

Sermon Notes – January 10, 2021*“How Do You Cope With Troubles?”*

(Exodus 14:10-14, 26-31 – Luke 9:37-43a)

This morning I am going to be talking from Exodus, but I want you to see in both of these readings that the people noticed the greatness of God and His power. When this man was healed in the New Testament, it said the people were amazed at God’s greatness and power.

In Exodus, many of you know the story of the deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptians. I hope you will get a chance to go back and read Exodus 11, 12, 13, and 14 sometime this week. In these chapters, it tells how the Israelites were in bondage and slavery to the Egyptians for over 400 years. While they were there, they prayed for a deliverer, and God sent Moses to deliver them. When Moses got there, he went to Pharaoh and he said, “Let my people go.” Pharaoh didn’t want to let those slaves go, so God sent different plagues on the Egyptians. He sent a plague of frogs and gnats and flies; He destroyed their livestock; and He even went as far as letting the first born sons of each Egyptian die. When that happened, Pharaoh, his soldiers, and his servants were overwhelmed. There was weeping and wailing in the town. Finally Pharaoh was so overwhelmed that he asked his servants to summon Moses and Aaron to the palace. When they got there, Pharaoh said, “Take the Israelites and leave. Don’t come back. Just take your animals, your people, food - here’s some gold; here’s some silver. Just leave us alone.” The Israelites left with Moses and Aaron guiding them.

After only a couple of days, Pharaoh talks his soldiers, “What have we done? We’ve let all of our slaves go! We need to go get them.” So, he mounted his chariot, took a group of his soldiers, and they went out in pursuit of the Israelites. They had chased them to the Red Sea, and the Israelites had already set up camp there. I want you to see that they were caught in an impossible situation -- the Red Sea is in front of them (the ocean) and the Egyptians are behind them, in pursuit to kill them or put them back into slavery. There are mountains on either side. Where are they going to go?

How do you respond when you are caught in an impossible situation? Maybe you are working for somebody and it's not a good situation; maybe you are wanting to have a child and doctors have told you that you will never have one - and you feel like you are in an impossible situation; maybe you've got something going on in your family and it's not going away -- you think it's impossible. I want you to know that God is a God of impossibilities - Nothing is impossible with God. ***I want you to see that even though things happen in our lives, God doesn't always send it. Some things happen in our lives because of choices we've made or things that are completely out of our control. But God works in those things to show us His power and to teach us to trust Him more -- that's what He wanted to do with the Israelites that day.*** They were stuck in an impossible situation.

I want you to look at some ways that people respond when they are in trouble. Have you ever met people that, whenever a problem come up, they always have to complain? They want you to feel sorry for them. They are overwhelmed, want to give up, and just feel sorry for themselves. I heard a story about a young mother that had a-year-and-a-half old son. He needed to take his medicine. She had him in his high chair and put the medicine in a spoon. Every time she went to give it to him, he would shut his mouth, shake his head, and knock the spoon out of her hand. He did this about five or six times and she got so frustrated that she left him in his high chair and told dad, "I'll be back in a few minutes." She threw the spoon in the sink, went to the bedroom, and cried. In a few minutes, she heard laughter in the kitchen. She went to see what was going on. The grandmother had come in and dad told her that mom couldn't get him to take his medicine, but he really needed to take the medicine. The grandmother had lots of experience as a parent and she was creative. She knew that this little boy loved orange juice. She mixed his medicine in orange juice, put it in a water pistol, and was shooting the juice in his mouth. She was playing a game with him and that little boy was laughing. The mother had spent so much time feeling sorry for herself that she didn't have the energy to be creative. Sometimes that happens to all of us, doesn't it? Sometimes when people

face problems or trouble, they feel so sorry for themselves that they can't even pull themselves out of it to try to deal with the issue or the problem.

