

Title: **TRAPPED IN HOPELESS DESPAIR**
 or
 DIRECTION FOR EVERY DILEMMA

Text: Exodus 14:1-15

Subject: *Israel at the Red Sea*

Date: Tuesday Evening — February 19, 2008

Tape: Exodus #66

Readings: *Bob Poncer and Bob Duff*

Introduction:

Do you sometimes feel yourself trapped in hopeless despair at the end of a dead end street, with no place to go? If so I have a message for you, a word of instruction from the God of Glory that is designed to give you clear direction in every dilemma you may face in this world. The instructions are clear. — “*Stand still!*” My text is Exodus 14:1-15.

A FURIOUS FOE

God hardened Pharaoh’s heart against the children of Israel; and he pursued them in fury, determined to take them captive again (Exodus 15:4-9). — “*The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel*” (v. 8). With everything at his disposal, the enraged monarch of Egypt went after the children of Israel.

(Exodus 14:9) “But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses *and* chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pihahiroth, before Baalzephon.”

That is a pretty good picture of our position in this world. **You and I are pursued through this world by a furious foe, determined to destroy us.**

In Revelation 12:12 the Apostle John tells us that Satan’s fury against God’s church, against Christ, his gospel and his people, the relentless venting of his enmity against the woman’s Seed is the result of the fact that he is a defeated foe; and no foe is more furious than one who is defeated. He may have no power, he may have no arms, he may even be bound in chains, but his fury is unabated. Even so, we are told that Satan is in a rage, “*because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.*” Though he is defeated, his rage has not diminished. He can do no harm to God’s cause or his

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people. Therefore, there is cause for all heaven to rejoice. But, like a mad dog in a cage or a roaring lion on a chain, Satan's hatred of Christ is demonstrated in his growlings and roarings against his church and people. Satan knows that he has but a short time. Therefore he persecutes God's people with unimaginable fury; but his fury is the fury of impotence because he is a defeated adversary (Revelation 12:13-16). That is precisely the picture before us in Exodus 14.

The children of Israel have come out of Egypt. They have been completely delivered from their captors. Not a hoof was left behind in Egypt. All their cattle, all their children, and all their aged men and women had come out of the house of bondage. But the tyrant who had enslaved them was hardened against them and pursued them with greater wrath and fury than ever, determined to overtake them and make them his captives again. The experiences of Israel, from the time that they came out of Egypt until they took possession of the land of Canaan, were typical of the experiences of God's elect in this world (1 Corinthians 10:1-11).

(1 Corinthians 10:1-11) "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; (2) And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; (3) And did all eat the same spiritual meat; (4) And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. (5) But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. (6) Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. (7) Neither be ye idolaters, as *were* some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. (8) Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. (9) Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. (10) Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. (11) Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

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As we make our way through this wilderness to our heavenly Canaan, Satan ever pursues us in fury. Therefore we are urged to cast all our care upon our God, being assured that “*the God of all grace*” will finish his work of grace (Philippians 1:6; 1 Peter 5:6-11).

(Philippians 1:6) “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ.”

(1 Peter 5:6-11) “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: (7) Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. (8) Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: (9) Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. (10) But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle *you*. (11) To him *be* glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

ENTANGLED IN THE WILDERNESS

Pharaoh said, concerning the children of Israel, “*They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in*” (v. 3). And when he overtook them that is exactly how he found them, “*entangled in the land.*” The Lord could easily have led them into Canaan in a far easier path, a path that would have avoided their entanglement; but he led them in the right way, the way by which he would most clearly display the glory of his grace. He led them to the edge of the Red Sea, surrounded by mountains they could not cross, with Pharaoh and all his forces roaring against them in fury. They were trapped in hopeless despair (vv. 10-12).

(Exodus 14:10-12) “And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. (11) And they said unto Moses, Because *there were* no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of

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Egypt? (12) *Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.*”

God’s primary purpose in all his works is the manifestation of his own glory; and that is preeminently the case in his great works of grace (Psalm 106:8; Isaiah 63:12-14).

(Psalms 106:8) “Nevertheless he saved them for his name’s sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known.”

(Isaiah 63:12-14) “That led *them* by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? (13) That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, *that* they should not stumble? (14) As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.”

