand be upon you today and forevermore. Amen.