

Standing Firm in Faith

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[0 : 00] May God bless that reading from his holy word as we turn to it to consider and to hear what God is saying to us through that portion of his word.

Exodus 14, 1 to 14, where we see this great truth of standing firm in faith, as we see Moses there calling on the people to stand firm in faith.

Four headings this morning to consider from the passage, as we see there. Sovereign purposes, God's sovereign purposes, even when these purposes seem perplexing.

We'll see that in the detail at the start of the chapter. And then stubborn rebellion, first of all, the stubborn rebellion of Pharaoh against God. And then really following on from that rebellion, the sinking hearts of the Israelites when they saw the Egyptian forces against them.

And in many ways, they were rebels against God as well in their sinking hearts. But then finally, the strong leadership of Moses and his commanding the people to fear not and stand firm and to see the salvation of the Lord.

[1 : 10] You know, there are many times in the life of a believer, the life of a Christian, when the Lord's ways seem so puzzling, even baffling.

And the believer can so often wither in his faith. And he crumbles. He crumbles in the test. He crumbles in the trial.

And at times even mumbles words of panic, words of fear, and forgets the all-sovereign purposes of God that are right, that are perfect. Because God is right, God is good.

And God has promised you, you who are his, even in these times of struggle, that God has loved you with an everlasting love.

I wonder if that's reminiscent of perhaps your experience in troubling times. You know, when God's dealt with you in a way that has seemed so mystifying, so baffling, so perplexing, and instead of persevering in your faith, you've persevered in a lack of faith.

[2 : 22] Maybe you've had that same, we might say, wilting under the apparent overwhelming circumstances that the Israelites were facing there in the desert.

They were forgetting that God is sovereign. They were forgetting that God's promises that God had made to the people of Israel, that God's promises are sure and are utterly reliable.

They were rebelling against God and against God's leader. God had appointed Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. And in the rebelling against him, they were rebelling against God.

And it may well be that many of us have experienced that situation, that scenario. Forgetting God, forgetting who God is, forgetting God and all his might, his power, his word that is sure, his promises that are for you to imbibe in your heart.

And if that's the case, well, look at this passage, this next portion of the story of the Exodus. And yes, we're going to see the Israelites sink in their hearts as they're looking at these so-called adverse circumstances.

[3 : 40] But they're looking at the circumstances and away from Almighty God. And if that's what's happening in your life, well, be encouraged. Be encouraged because despite what may appear, as was the case with the Israelites there, what may appear an overwhelming power that's raised against you and against the gospel, remember that God is sovereign, that God's ways are right.

And always, always he does what he does for his glory and for the eternal good of his people. So listen, listen to God speak to you through his word, even this morning.

Because we do forget, we so easily forget God's word. The Israelites forgot, and they forgot so quickly that God is Lord. They forgot that God's ways are right.

They forgot the truth that we read elsewhere in Scripture, Proverbs 16, the heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps. And certainly, God the Lord was establishing the steps there of the Israelites as they're leaving Egypt.

I mean, we've already seen last Sunday morning, God had led them away from a very short route across the north of the Sinai Peninsula through Philistine territory to the Promised Land.

[4 : 59] God had taken them away from that route because the Israelites would have been so afraid of the Philistines and their armies that they would have turned back immediately back to Egypt.

So God had already taken them a much longer route down the Sinai Peninsula. But if that was unexpected enough, when we read there at the start of chapter 14, you see another unexpected turn.

Something that at first would have seemed utterly mystifying. But again, from man's perspective, mystifying, but in God's perspective, utterly correct for his glory.

You see there in verses 1 to 4, God's telling Moses to take, well, to take another unusual route, another turn in the journey. And this time they're to head towards the Red Sea and make their camp right beside the shore of the Red Sea.

So they're to camp right by that sea. Of course, humanly speaking, how can they cross that sea? And it's as if they're wandering around in that desert, as if they have no direction home.

[6 : 14] Now, obviously, there were Egyptian spies who were watching the Israelites as they moved in this sort of zigzag way. These spies tracking the move of the Israelites. And obviously, these spies are going to report back to Pharaoh what would appear to be utter confusion in the Israelite ranks.

There they are, camping at the Red Sea. No apparent means to cross the Red Sea. It would have seemed just utter madness. Impossible, impossible to move forward.