If God is to be glorified, man must be put out of the way. If he is to be glorified in the salvation of my soul, I have to be moved out of the way. If God is to be glorified in your salvation, you have to be put out of the way. How does he move us out of the picture? He brings us to our wits’ end, makes us conscious of our folly, our weakness and our sin, that we may behold his glory when he performs our deliverance. Nothing so blinds us to God’s glory as our high opinion of ourselves. Therefore, the Lord God leads us to Glory through the wilderness of this world, a place of much entanglement, where Satan pursues us and seeks to destroy us. Often the entanglements are of our own making; but even these could and would be avoided were that best for God’s glory and best for our souls. What entanglements we make for ourselves! How often we are trapped in hopeless despair, at the end of a dark dead-end road, with no place to turn!

- Entangled with worldly care!
- Entangled with fleshly lusts!
- Entangled with ridicule, opposition and persecution!
- Entangled with religious curiosity!
- Entangled with heavy trials!

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Those who wade around little streams and shallow creeks, never learn much about God' and his works. But they who “*go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.*” It is in waves of bereavement, poverty, temptation and reproach that we learn the power of Jehovah. There we are made to know our own littleness.

Spurgeon said, “Self esteem is that speck in the eye which most effectually mars human vision. The Great Surgeon of souls removes this from us chiefly by sanctified afflictions.”

At the mouth of the furnace the Great Purifier sits as a Refiner to purify the sons of Levi, and when this work has been achieved and the divine purpose is accomplished, God’s glory is manifested. Give thanks to God, if he has led you down a rough road and through deep waters. It is in this way that he has given you the experience of his great lovingkindness. Your troubles have enriched you with a wealth of knowledge you could never get in any other way. Your trials have been the cleft of the rock in which God has placed you as he did his servant Moses, that you might behold his glory as he passed by. It is pain that creates a capacity for great pleasure, emptiness that creates a capacity for filling, and thirst that creates a capacity for refreshing!

The children of Israel were “sore afraid” (v. 10). They thought they were about to die by the hand of Pharaoh (v. 11). In their desperation, they even thought it would have been better had they never come out of Egypt (v. 12). In the light of all they had already experienced, their fears and unbelief seem almost comical.

- Their Preservation
- The Plagues
- The Passover

But, before we judge them too harshly, let us remember how often we are filled with the same fears and unbelief they expressed. We panic, just like they did; but there is no cause for alarm. Our God will never leave us, forsake us, or allow anything to harm us (1 Peter 1:3-9).

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(1 Peter 1:3-9) “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (4) To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, (5) Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (6) Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: (7) That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: (8) Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see *him* not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: (9) Receiving the end of your faith, *even* the salvation of *your* souls.”

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Now, look at verses 13-15, and hear God’s instruction to our souls. Here is divine direction for every dilemma.

(Exodus 14:13-15) “And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will show to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. (14) The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. (15) And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward:”

The direction the Lord commanded Moses to give us is fourfold. He tells us to do three specific things: (1.) “*Fear not*,” (2.) “*Stand still*,” (3.) “*See*” and (4.) “*Go forward*.”

“***Fear not!***” — How often our great God and Savior speaks those words to us. How graciously he enforces them (Isaiah 41:10-14)

(Isaiah 41:10-14) “Fear thou not; for I *am* with thee: be not dismayed; for I *am* thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help

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thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. (11) Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. (12) Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, *even* them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. (13) For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. (14) Fear not, thou worm Jacob, *and* ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.”

All three persons in the triune Godhead have avowed themselves to help his wretched, weak, worthless worm, Jacob.

- “*I will help thee, saith the Lord.*” — **Jehovah.** That is God our Father speaking.
- “*I will help thee, saith...thy Redeemer.*” — That is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, our Redeemer, speaking.
- “*I will help thee, saith...The Holy One of Israel.*” — That is God the Holy Spirit speaking.

“*If God be for us, who can be against us?*” — The Lord God of heaven and earth, the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit makes **eleven promises** by which he would both remove our fears and encourage us to trust him.