Then there are some people that are like the Israelites - they find somebody to blame. Have you ever met people that nothing is ever their fault? They've never made a mistake. No problem is theirs -- it's always their family, the boss, the neighbor, God, the preacher, somebody. I heard an interesting story about a man named Spencer, who was in a friend's church. Spencer was in his 40's, was married, and had two children. He had a big problem -- he was an alcoholic. One year at Christmas, the family made it through, but Spencer pulled another one of his binges. The wife said, "Honey, get out and don't come back until you deal with your problem. You are not going to see us or live here with us until you get help." Spencer went off and was gone for about thirty days. No one knew where he was. He was on one of his binges. The wife found out that Spencer had moved into a friend's empty apartment and she asked her pastor if he would go check on him. The pastor went to see him. Spencer was trying to get to the door, but the pastor could hear him, drunkenly falling around inside. Finally, he opened the door and let the pastor come in. The pastor could tell that he hadn't bathed in weeks - he was disheveled; his apartment had beer and liquor bottles all over it; there were empty pizza boxes; he had broken the coffee table; everything was a complete mess. He was still falling around. The pastor helped him up, sat him on the couch, and made him a cup of coffee and a sandwich. The whole time, Spencer is ranting and raving about everybody else -- "This is my wife's fault. I wouldn't have these problems if my wife and kids would do so-and-so. My employer let me go and I didn't do anything wrong. This is all his fault." He started blaming God and he started blaming the pastor. The pastor just listened to him. Finally, Spencer asked him, "Don't you have anything to say?" The Pastor responded with, "Well, I was trying to give you a few more minutes, in case there was anybody else that you wanted to blame." Spencer balled up his fist like he was ready to fight -- but instead looked at his feet and said, "Pastor, my life is a mess and it is all my fault. I guess my life is over." The Pastor said, "Sir, you are right. Your life is a mess, but it is not over. You can start over again." Spencer said, "Pastor, are you sure about that?"

The Pastor said, “Yes. God will help you - your family will help you - this church will help you, but not until you are willing to admit that you have a problem and you need help.” He looked down and there was a long pause of silence. Finally he said, “Pastor, I want my wife and my kids back. I want a job. I want my old life back. I want to feel like life is worth living, but I don’t know how to do that.” The Pastor said, “I’m going to take you to the hospital and we’re going to see if we can get you in a rehab program.” And they did. He went through rehab; he went through AA (Alcoholics Anonymous); he recommitted his life afresh to God; and he got back in his church. As time went on, he and his wife and his children made amends. Today, that man has been sober for twenty years; he is a Sunday School teacher; he works with the AA; and he’s a Deacon at his church. *You see, for a long time he wanted to blame everybody else for his problems and his troubles.* Until he was willing to take some responsibility, it wasn’t going to change. ***Sometimes, when trouble comes, people just want to blame somebody else and they want people to feel sorry for them.***

The Israelites blamed Moses. Did you notice in the scriptures that they said, “Moses, why’d you bring us out here? Were there not enough graves in Egypt so you brought us out here in the desert to die? Why didn’t you just leave us to serve the Egyptians? ... At least we knew what we were doing.” It was all Moses’ fault for bringing them out there. Some people want to blame God, the preacher, the church, the hypocrites in the church, their family, and everybody else for their problems, rather than taking responsibility. ***I want you to notice that sometimes when we face difficulties and problems, don’t we do just like the Israelites?*** It said when they looked and saw the sea and the Egyptians behind them, that they were terrified and they called out to God. Isn’t that what we do? We cry out to God and pray. Then it said that Moses told them, “Fear not.” That’s hard for us to do, isn’t it? If you are about to lose your home, your marriage, your life, it’s hard not to fear. God knows that. He said, “Stand firm” - and that meant to “hold onto your faith.” Moses said, “The Lord will fight for you.” We need to remember that, when we are in trouble, God is already fighting for us.

In Exodus, Chapter 14, it said that, “the angel of the Lord was in front of them and the pillar of cloud by day was leading them.” It led them to the Red Sea. But, when the enemies got there, the presence of God went to the back of them and was between them and the Egyptians. ***How many times do you go through a problem or a struggle and you say, “God, where are you? God, have you forgotten me? Have you forsaken me?” ... And God is still there - He’s behind you, beside you, etc.*** He may be working on other situations at the same time as you. But He’s still there - even when we are not aware of it. He was there for them. Moses told them, “God will fight for you.” He’s there, always fighting for us. He’s with us, behind us, above us, and in front of us.