But God knew. God cared. God would deliver. God's plan for the Israelites was absolutely perfect. Even the very, sending them there to that Red Sea.

It seemed without any sense at all that God's will would prevail. God would reveal his glory, even in the Israelites being at that Red Sea. Being, as it were, in between the army and one side, the sea and another.

God would show his wisdom, even in the most trying and seemingly impossible situations. But before we look ahead, as it were, before we see God's wisdom in that change of direction, before we, of course, next week, God willing, see the crossing of the Red Sea, let's just consider the principle that we find here in the passage.

[7 : 41] God's ways are not my ways. God's ways are not my way. God's ways are not my way. God may well lead you to your Red Sea, as it were. You see, your journey home, my journey, our journey home, our journey to heaven.

It's not a straight line of uninterrupted changes. But there is, as we saw last week, there are the many times when we will face our hill of difficulty.

And it's in these times when we are in these hills of difficulty, when it seems as if there is no way forward. It's then that your faith and your trust in God and God's perfect ways with you, it's there that your faith will be strengthened.

And yes, the race that God has given you to run, in many ways it will have twists and turns and unexpected changes, unexpected altered directions, changes that you would never have envisaged, that God has known from all eternity.

You see, God has determined your race. He's planned your journey from all eternity. And just with the Israelites there, your journey may well take you to places and situations, and yes, even crises that appear utterly impassable and utterly impossible to deal with.

[9 : 09] But look at the example here. Just the Israelites there, they've been led to the Red Sea. It seems that they've been led to a position of utter hopelessness. This sea, a barrier's too wide, so deep.

It's impossible to traverse without certainly the means to cross over that sea. And, you know, apply this to yourself.

In your own strength, we can apply this. You see, God will lead you many times with obstacles before you that seem too difficult to manage by your own strength, just as in the case with the Israelites.

By themselves, they wouldn't be able to cross the Red Sea. By themselves, they wouldn't be able to survive against the pursuing Egyptian army. But God knew. God knew that.

He knows my weaknesses, your weaknesses. He knows the hurdles that are before you as hurdles before me. He knows that there are obstacles that might appear to be just too high and too severe when God takes you even to the very foot of that hill of difficulty.

[10 : 19] And even as you cross over it, we might say when he takes you to the brink, that God knows and God cares. And God will deliver.

Because there will be that way of escape. And that way of escape provided by God, just as it was with the Israelites. You see, God was working.

God was moving in that perfect plan so that he would reveal his glory. Just as God will have glory in your life.

Just as you who are his will know his perfect ways with you. As God said, I will harden Pharaoh's heart and he will pursue them. And I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his hosts.

And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord. And so yes, God does. As we're told in the passage, God hardens the heart of Pharaoh. And Pharaoh's going to chase the people thinking that the people are just easy prey for his superior army.

[11 : 22] But the prey won't be the Israelites. The prey will be the Egyptian army. Led by a rebellious Pharaoh. A Pharaoh who will not acknowledge God as Lord, as we saw there in verses 5 to 9.

The stubborn rebellion that we spoke of earlier. One of the focuses, one of the main characteristics of rebellion against God is the focus on self.

You know, when self is elevated above God. You know, or we might say when self is placed at the center. When all the evidence of God's being, all the evidence of God's power, all the evidence is ignored.

And sadly, that was the case with Pharaoh. That was at the heart of Pharaoh's rebellion against God. Even though God has shown his unquestionable power in the first nine plagues, and then ultimately in the tenth plague, even though it was so evident that God is Lord, and even through these plagues, even though Pharaoh, yes, had allowed the Israelites to leave Egypt on the basis of seeing the devastation of the tenth plague, Pharaoh still would not put his trust and faith in God.

And self comes to the fore. He'll change his mind. He'll realize that he's lost this workforce and that they're going to have to be brought back and brought back with force. And so his decision to bring the people back, a decision in defiance of God, of course, in defiance of Moses.

[13 : 02] Pharaoh ignoring the truth that God is Lord and that God's power is ultimately and gloriously greater than any man, even a Pharaoh of Egypt.

But then when we read the passage, it would seem at first anyway that that rebellion was working. He's sending out his best charioteers, the cream of the Egyptian army.

And they're chasing after the Israelites. And the spies know exactly where the Israelites are. Surely victory is going to be his, you know, this mighty army against these unarmed Israelites.

