**THE CROSSING THE RED SEA**

**Exodus 13:17-14:31**

**Key verse**: Exodus 14:13-14 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.”

When I was about 5 years old, I remember I had a scary dream. I was standing on a narrow street. Then I found a ghost on one side and a snake on the other side. I was completely trapped between two things that I was most afraid of in my childhood. I didn’t know what to do, but finally I jumped and kicked the ghost, and then I woke up. I was relieved when I realized that it was just a dream. However, in our real life, we can be actually trapped between many troubles and problems that we are afraid of. When we fall into such situations, we can become extremely fearful and helpless. We would also blame others as well as God. No human can really save us out of serious life problems and crisis. In today’s passage, the Israelites were trapped between the furious Egyptian army and the deep blue Red Sea. Then God performed one of the greatest miracles in the Bible and enable the Israelites to cross the Red Sea. May God help us to learn how to fear and trust in God only in the midst of crisis through today’s passage.

1. **Pillars of cloud and fire**

While experiencing nine different kinds of plagues, the Pharaoh was still stubborn and proud, and refused to listen to Moses. However, after the tenth plague, which killed all the firstborns in Egypt including his son, the Pharaoh finally agreed to let Israelites leave Egypt. When the Israelites left Egypt, perhaps most Israelites expected a smooth and short journey to the land of Canaan. However, God’s plan was different. Read verses 17 and 18.

“When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, “If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.” So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt ready for battle.”

God was exactly aware of the status of Israelites. They have been slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years, and had no experience of war. Therefore, if they went through the Philistine country and faced war, many of them would have run back to Egypt to save their lives. Although we always prefer the shortest route, God who knows and understands us may lead us through the longer route than we expect for our own sake.

Look at verse 19. “Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the Israelites swear an oath. He had said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place.” In Genesis chapter 50, just before his death, Joseph made a prophecy about the Exodus, “I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” The oath was finally fulfilled about 400 years after Joseph’s death.

Look at verses 20 to 22. After leaving Sukkoth the Israelites camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. During the day, the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and during the night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that the Israelites could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. The pillars of cloud and fire represent the presence of God. Because the Israelites had never left Egypt for 400 years, it must have been very difficult for them to travel through unknown places. They did not know where to go because there was no GPS navigation system or google map. However, God went ahead of them to guide them on their way in pillars of cloud and fire. God led the Israelites as their good shepherd. Psalm 23 states, “The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake”.

In John 14, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit during the last supper, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” As the pillars of cloud and fire were with the Israelites and guided them in the desert, the Holy Spirit is now with us and guides each of us to the right direction.

Look at chapter 15 verses 1 to 5. Then the Lord said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. Pharaoh will think, ‘The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.’ And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.”

God had a surprising plan for the Israelites. God wanted to make Pharaoh and his army pursue the Israelites when they encamped by the Red Sea. Why was God going to put his people through such troubles? It was to gain glory for himself through Pharaoh and all his army, and to make the Egyptians know that he was the Lord. God wanted to give the Egyptians the final lesson that he is the God Almighty who deserves all the glory on Earth. In John 11, when Jesus heard the news that Lazarus was sick, he said, ““This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” God wants to reveal his magnificent glory through problems and troubles that we cannot handle. Therefore we must remember that the time of trouble is the best time to experience the glory of God.

1. **The Lord will fight for you**

Look at verse 5. “When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, “What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!” The Pharaoh and the Egyptians were deeply saddened and despaired by the death of their firstborn sons. But soon they came to the realization that the Israelites had already left and they lost all their free slavery services. The Pharaoh quickly had his chariot made ready and took his army with him to chase the Israelites. He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. His heart was burning with anger and desire to seek revenge on the Israelites for his son’s death. The Egyptians pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hahiroth. At that time, Egypt had the most advanced civilization in the world, and therefore their army was also very powerful. Egyptian chariots were wheeled carriages pulled by two fast warhorses. Two soldiers rode in a chariot. One drove the chariot and controlled the horses while the other fought using a bow and arrow or spear. When the Israelites saw hundreds of those powerful chariots running toward them, they were horrified and paralyzed with fear.

Look at verses 10-12. As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. No Israelite expected the situation. They began to yell at 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! Moses! You can’t be serious. You cannot be serious!”

When things go wrong, it is easy for us to blame our leaders. We blame political leaders of our country and our bosses at work, as well as our church leaders. We think everything is their fault, not our fault. If we have no one to blame, we blame God. “God, why have you done this to me? It is all your fault”. On one hand, it is understandable why Israelites were so angry at Moses and God because all of them were about to be killed by the powerful Egyptian army after going through all the troubles and following all the instructions from Moses and God. However, we should not complain to God in any situation because God is good all the time, even during the time of our failure. If the Israelites remembered all the miracles performed by God in Egypt, they could have expected that God would perform another great miracle to save them. We must remember that God always has the answers to any difficult questions. God himself is the answer.

How did Moses respond to the terrified and angry Israelites? Read verses 13 and 14. “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.”

Was Moses not afraid at all in such terrifying situation? I think he was also fearful when he found that the Israelites were completely trapped between the deadly Egyptian army and the deep blue sea. However, he did not speak any words of unbelief. Instead, he spoke words of faith overcoming his own fear. As a human, no one can be perfectly free from fear. Often we suffer from various fears, including fear of death, fear of failure, and fear of disease. Personally, I have a fear of heights. That is why I cannot ride rollercoasters or pirate ships in an amusement park. Recently, I tried to overcome my fear by riding on a snow tube over a steep hill during the last Spring Conference. However, there are much more serious fears that people cannot easily overcome. When we are in such fearful situations, it is easy for us to speak negative words blaming others or God. However, Moses had faith in God and believed God would do something great for them. “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.”

