

## Saved But Miserable



David Wilkerson June 18, 2012

Think for a moment of that glorious hour when Israel stood safely on the other side of the Red Sea. Thousands of God's people lined the shore, watching as a miraculous scene unfolded. The swift waters of the sea had collapsed over Pharaoh's great army!

What an incredible scene it must have been — the sights and sounds awesome to behold. Horses bellowed, soldiers screamed, chariot wheels spun off in all directions, men bobbed up for air and then disappeared beneath the flood tide.

An estimated one-and-a-half million Israelites watched all this take place. I picture the people as simply awestruck — falling on their knees, their hands raised in praise, overwhelmed by the sight of God's power at work. Moses' sister Miriam spontaneously led hundreds of dancing damsels in a victory march, and tens of thousands of voices shouted out loud hosannas.

If you had been there that day, you might have asked any Israelite, "This is such a miraculous sight. How could you ever doubt God again, no matter what trial you face?" Almost certainly the answer would have been, "Yes, yes! How could anybody doubt a God who buries a whole army? He's a miracle-working God." Yet Israel's great faith lasted exactly three days.

I believe the people of Israel wanted to trust God with all their heart and were probably convinced they would. They fully intended to march every mile to the Promised Land full of faith, and to enter it saying, "We've seen the ten plagues in Egypt. We've seen God open the Red Sea and destroy our enemy. Who could ever doubt such a great and mighty God?"

And so it is today. Nearly all true followers of Christ intend to live lives full of faith, never doubting or complaining. We say, "I've seen miracles in my own life. I've had my own Red Sea experiences. How could I doubt him when he's done all these things for me?"

Yet have you ever ended up like ungrateful, complaining, doubting Israel? Sadly, many Christians already have. The Bible declares that in the last days many will lose their faith and leave their first love. They'll end up in a desert of doubt and unbelief — saved but miserable!

Paul wrote to Timothy, "(Keep) faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck" (1 Timothy 1:19). Paul wrote this just after Pentecost, when God had moved mightily in their midst. Yet already many had lost faith.

Jesus himself said, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). In other words: "When I return for my people, will I find true faith among them?" I once had a hard time swallowing those words. I thought, "But, Lord, multitudes are walking in faith."

The Lord reminded me: Out of those 600,000 Israelite men who determined to trust him always, only two held onto belief. That's right — 599,998 lost their faith. Only Joshua and Caleb believed and never doubted, and only they

entered into the Promised Land. Every other Israelite over age twenty, once awed by God's miracles, died in doubt in a miserable wilderness.

It is possible to come out of terrible bondage and yet never enter into the fullness of Christ.

Many Christians spend their entire lives lost in a wilderness, plagued by fear, restlessness and unbelief. They need to know what the Promised Land signifies. It does not represent heaven, as many think. (On the day the Israelites entered Canaan, wars began.) Rather, Canaan stood for life at its fullest, abundant life. It was a land "flowing with milk and honey," a life of blessings and peace, a life at rest from all fear.

Today our Promised Land is Jesus Christ alive in us. He is our inheritance, and we rest in his faithfulness, enjoy his presence and have joy in him all our days. God never intended for us to become stuck in a wilderness of continual drought. Life in his Son is one of total surrender into God's hands, trusting fully in his will and love.

Only Joshua and Caleb kept their faith in God's power to deliver. They testified, "We can defeat this enemy if God is pleased with us. Our mighty God can't be compared to men." But that night the other ten spies went from tent to tent and tribe to tribe, spreading doubt and fear. And all night long the people could be heard weeping in their tents: "All the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night" (Numbers 14:1).

How grieved God must have been. Consider Israel's blasphemous words of doubt and bitterness: "All the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? Were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt" (14:2-4).

Go back to Egypt? With no water, no manna, no direction, no cloud or pillar of fire to guide them? They couldn't have lasted a week on their own. Even if they did make it to the Red Sea, how would they cross it? If they did, they would face an angry, vengeful Pharaoh.

Perhaps right now you're in the fight of your life. The enemy is coming at you on all sides. You know you have a mighty God on your side, but all you can see is the battle in front of you. You're saying, "Oh, God, I can't make it! Why did you bring me into this mess? When I got saved, I didn't know I would have to fight so much. I thought everything would be okay."

Nehemiah said of Israel: "In their rebellion [they] appointed a captain to return to their bondage" (Nehemiah 9:17). They actually prepared to return to bondage! They thought they would go back to something easier — but they hadn't seen anything yet.

Listen to these incredible words from the Lord: "How long will this people provoke me? And how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they" (Numbers 14:11-12).

But Moses pleaded with God to show his great mercy: "Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now" (14:19). Here is the heart of my message.