Surely he's going to usurp the authority of Israel as God. And he'll be vindicated. He'll triumph. The Israelites will be beaten and will be forced to return to slavery and Pharaoh will be triumphant.

Isn't that his mindset? Isn't that the mindset of the world? The world that despises God the Lord. A world that despises the things of truth and denies that the Lord Jesus is the only saviour of mankind.

[14 : 16] It's that arrogance that thinking that man has the upper hand, even against God, even against his church, even against the church of the Lord Jesus. It's that arrogance that closes its eyes to the evidence of God who is there, the God who is Lord.

And so an agenda is pursued that seeks to, well, that seeks to present a dominance, and authority, even against God, even against his people.

That's what we see here in Pharaoh. This picture that we see of Pharaoh here is a picture of every rebel against God. And I think we have to say that some of the saddest indicators of that mindset comes from those who have heard the good news, who've listened to the word of God.

Maybe at one time have said, Lord, Lord, even as Pharaoh at one time did utter the name of the Lord. Certainly he did that after the 10th, certainly immediately after the 10th plague.

In other words, there are so many who are so close to the kingdom, but now rebels, because they won't see Jesus. They won't hear Jesus.

[15 : 36] And they won't speak his name without blasphemy. But what of the Lord's people when trouble comes? You know, when crises afflict those who profess the name of the Lord, what of the sinking hearts there that we read there in the passage where the Israelites' hearts sink to the ground when they see the predicament that they're in, that they consider to be impossible to be removed from?

Well, let's consider what we read there in verses 10 to 12. Well, Moses is the author of this passage, so he's recounting what happened these number of years before.

And as he recalls what happens, what happened then, he's telling us that Pharaoh's armies were getting nearer and nearer the Israelites. The dust from all these chariots, these hundreds of chariots, the dust rising from the desert, and obviously something of massive proportion coming towards the Israelites.

And the people appear trapped between the army on one side and the Red Sea on the other side. It just seems an impossible situation. Certainly no way to turn, but we have to turn physically.

Turn one way, and they're going to be overwhelmed by the army. Turn the other way, they're going to drown in the Red Sea. Well, they turn to the Lord. Well, we read in the passage, at one sense they do.

[17 : 01] They do cry out to the Lord. But then immediately, we're told these words. We're told that in great fear, well, they feared, they were afraid, even though they did cry out to the Lord.

And immediately after expressing their fear, they turn on Moses. And they say words that indicate that their hearts were not right with God at that point. Yes, they might have cried to the Lord, but they were utterly lacking in faith.

They didn't trust God, that God would lead them even out of that predicament. Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you've taken us away to die in the wilderness?

What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not what we said to you in Egypt? Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than die in the wilderness.

See, if Pharaoh was rebelling against God, then we have to say that at this point, the Israelites too were acting as rebels. They were resisting God's leader. And in resisting God's appointed, they were resisting God himself.

[18 : 14] I mean, they were resisting Moses. They were resisting God's man. Moses was innocent of all charges, but the people showed their complete lack of faith in God, and they simply would not believe that God had led them this particular way.

But then, you know, the evidence was there all beside them that God would lead them out of Egypt and God would lead them to the promised land.

As we said at the start of the sermon, I mean, God was there before them in that pillar of cloud, that pillar of cloud by day, that pillar of fire by night.

The evidence of God's presence was with them all the time. He'd never left them. He'd never abandoned them. And then, as they looked around, they would see Joseph's sarcophagus.

Remember, Joseph, before he died, several hundred years before, had said that he asked the Israelites to take his bones out of Egypt and take them to the promised land.

[19 : 18] And again, the evidence of Joseph's sarcophagus there indicating that that would happen. The land that God had sworn to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be the land that the Israelites would be taken to.

And even that sarcophagus there with a physical sign that God was leading his people and God doing so in his way. And yet, when this first time of testing comes, the Israelites weaken.

They won't see the evidence before them. They won't see that God has a perfect purpose for them and that purpose is going to be fulfilled. Even in that time of testing, they wouldn't turn to God with all their heart.

What did they do? They looked to man and they're afraid. They saw with their eyes and they responded with their hearts. But they didn't cling to God's promises.

God had assured them that he would take them to the land of promise. But all the people could see was a false picture of a false place.