Then Moses told them to, “Be still.” Do you know what “be still” meant in their language? ... “Quit your complaining. Quit griping. Be quiet.” Don’t we have a tendency, when we’re going through struggles, that we get scared - we complain to God - we cry out to God - we even complain to others, “Why has this happened to me? What did I do?” Moses said that there is a time to quit complaining - and then he said, “The Lord will fight for you and then it’s time to move on.” God told Moses to tell the people to, “Move on.” Sometimes, when you and I don’t see an end to a problem, there’s a tendency that we don’t want to move. We just want to keep on praying or complaining about it, and God wants us to move on, taking one step at a time, trusting that He’ll always be there with us and He’ll get us through this crisis or problem.

Dr. Lyle Schaller is a motivation speaker and a book author. He often talks about how to grow churches. He was at Lake Junaluska several years ago (at the Presbyterian Retreat Center). He was leading a workshop and he asked this question: “What is the most powerful influence in making decisions? If you were meeting in a group and that group was supposed to make a decision on how to lead a project, what is the most powerful influence in your decision-making?” Everybody had their thoughts and opinions, but finally he answered with, “the past - what did we do in the past? - what did we do when this happened last year? - how did we handle it before?” Because the past is an encourager

to us. God wants us to not forget how He has helped us in the past and He will help us again.

Then, I want to remind you, that after they took one step-at-a-time and moved closer to the sea, God blew up an east wind that parted the seas. Now I don't know how to explain that - but it said that God did the impossible. He parted the seas and they went across on dry land. When it was time for the Egyptians following them to go, the water came back over them and drowned them. "When the Israelites saw the power of God displayed against the Egyptians, they feared God - the revered Him. They believed in Him and they trusted Him - and Moses, His servant."

Sometimes, when you are going through the difficult times, you don't see God's power right then. It's observed after you get through it and you look back, then, you can say that you can see God's hand in your life. "I can see why God was directing me and helping me through that. I didn't see it at the time, but I can see it now." What a powerful testimony that God has given to you; He wants you to use that experience to help somebody else. He wants you to say, "When I was going through that, this is what God did for me. I couldn't see it right then, but God was in it. God was walking with me and He brought me through that. It seemed impossible!"

Think about some of the impossibilities that you face: sometimes you go through rehab and you wonder if you'll ever get any better. You get so impatient and tired that you think you'll never get any better. It may take months, but eventually you are back to walking and doing all those things that you wanted to do. Sometimes you wait for many years and then finally, here is the child that you wanted. Sometimes God does the impossible to show us His power. God is faithful. God is beside us. ***God is with us, but He wants us to learn to trust Him, one step-at-a-time.*** Sometimes, when you are in the deepest trouble and you think it's impossible, God may be behind the scenes and working in people's lives and situations to change it, so that it does become a possibility for you - that marriage is healed, that addiction is cured, something else is resolved for you. You may not see it or feel it at the time, but God is

there working behind the scenes for you. Great is His faithfulness. He's always there.

When they saw God's power, they revered Him. They trusted Him. God is calling you and I to trust Him, one step at a time. Right now there is a lot going on in our world and I have to tell you that I cried the other morning watching the news -- to think that our country is so polarized and there is so much is going on in our world. But, I do know that God is still at work and I believe that with all my heart and mind. And God wants us to trust Him and take one day at a time. Do the best we can. Sometimes all we do is gripe and complain, and I can't help but think that God shakes His head and wonders, "Would you just trust me and listen? Would you just be still and hear me, instead of griping and complaining? Would you trust me and take one day at a time?" God is a God of the impossible. I don't know how things are going to come out in our world, but I know we will be okay. I don't know what the future holds, but I know who holds it - and that's God. Great is His faithfulness. ***As you go through the difficulties of life, remember God is fighting with you. Remember the past and how He's helped you before, and will do it again. Remember. God wants you to trust Him more and more. And when He brings you through something, He's given you a testimony to help others as they go through the difficulties in life.*** May God bless us this day and this year.