

Realise that God means for you to be where you are – even in this Pandemic!

I have been re-reading a book by Robert J Morgan “The Red Sea Rules – 10 God given strategies for Difficult Times”. These are “Difficult Times”! And the Bible is our essential go to guide for navigating all our times, it is our daily resource, especially in the midst of a Coronavirus Pandemic.

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Exodus Chapter 14

Exodus ch.14:1 Then the LORD said to Moses, ²‘Tell the Israelites to turn back and camp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to camp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. ³ Pharaoh will think, “The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.” ⁴And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD.’ So the Israelites did this.

⁵When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, ‘What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!’ ⁶ So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. ⁷ He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. ⁸ The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh King of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly. ⁹ The Egyptians – all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots, horsemen^[a] and troops – pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon.

¹⁰ As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. ¹¹ They said to Moses, ‘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? ¹² 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 than to die in the desert!’

¹³ Moses answered the people, ‘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. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.’

.....And the whole World knows what happened next!

See how specific God is in directing his recently rescued people -

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ²‘Tell the Israelites to turn back and **camp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea**. They are to camp by the sea, **directly**

opposite Baal Zephon.So the Israelites did this.” They did as they were told by God!

Red Sea Rule 1 – Realise that God means for you to be where you are

This is our first lesson from this very well-known story. Sometimes we go through prolonged periods of pain, isolation, and pressure. We feel hemmed in on every side with no obvious way of escape or relief. We feel trapped by circumstances, afraid, and the dark valley seems to have no end. Put yourselves in the sandals of Moses and the people of God as they have left slavery in Egypt, tyrannical slave-masters and years of unrelenting misery and oppression – they are free and marching to the Promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey and complete freedom and peace and prosperity – **They Are Saved!!** Then they are ordered to camp with the Red Sea in front of them, hemmed in by desert and mountains each side and the Egyptian Army with 600 chariots and many soldiers armed to the teeth hurtling toward them to massacre and re-enslave survivors! As an old theologian of the 19th century, C H Mackintosh could say – “all this be it observed, permitted and ordered by God.” The same God who had rescued them from Egypt.

For me and I hope for you who are saved by God’s grace and mercy, rescued from slavery to sin and its eternal consequences the lesson is that the journey to our Promised Land will not be as easy as we would like. Jesus calls it a narrow way that leads to life, the easy road that unsaved folk are travelling along through life is the broad road that leads to destruction, and many there are who are walking that road!

When the going gets tough, even frightening, when we feel hemmed in on both sides and with an impenetrable Red Sea in front of us and appalling danger chasing us – we are exactly where God means us to be. If you are in a predicament not of your making (e.g. this Pandemic) you can be sure God has you where he wants you. How should we respond to the current Coronavirus Pandemic? We are all literally hemmed in on all sides, in our homes, and fear stalks the land.

So what is our instinctive response? It is to worry. That’s what the Children of Israel did and let’s be honest that is what we do. Someone defined worry as the small trickle of fear that meanders through our mind, cutting a channel into which all other thoughts flow. A Bishop Fulton J Sheen nails it when he calls it “a form of atheism, for it betrays a lack of faith and trust in God”.

This worry, this fear is palpable as we read of the people standing on the shores of the Red Sea, It is getting dark, the wind is picking up and the clouds of dust of the chariot hordes can be seen behind them. The men had few weapons to protect themselves or the women and children and elderly.

“Where is God?” you can hear them cry. “Yes we saw his power in the recent past in the judgement of the 10 plagues on the Egyptians but has he brought us out to be slaughtered in the desert?” “We should have stayed in Egypt!” Are we tempted to ask God why we are where we are?

They are where God wants them, and today you are where God wants you. Leaving aside the Coronavirus crisis for a minute, consider how difficult you are finding it is to faithfully follow the Lord Jesus Christ who died to pay the price of your sin and rebellion. Do not look back to the time when you were in bondage to sin, pleasing yourself, your own little god, ordering your affairs as suited you, life seemed so much easier than following Jesus Christ. Are you tempted to say that “The cross that I have to carry is heavier than I can bare.” “I am frightened, I want to go back to my old life, my old friends, and my family will be easier to live with as they don’t understand my decision to follow Jesus.” “Jesus seems to lead me into tough places and situations and I don’t understand why!”

God led his people as a Shepherd leads his sheep out of bondage and he led them into the Promised Land. On the way he parted the Red Sea, destroyed all their enemies, fed them and kept them clothed and free of diseases, but every now and then he tested them to see if they would grumble and moan and complain when things looked tough. And they did moan and groan many times despite his careful provision, they doubted him, they did not wait for him, they did not pray to him. Today we are His little flock, his sheep and just like sheep we can panic and bolt even at the slightest disturbance that occurs. This is not a quality that he appreciates in us – rather our Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus wants us to say instinctively - “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me.”

But how can you not fear when your “Red Sea” faces you and you are hemmed in by your “mountains” and your “enemy” is racing toward you with drawn swords?

Answer! Accept that God has placed you in that situation and convert your **worries into prayers** and your **fears into faith in God** who has promised to never leave you nor forsake you. God took Israel into a dangerous cul-de-sac and by implication would take responsibility for getting them out. He does the same with us – **why? - To show us more about himself and more about our faith.** The Bible is a treasure trove, full of lessons for us like this story, please do not neglect to read your Bible every day, it is your most important meal each day. Let us read it and be encouraged, God has not changed, He is the same yesterday and today and forever.

So take a deep breath, don't panic, recall this deeper secret of the Christian life that when you are in a difficult place realise that the Lord has placed you there or allowed you to be there for reasons best known to himself **but he who led you in will lead you out.**

The Bible, our great God given resource is full of stories of men and women in terrible situations – Hagar – a single mum with a young child forced out into the desert to die of thirst, Joseph – sold by his own brothers into slavery in Egypt, Moses – accepted the thankless task of leading a rebellious people through the Wilderness for 40 years, David fleeing from king Saul, Hezekiah faced by the most powerful army on Earth, Disciples in that small boat in a storm on Galilee, Jesus himself in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus himself nailed to that cross was where his Father meant him to be, and the stories of Jesus' disciples down through the centuries – to the present time, and including your own stories, all recorded in Heaven.

Don't be surprised when seeking to do God's will we find ourselves in difficult even frightening situations – we must expect it, including Coronavirus! The Apostle Peter could write "Beloved think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing is happening to you (1 Peter 4:12).

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

Realise that God means for you to be where you are, and convert your worries into prayers and your fears into faith in God!

Amen

David Patterson

March 2020

(With grateful thanks to Robert J Morgan, "The Red Sea Rules" 2014, published in Nashville, Tennessee by W Publishing)