1. **Are you alone?** God says, “*Fear thou not; for I am with thee,*” not only within reach, but with you!
2. **Are you dismayed,** by the power of your enemies on the greatness of your trial? The Lord says, “*Be not dismayed; for I am thy God,*” I am for you (Romans 8: 28-39).
3. **Are you weak?** Your God says, “*I will strengthen thee.*”
4. **Are you destitute?** God says, three times, “*I will help thee.*”
5. **Are you about to fall, or already fallen?** The Lord says, “*I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.*”
6. **Are your enemies a terror to you?** Your God says that he will confound them, bring them to nothing and slay them everyone (vv. 11-12). — “*The Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever!*”

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7. **Are you fearful of failure?** The Lord your God says, “*I will hold thy right hand*” (v. 13). That means:

- I will walk hand in hand with you as your Father and your friend.
- I will guide you and lead you in your way (Proverbs 3:5-6).
- I will hold you up when you are weak, wavering and trembling.
- I will pick you up when you fall.
- God will silence your fears as you walk with him, “*saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.*” He will say to you, to your heart, by his Spirit, “*Fear not,*” and make you hear his assuring promise, “*I will help thee.*” — “*The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace!*”

8. **Are you now made to weep?** — “*Thou shalt rejoice in the Lord.*” He will make you triumphant at last.

9. **Are you now abased?** — “*Thou shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel*” (v. 16). — Glory awaits you. — You will yet glory in the Lord!

- In your Interest in Him!
- In your Relation to Him!
- In what He Has Done for You!

10. **Do the heavens appear to be as brass to you?** God says, “*I the Lord will hear them*” (v. 17).

11. **Does it sometimes seem that God has forsaken you?** — He has not. He says, “*I the God of Israel will not forsake them*” (v. 17).

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Has laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can ye say, than to you He hath said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

Mark these promises and realize that, though you are a worm, you have a mighty and a great God, and you have no reason to fear anything or anyone, ever!

“**Stand still!**” — The people of God in a great strait, even at their wits’ end. Perish they must, to all human appearance. A wide ocean is before them. Inaccessible mountains surround them. An enraged Pharaoh pursues them. Death is before them. Yet, Moses says, “*Fear not.*” Unbelief and carnal reason might suggest, What! not be afraid when inevitable destruction must

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be our doom? Why does Moses talk to us with such ignorance? But, in the view of apparent destruction, Moses tells them of certain salvation, and commands them to stand still and behold it. We do not hear one word from Moses to soothe their fears or comfort their minds, from any considerations of what they were in themselves, or what they had done to entitle them to the Lord's favor. No; but they were at this very moment indulging the murmurs of unbelief: "*Why hast thou brought us forth! Better to serve the Egyptians, than to perish here.*"

In times of difficulty, in seasons of distress, when sin rages, conscience accuses, the law condemns, unbelief prevails, and we poor sinners are at our wits' end; seeing justice pursuing, all hope and help failing, and despair at the door, then the salvation of the Lord is our only hope. How blessed! How delightful! How this quells our fears, composes our souls and comforts our hearts!

But, what is it to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord? Is it to cease from prayer and all other means of grace? No; in the midst of fears, in the sight of dangers and in the dread of destruction, to stand still is to cease from all self-confidence and trust Christ.

"See the Salvation of the Lord!" — This is an imperative command. Yet, it is a matter of certainty. You must behold "*the salvation of the Lord.*" And as you stand still before him, you shall "*see the salvation of the Lord!*" — The salvation he purposed in eternity! — The salvation he purchased at Calvary! — The salvation he performs in grace! — The salvation he preserves in his own! — The salvation he promises in resurrection glory!

(Isaiah 45:20-22) "Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye *that are* escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god *that* cannot save. (21) Tell ye, and bring *them* near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? *who* hath told it from that time? *have* not I the LORD? and *there is* no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; *there is* none beside me. (22) Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else."

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“Go forward!” — That is our only path. “*Go forward!*” That is the only path for...

- Fugitives pursued by justice.
- An army under orders from the Captain.
- A chosen people on the way to Canaan.
- A covenant people in great trouble.
- A people under divine commission. — Possess the land! — Slay the Canaanite!
- A people who soon must cross the Jordan and enter the land of rest!

“*Fear not,*” — “*Stand still,*” — “*See*” — “*Go forward.*”

Amen.