What a wonderful speech! It was a short but very powerful message for the frightened Israelites. In human history, there are many great speeches that have influenced numerous people and changed the world history. Those speeches including Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg address, Franklin D. Roosevelt’s inaugural address, and Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I have a dream” speech, have planted hope, courage, and vision in many people’s hearts. Moses’ speech delivered to the Israelites who were in panic, despair, and fear planted faith and hope of God in their hearts. Moses’ powerful speech restored people’s trust in God and made them united in Almighty God.

Moses told the Israelites to stand firm and be still because God would fight their enemies on behalf of them. Some may think standing still is like a piece of pie, but it is not easy at all to stand still when you are surrounded by furious Egyptian army and the deep blue sea. You can stand still during such terrifying moments only when you have absolute faith that God is fighting for you.

Several years ago, when I was working for a national laboratory in Washington State, I was in deep distress and disappointment because of uncertain security of my job. One day when I was standing in front of a river near my working place, I saw a brown eagle suddenly appeared in the sky. Then I saw a bald eagle followed the brown eagle. Both eagles started to fight and the bald eagle was winning. It was a very strange sight for me that two eagles were fighting in the sky just in front of me. Soon, I accepted this as a sign from God. While I was disappointed and fearful for my situation, God was indeed fighting hard for me. I believe he still fights for me every day to reveal his majestic glory.

What was God’s rescue plan for the Israelites? Look at verses 15-18. “Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. 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.”

Habakkuk 2:14 states, “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” God reveals his glory to all people including believers and non-believers, so that all may know that God is the Lord. No one can stand against God. Even the powerful Pharaoh must acknowledge the greatness of God. God is the only one who is worthy of all glory and honor in the whole world.

God also wants us to keep moving on by faith instead of being paralyzed by fear. We should stop playing the blame game out of fear and unbelief but keep on walking toward the Promised Land by obeying God’s words.

Verses 19 and 20 show how God protected the Israelites before they crossed the Red Sea. “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.”

The pillar of cloud stood between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night, the Egyptian side was totally dark, while the Israelite side was bright, so the Egyptians could not come near the Israelites.

Read verses 21 and 22. “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.”

God divided the Red Sea with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The Israelites walked through the sea as if it was dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. This was such an amazing moment that no one had ever seen before. God showed his awesome power as the creator of the heavens and the earth. Today, many people are skeptical about this miracle because it is hard to prove the event by science. But we must remember that God created everything including the ocean, the land, the life, the universe, and all laws of nature. Isaac Newton, one of the greatest scientists, once confessed like this; “I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.”

God is the creator above all science and all nature is under his control. In Mark 4, Jesus and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee on a boat, and there was a furious storm while Jesus fell asleep on the boat. When the boat was drowning, Jesus’ disciples woke him up, and Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves, “Quiet! Be still!”. Then it was completely calm. Likewise, God was revealing his absolute glory and majestic power in the face of Pharaoh and the Egyptian army who worshiped creatures rather than the creator God.

The Pharaoh and Egyptians should have repented of their sins while witnessing a supernatural event happening in the Red Sea. But their hearts were still hardened and they refused to surrender. Look at verses 23 to 25. “The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. He jammed the wheels of their chariots so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, “Let’s get away from the Israelites! The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.”

The Pharaoh had a never-giving up and unyielding spirit. However, God opposes the proud. The pride and stubbornness of Pharaoh destroyed him as well as his army. God patiently waits and provides opportunities for everyone to repent. If we miss the chances, we are destined to his eternal judgement. No one can stand against God. Our God is the Most High over all the earth and he is exalted far above all gods.

What happened to those stubborn and unrepentant Egyptians when they continued to chase the Israelites? Following God’s instruction, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were swept into the sea. The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived. The word of Moses in verse 13,” The Egyptians you see today you will never see again”, was just fulfilled. No matter how powerful and intelligent we are, we must admit that we are nothing before the creator God. And we must humble ourselves before God.

In the meantime, all Israelites safely crossed the Red Sea, singing a song of joy. “There can be miracle when you believe though hope is frail it’s hard to kill. Who knows what miracle you can achieve. When you believe somehow you will.”

Let’s read verses 31 and 32 together. “That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.”

In my life, from time to time, I was standing in front of the fearful Red Sea. Recently, my Red Sea I faced was the faculty promotion. I applied for my promotion from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor last fall as my department chair suggested. Although I was quite confident about my academic achievement, I was not sure if I could be promoted. Besides the promotion evaluation, I had to also go through reappointment process as a tenure track faculty every year. I had to struggle with my anxiety and worry because I was afraid of losing my job. I worried about having bad evaluations from senior faculty and students. While I was waiting for the result of my promotion over several months, I had to fight against my fear, anxiety, and unbelief. I decided to hold on to Exodus 14:13 and 14, “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.” I constantly reminded myself that the only one I have to fear is God himself, and nothing else. Last month, I heard the news that I have been promoted to Associate Professor. I thank God for his great deliverance. The next Red Sea I have to cross is the tenure, which will be determined at the end of next year. May God help me to continue to walk through many Red Seas that I will face in my life by faith. May God also help me to trust in God only. I pray that we may be able to cross many Red Seas of our life by fearing and trusting in God, our Father and good shepherd.