

Lesson 9 – “Give God Time to Work” Exodus 14:11-14

“In times of great difficulty and great expectation, it is our wisdom to keep our spirits calm, quiet, and sedate; for then we are in the best frame to do our own work and to consider the work of God.” Matthew Henry

I love this quote from the bible commentator Matthew Henry, because I think it describes, spot on, the way a believer should react during trials. Do we always succeed at this? No. Did the Israelites? No. As we study today’s scriptures, maybe we can gain a better understanding of why we should be able to trust in the promises of God.

It is easy to understand the panic the Israelites felt at this moment. It was evident that there was no escape. They were hemmed in on all sides (mountains on either side of them, the sea before them and the Egyptians behind them; nowhere to turn ... nowhere, that is, but UP! Yet, even after having witnessed the power of God in Egypt, they failed to look upward. *“From whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.” Psalm 121:2* The fear they felt overwhelmed them and overtook their emotions and sense of reasoning. In v. 11, they lash out at Moses with a most sarcastic tone. Moses had only had their best interests at heart all along, and he had done all that God had asked him to do on behalf of the people, and yet they condemned him and accused him of ill will against them. Many of you have the devotional book Marina Bittle put out a few years back, and I was reminded of one of the devotionals she wrote on just this subject, entitled, “How Quickly We Forget ...” It begins, “There is an old saying that says, ‘When the going gets tough, the tough get going.’ I’m sure we’ve all heard it, but most of us have probably done something more like this, ‘When the going gets tough, we band together and complain.’” And this is exactly what the Israelites did. In v. 12, it is evident that they had quickly forgotten their years of slavery under the Egyptians and the abuse they had suffered while in servitude to them. Had they also forgotten how they had called upon God to deliver them? And He had .. by sending Moses. Well, obviously they had, because they were quick to give up and lose all hope now that they were faced with what seemed like an impossible situation.

Moses’ response to the people was full of compassion. This was just one of many outbursts the people would make against him along their journey. As a matter of fact, we’re told in our lesson that the word “complained” appears at least 20 times during their exodus journey. Later we will see that Moses’ patience wears thin. Here, however, instead of scolding them or judging them for their lack of faith, he comforts them and encourages them. Just as God is merciful with us, Moses’ reaction here is also full of mercy. He reassures them not to fear, that God will surely deliver them. He comforts them with the same comfort with which God comforts us. His faith was intact and he knew, without a doubt, that somehow God would make a way. This was leadership at its best; Moses led by example. His faith in God never faltered, he showed great compassion and love for God and God’s people; he interceded in prayer for the people, he persevered, and he trusted in the Lord.

Moses told the people in v. 13, *“Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord ...”* Remaining still, while going through a crisis, is probably one of the most difficult things to do. And yet, there are many times when we are told in the bible to be still. *“Stand still,”* he tells them. Don’t run, don’t panic, don’t doubt ... be still!

Psalm 4:4: “Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still.”

Psalm 37:7: “Be still in the presence of the Lord, and wait patiently for Him to act.”

Psalm 46:10: “Be still and know that I am God.”

Jeremiah 47:6: "Rest and be still."

Be still – in other words, we need to stop focusing on our circumstances, or on what is going on in the world around us. Be still and focus, instead, on JESUS! Be still and listen for the voice of God. Sometimes we get so caught up in the whirlwind of the storm we are in that we forget to listen for God to speak to us. We forget to give Him time to work! We can be assured that we will not be able to hear him in the chaos of the storm, unless we really make an attempt to be still and listen.

In 1 Kings 19:9-18, we are given an account of a lesson God taught the prophet Elijah. Elijah was considered one of the greatest of God's prophets. He had come on the scene at a time when Israel had forsaken the Lord, and the people were worshipping Baal. Elijah had confronted the people and fought mightily for the Lord, but now he was hiding in the wilderness because of a threat that had been made against his life by the evil Jezebel. Just like the Israelites, he was consumed with fear. And just like the Israelites, fear had overtaken him and made him forget that he served the almighty God Who had created heaven and earth. As he is hiding out in a cave, God comes to him and says, *"What are you doing here, Elijah?"* Elijah begins to cry out and lament about how none of the people are paying any attention to what he is telling them, and how they've killed all the prophets and he's the only one left, and now they're after him, too. Never mind that God had provided for him by sending an angel to minister to him when he had given up and prayed for the Lord to take his life. He was too consumed with fear and anxiety to remember the good things God had done for him and the miracles God had allowed him to perform. His focus was only on his current adverse circumstances.

God asked Elijah to go out of the cave and stand on the mountain. Vs. 11 & 12 give us the fascinating description of what happened next:

"And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire ... a still small voice."

God wanted to show Elijah that even though he could have very easily manifested Himself in that violent wind, or the powerful earthquake or the consuming fire, He did not want Elijah to be moved by those things. He wanted him to be still long enough to hear God as *"a still small voice."* And I think the message here for us is that we should not get caught up in the turmoil surrounding us, and that we, too, need to listen for His still, small voice.

It wasn't until after Elijah heard God's voice that he was able to be at peace. He understood exactly what God required of him, and he was able to set out on the course God had shown him. This is why we need to listen, too, because God still whispers personal messages to us today, and it is when we hear His still small voice that we can understand what His direction for us is. This is clearly not the understanding the Israelites had when they were faced with their fears. And even though they lost hope and showed a lack of faith, God did not abandon them. 2 Timothy 2:13 says, *"If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself."* This was true then for the Israelites, and it is true for us today.

Key points to remember when faced with a crisis:

- Do not complain or assign blame to others.
- Do not fear. (We are told this about 365 times in the bible – one for each day maybe?)
- Be still, wait on the Lord and expect to see your deliverance.
- Remember that the joy of the Lord is your strength! (Nehemiah 8:10)

“Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation.” Psalm 91:14-16

