

God's Presence

19 And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. 20 So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night.—

Exodus 14:19-20

In our life journey, our lives are filled with defining moments. Those times when we must make important decisions that will impact the rest of our lives or those moments that change us to the core. The Israelites' defining moment was when they believed that the Lord was speaking through Moses and followed him out of Egypt to go to the Lord's promised land. They saw the Lord use Moses through the plagues, and they obeyed when he told them to get ready. When they finally headed out of Egypt, "the LORD went before them in a pillar of cloud to guide their way by day, and in a pillar of fire to give them light by night, so that they could travel by day or night. 22 Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place before the people." (Exodus 13: 21-22). God was there to guide their way by day and by night. He did not leave them alone to figure it out on their own. He went before them to ensure that they made it to all the way to where He had promised to take them. God wasn't just taking them out of bondage, He was leading them true freedom if they were willing to accept it.

As they arrived to Pi Hahiroth, they are seemingly surrounded. The sea is before them, mountains all around and the Egyptians are closing in fast. Exodus 14:9 tells us, "The Egyptians—all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, horsemen and troops—pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon." But the Lord planned it this way. In the first half of verse 17, the Lord tells Moses, "And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them." They are in the middle of the desert with no weapons, very little food, and the Lord wants for the Egyptians to follow them. Naturally, the Israelites are frightened and perhaps confused. All they can see with their own eyes is trouble, so they begin to complain hoping that something will change. Sometimes in the midst of our own storms, we lose sight of who God is and what He can do, but we mustn't forget what Jeremiah 32:17 says, "¹⁷ 'Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You.'"

But the Lord's intention was not to scare the pants off the Israelites to scare them into submission. His intention was to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that He is God over all. The second half of verse 17 tells us His intention, "So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen." It's important to note that Pharaoh didn't just take a small regiment of a few men to bring the people back. Exodus 14:6-7 tells us, "6 So he made ready his chariot and took his people with him. 7 Also, he took six hundred choice chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt with captains over every one of them." That's right, he took all of them. Clearly, Pharaoh didn't think he was going to lose this battle. His heart and the heart of his people was hardened, so they thought that they were going to go out there, surround the Israelites with their mighty army and drag them back to Egypt. But God's plan is in verse 18, "Then the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gained honor for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen." God's intention was to gain honor over Pharaoh. It wasn't enough for the people to believe that He was God. They needed to see that God was more powerful than Pharaoh and all his worldly strength so that all the people (both Israelites and Egyptians) would honor Him above the all the false gods they had known all their lives. This was about to become a defining moment for the Egyptians. As Isaiah 45:6-8 tells us,

"6 That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting
That *there is* none besides Me.
I *am* the Lord, and *there is* no other;
7 I form the light and create darkness,
I make peace and create calamity;
I, the Lord, do all these *things*."

Although the Israelites didn't understand what was going to happen, they had to trust God despite the obstacle in front of them. The Lord was now going to execute His plan. In Exodus 19, "the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them." So the Angel of God and the pillar of cloud have moved from in front of them as a guide between the Israelites and the Red Sea, to behind them as a protector between the Egyptians and the Israelites. Imagine being the Israelites, seeing this huge cloud jump over you and position itself between you and the Egyptians. Imagine being Moses, getting ready to do what the Lord had commanded him to do. Imagine the Egyptians as this huge dark cloud positions itself between you and the Israelites.

As the cloud settled into position, “it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night.” (Exodus 4:20) The Lord stands between His people and the enemy.

To the Egyptians, the pillar of cloud is a cloud of darkness. The Egyptians were not strangers to the darkness that was about to come. The Ninth Plague that the Lord sent them was darkness. Remember in Exodus 10:21-23, “²¹ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, darkness *which* may even be felt.” ²² So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. ²³ They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days. But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.” This wasn’t just a little darkness. It was darkness that could be felt.

Through the cloud of darkness, the Lord has rendered the Egyptians powerless. Because they are blinded by the darkness, they cannot prepare for battle. Because they cannot see the Israelites, they cannot make a plan of attack. Because they don’t know when the darkness will be lifted, they cannot rest. It’s like when the lights go out at home. For some reason, everything seems to stop, and we become restless. We don’t know what to do with ourselves until the lights come back on, but it was much worse for them.

On the other hand, the cloud “gave light by night” to the Israelites. Although it was night, they had a chance to prepare to cross the Red Sea. Moses was able to relay the message to move forward to the people who were waiting, putting distance between them and the Egyptians. They were able to see what the Lord was about to do as Moses positioned himself to do as the Lord commanded.

The Lord was now going to make a clear separation between his people and those who rejected Him and prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that He is Lord over ALL. But this is not the last time that the Lord will separate His people from those who are not His. 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 tells us, “¹⁴ Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. ¹⁵ For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. ¹⁶ To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? ¹⁷ For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but

as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.” His word separates believers from unbelievers. To the believer, He is life, to the unbeliever, He is death. Because “⁴In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” (John 1:5). Hebrews 4:11-13 tells us His word discerns the intention of our hearts, “¹¹Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. ¹²For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. ¹³And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.”

Sometimes we experience trials that we think we won’t be able to get beyond, but we can with Christ. Although things happen in our lives that we don’t understand, they force us to ask ourselves these questions:

Do I trust God despite the painful trial in front of me?

Do I trust God even when I don’t understand?

Exodus clearly shows us that we can trust Him through our difficult trials. It also shows us that it won’t be easy, and sometimes it is frightening and confusing. However, it also shows us that He has a plan for everything. Sometimes, our plans are short-sighted because we think we have it all worked out and have all the time in the world. His plans are not never short-sighted, because He sees the end from the beginning, and He is eternal. So, if today, you feel like you are surrounded on all sides and don’t see a way of escape. Hold fast to Him and keep moving forward.

“And the Lord, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.” Deuteronomy 31:8