You can be forgiven and yet be shut out of God's fullness.

This is the consequence of unbelief. You can be the recipient of God's great mercy, blessings and protection, yet never enjoy the life of power and rest he intends for you.

God heard Moses' pleading, and he pardoned Israel's horrible sins: "The Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word" (14:20). Yet what was the people's reaction? "(They)...refused to obey, neither were [they] mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage" (Numbers 9:17).

God still showed his mercy, love and longsuffering toward unbelieving Israel: "Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the

way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go.

“Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst. Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not” (9:19-21).

You may be thinking, “They were in good shape. They were pardoned, still being guided, cared for, fed and clothed. What more could they want?” Yet something was terribly wrong. We find the problem in this verse: “They shall not see the land” (14:23).

They were cut off, disinherited. God’s people were saved, forgiven and blessed, but they had nowhere to go. They were wasting their lives, because they had been shut out from God’s best. They were doomed to a “wilderness life,” being dry, troubled, restless, empty and miserable for the rest of their days.

God literally broke his promise to them — that is, the promise of bringing them into a life of peace and rest: “Ye shall know my breach of promise” (14:34). Why did God take such drastic action? It was because of unbelief, plain and simple. They had made it a habit to forget all of God’ past faithfulness. And in each new crisis they murmured and complained.

Yet these were not a forsaken people. They were saved, freed from bondage. The blood sacrifices continued. The manna kept coming. The water from the rock still flowed. The pillar and the cloud were still visible. But God’s people were lifeless. The Lord even called them evil.

“With whom was he grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Hebrews 3:17-19). Israel wasn’t cut off because of idolatry, fornication or covetousness. It was because of unbelief.

Can you imagine the misery of living in fear an entire lifetime? For forty years these people went in circles, their lives wrapped up in simply surviving. They became lost in petty problems, going through the motions, fretting about things that would never happen.

This is a picture of what happens when you lose your faith. You worry about every petty, small problem that comes along. You always question God, and you never have peace, joy or hope. God says to you, “I won’t forsake you. But you won’t get anywhere.”

This isn’t just some Old Testament dilemma. Hebrews says, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God...Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” (3:12, 4:11). We are warned clearly: Unbelief can keep us from entering in, as it did with Israel.

I believe multitudes of Christians never enter into the restful life of Christ’s fullness. They spend all of their days saved but miserable. They don’t experience the joys of victories won by faith. They never know a life free from continual worry. They never enjoy the peace and joy that come to those who trust all things into the Lord’s hands. Only the Joshuas and Calebs ever enter by faith into the abundant life.

Here is another great lesson we need to learn from Israel’s experience.

We need to be careful of our words when facing difficulty.

How dangerous it is to speak doubt to others. Scripture says the ten spies who “did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the Lord” (Numbers 14:37). And what of the complaining congregation who said, “God should have let us die in the wilderness”?

The Lord answered them: “All right, you will die in the wilderness.” “As truly as I live...as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you...from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me” (14:28-29).

These may seem like harsh words to you. You may think, “But the Israelites were only human. They were uprooted

from the land, traveling here and there, worried about their children. Their fear was only natural. Surely God would understand that.”

No. God isn't looking for “just human” responses. He's looking for faith responses. He wants a people who will say, “I believe God's Word. Therefore I believe he is more concerned for my family than I am. I won't act in fear, because he's faithful to keep me in these troubled times. Even sickness and death can't separate me from his love and care for me.”

“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (10:22).

Our faith has to be grounded solely in God's Word.

Satan's strategy in these last days is to get you to doubt the reality of Jesus. He will do everything in his power to make you doubt that God is with you in all things.

God's concern is that his people are being shaken in their faith, that they won't trust him in their crises. Indeed, our worst sin is not to believe he will do what he promised. This offends him more than adultery, fornication, drugs, alcohol or any other sin of the flesh.

His Word says, “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations” (2 Peter 2:9). “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

These verses are either the gospel, or they're lies. If they're the gospel, then we must stand on them. God wants us to be able to say, “Lord, if I die standing here, trusting you to see me through, then let me die in faith. Live or die, I am yours!”

Let all the winds and waves of hell come at you. Let everything come at you. Our God said he is able — and he knows how to deliver you.

He intended that you and I have all joy, peace, victory and rest in our walk. He's looking for men and women who will stand up against what's coming in this dark age — servants who will stand with a calm and a peace because Christ abides in them.

God so desires for you to come into such a place of trust. He wants you never again to fear, but to truly rest in his power and ability. He knows how to deliver you from all snares, all trials and temptations — if you will but trust him.

Renew your faith in him today. He has provided abundant life — all rest, peace and joy — and set it before you. Enter into it, believing him!

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