

June 1, 2008

Do What?

Two weeks ago we began an Old Testament journey to see how God, the God of covenants, fulfilled His promise to be the God of His people Israel. In our first week we heard God call Moses to be the great deliverer of His people. Moses balked, gave excuses and tried to get out of doing God's will. One of the excuses Moses used was that he didn't know God's name. So God gave him His name. In Hebrew that name is Yahweh; in English it translates "I am". I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I am who I am, and I am God. This name was held in such high regard that the Hebrew people would not even say it. We see it in our English Bible as LORD. Last week the LORD used the ten plagues decimate Egypt physically and economically, wipe out the Egyptians pagan beliefs by attacking their gods' strength, to release His people and to make everyone know that He is God. With the ten plagues God accomplished all four objectives. Today we pick up the account with the children of Israel still in Egypt but on the road.

According to the Exodus 13:18, they took the desert road toward the Red Sea. They were heading south away from the Nile River delta and the land of Goshen. God led them in a miraculous way. During the day he led them by being a pillar of cloud that went before them that they could follow. At night or at the end of the day the pillar would stop and the people would set up camp. When darkness came, upon them the pillar would turn to fire and gave light to the people. The people area few days out when God reversed His direction and heads back north. He knows what Pharaoh's thinking and He chooses a place for the great showdown and what would appear to be some of the worst advice ever given. You heard in our Old Testament reading this morning Pharaoh and his officials began to ask themselves, "What have we done? We've let our labor force go!" So Pharaoh summoned his army, all three branches, and he went out after the children of Israel to bring them back. When the people saw the army approaching they were terrified. Imagine the position they were in. The Egyptians had suffered dramatically and it now appears the Israelites are wandering they are backtracking it's time for the Egyptians to seek revenge. They respond in typical fashion in Exodus 14:10, we see that they cried out to the Lord but God didn't do anything immediately. The cloud just sat there so they got mad they got mad at Moses and they say to him, "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 then to die in the desert." Now listen carefully to Moses' response to these complaints, "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." Let me summarize what he's saying. He's saying be still, do nothing God will fight for you. In fact when we look at the English Standard Version it's, "The Lord will fight for you. You have only to be silent." I can just imagine the how's that went up from the people. Do what? You expect us to nothing? Do you not see Pharaoh's army? You want us to sit and just let them slaughter us? But at this time now God intervenes. God tells Moses to lead the people to the sea. Now again do what? Go towards the sea? But Moses, the faithful servant, does this. He takes his staff and he goes towards the sea. Meanwhile, now the cloud moves the opposite direction from Moses. How about that for a test of faith? Moses moves one way the cloud goes the other but as they watch the cloud goes between them and the Egyptians. Darkness was approaching the cloud just makes it darker for the Egyptians however, it becomes bright on the Israelites' side. That's got to be pretty cool. One half is dark cloud, I think of an image of tornado clouds that were pitch black in Oklahoma last week. On the other side it's glowing like some giant fluorescent light giving light to the people. What happens next?

Moses lifts up his staff and his hand over the water and the water parts and the dry desert wind begins to blow and dry out the ground. Now what do we know about this body of water? Really we don't know too much. The Hebrew word that is used is, "yam suph", which could mean Red Sea but it also could mean Sea of the end. All we do know is that there were and still are several large lakes or bodies of water in this area. In fact, this Hebrew phrase is used again to describe in Exodus 23:31 and in Numbers 33:10. So this is not a shallow reedy marsh. We also see that there is a wall of water on either side for thee to be this wall of water on either side this is not some marshland like some skeptics want to say. With the light of the pillar of cloud and fire the children of Israel begin to cross this body of water at night. During the last watch it would be between 2:00 am and 6:00 am. The pillar of cloud and fire moved out of the way and let the Egyptians through. The Egyptians quickly joined the chase and followed them into the sea. Scripture tells us that God put them into confusion the wheels came off their chariots, they were in disarray, then as daybreak comes, Moses with all the people safely across stretches out his

hand and staff and the waters come flooding back. The Egyptians tried to escape but they were caught and they were killed.

Wow what an account. Yet, it is a foreshadow of things to come. Just as the children of Israel were oppressed they were surrounded by darkness, water, chased by certain death God gave them a single path to follow. We too are surrounded by sin like that water could engulf us, Satan like Egypt just waiting to pounce, yet Moses' words are still true today, be still, do nothing, the Lord fights for you. You see it is God who provides the one path to our salvation thought Jesus Christ just like there was that one path through the sea there's only one path to salvation and this is the foundation that our gospel this morning speaks of; the foundation that will withstand all the perils of modern day pharaohs, modern day Egyptians, modern day seas the foundation that is free that we have to do nothing to earn and that we have nothing to earn. Just as the sun began to rise Moses stretched out his arms and God secured the victory over the Egyptians so too on that Easter morning as the sun began to rise, the earth shook, the angel of the Lord descended from heaven and rolled back the stone and our Lord and Savior walked out of that grave victorious. Be still, don't worry, our Lord has fought, has died and has risen from the dead the victory is ours.