[20 : 31] Egypt. Egypt where they said they wanted to return to even though that was the place of their slavery. And they expected to die, even die in the wilderness instead of going back to Egypt.

And you know, there's a warning here for all who are the Lord's people. because so often, you know, you can look with your eyes and interpret with your heart, but you haven't first trusted in God.

And we can so easily prefer the immediate, the so-called, you know, evidence of a powerful enemy rather than look first to the one who holds your times in his hands.

Of course there are real dangers before you. And of course the enemy is subtle and he deceives and he deceives with plausible words. He did that right from the beginning with our first parents, Adam and Eve.

But listen to the words that God gives you and that continues to give you. I am with you always. Jesus said that to his disciples. I am with you always. Even to the very end of the age.

[21 : 43] Take that part and do it. Please do it even right now. Especially when there are times when you see the dark clouds of oppression and more than you see the, as it were, the presence of God.

That's what the Israelites were doing. They were seeing that dark cloud of oppression, but they weren't looking to the pillar of cloud before them. But remember, you have a saviour, the Lord Jesus.

And he's interceding for you right now. And his presence goes before you right now. And what he's promised, he'll see you. For you to be strong and to be courageous and to remember the Lord is with you.

And I pray that while there are sinking hearts, that these hearts will be raised and yes, raised to newness of hope and faith and love in the Lord, your saviour, as you rest in him.

And listen. Keep listening to the voice of God. Even listen through the many times when God's servants will proclaim God's truth to you, just as Moses here, the servant of God, when Moses proclaimed God's truth to the people there.

[22 : 55] As we see that strong leadership of Moses in his standing firm in faith. Now, we don't know the exact number, but we were in several million people.

Several million voices had been raised in, well, we might say in pity, self-pity. Certainly raised in hostility against Moses. Several million against one.

But Moses wouldn't join in that self-pity. Moses wouldn't, we might say, succumb to that pity party. Moses didn't desire slavery in Egypt.

He didn't prefer that to the freedom, the freedom that the people have promised in the Lord. But he's emboldened in his faith. He's strong in trust.

He's close to God the Lord. And he gives the Israelites three commands. These three commands that God even, even at this moment, is giving to each one of us.

[23 : 57] Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord which shall work for you today. I mean, the Israelites were terrified. I mean, their bodies, you can just picture them, the bodies were shaking with fear.

But their eyes were far from faith, true faith in the one true God. But Moses wasn't afraid. Moses stood firm. Yes, he saw the danger, but he stood firm.

And Moses could see the salvation of God that was about to be revealed. Because Moses knew that God is the warrior. That God the warrior would fight and defend his people.

And it's for the people to be still and to know that God is God. You see, even the very words of Moses there had shown that he'd grown in faith.

And at one time he was such a doubting individual. But now we're saying that he truly does hold fast to the promises of God. And Moses is showing that yes, faith, sure faith overcomes fear.

[25 : 04] And he's not afraid to show his faith even in that time of crisis. And so again, there's a message for you and for me here this morning. Don't just hear the word of God, but apply it.

Don't just be hearers of the word, but be doers also. I mean, when you've heard the voice of God speak through Moses, well, apply that word in your life.

Fear not. Stand firm. See the salvation of the Lord. Trust in God the warrior. Trust in him and be still.

And think above all of the mercy of God, the mercy that God showed in the work of the Lord of Jesus when Jesus in his being our warrior, when he fought Satan, fought sin, when he fought in your behalf and for you, it was for you and for me to be silent, to be still, not claiming any merit of our own in that great salvation that Jesus won for you on the cross.

And so, I pray that you will have been and are being encouraged in the Lord even from this passage to remember that God the Lord, he fights for you on your behalf because he wars against the world, against the flesh, against the devil and he's the one who's gained the victory.

[26 : 30] Jesus won that victory on the cross. He triumphed on the cross and Jesus continues to triumph. He does so for his glory and does so for your eternal being.

So trust in him. Don't be afraid. Stand firm in faith and behold that great salvation that's yours in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, we give you thanks and praise for your goodness to us even in the passage we have looked at this morning. May you strengthen the hearts of your people to stand firm in faith, to stand firm in the promises that you give to each and every one who is yours.

May we truly know that you are the one who presences yourself even by your love, your steadfast love. So Lord, hear us as we continue in worship before you now.

Lord, go before us in all things we ask. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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