

Introduction:

- A. Illus.: I saw this great story in the *Chicago Tribune* a few days ago entitled, "Miracle on Chicago Avenue." It was about one of TV's "Top Chefs" named **Carlos Gaytan** who has an exclusive restaurant in Chicago called Mexique. Seventeen months ago he and his wife were in desperate debt. It was a Monday and they decided they'd have to give up on Friday. The article went on, "*In their living room above the restaurant, the two dropped to their knees.*" They are Christians, very active in their church, and they prayed for God to give them a sign as to whether they could continue. According to the article, "*The next morning, Gaytan says, he received a phone call from Michelin, which publishes its annual dining guidebook in major cities. Mexique was one of 16 restaurants to be awarded a one-star rating in Chicago.*" One star is the best you can get! "*The timing,*" said the reporter, "*was too neat to be random.*" Isn't it great how God leads! [3/27/14, Kevin Pang]
- B. Illus.: But then the next day I saw another story in *Christianity Today's* web edition. Almost a year ago Matthew Warren, the son of Rick and Kay Warren, committed suicide. He, like his famous parents, was a Christian but he struggled all his life with terrible mental illness. Kay recently wrote a blog that has gone viral. 3.75 million readers and 10,000 comments. She wrote, "*I have been shocked by some subtle and not-so-subtle comments indicating that perhaps I should be ready to 'move on.'* ... *I have to tell you—the old Rick and Kay are gone. They're never coming back. We will never be the same again.*" The grief in her article was palpable. Well, maybe it isn't always so great how God leads. [CT, web edition, 3/28/14, Timothy C. Morgan]
- C. Last week, at the end of Ex. 13, we saw how God leads his people once he's saved us. Now this week and next we come to the epic story of God's parting of the Red Sea. **It is**

a story, of course, about God’s power, but it is also a lesson in God’s leading. Turn to **Ex. 14**. When it comes to the ways God leads, this story leaves no doubt that **sometimes God builds his reputation by leading his people into the terrible pressure between between the devil and the deep Red Sea.** We *need* to know this!

Ex. 14:1-4... A few verses later, just after God tells Moses to hold his staff out over the sea, he repeats himself in **vv.17-18...** And God has said this same thing several previous times. Why is it so important for God to “*gain glory*” for himself? Why is it so important to God that the Egyptians “*know that I am the LORD*”?

The world around us is overrun with the deadly lie that the LORD is irrelevant; that he’s optional. Believe in him if you want. Pray all you’d like. But God cannot tell us how to live our lives. Furthermore, God is impotent. He can be defied. He’s not actually a player on the world stage. Tell me: among all the leaders of the world who among them *doesn’t* ignore the authority of the King of kings?

God is too good and gracious to let that pervasive, poisonous lie go unchecked. That lie sets all creation askew and seduces all people to their everlasting deaths. And that lie blinds people to God, majestic in holiness, full of grace and truth, the Father who loves them, the King whose service ennobles them, the Savior who waits to redeem them. So when God leads his people...

I. THE LORD WILL BE SURE HIS REPUTATION GROWS (14:1-4, 17-18)

- A. Everything God is and does is spectacular but there are two things that stand out in all God’s dealings with people: (1) no enemy, no matter how mighty, can stand against him. And (2), he redeems people who trust him, and then he never forsakes them. Those things *are* the glory of God. There is where we see God at his best, where God shines.
- B. Jesus Christ is God’s proof and guarantor of his judgment and salvation. Jesus crushes Satan, renders death nontoxic, and will come to judge the living and the dead.

And Jesus redeems slaves and sinners, gives us everlasting life, and prepares a place for us to be with him as his beloved bride forever. Jesus Christ *is* the glory of God.

- C. So no matter how God leads us, this great thing is always true: he will be sure that through us his reputation grows. Through us, *he* will shine.

God's plan to lure out the Egyptians worked. **Vv.5-9... Got 'em right where we want 'em.** Just one little problem. It was a situation that scared the wits out of Israel. But when God leads...

II. THE LORD ENLISTS US IN OUR WEAKNESS TO LURE THE ENEMY TO CRUSHING DEFEAT (14:1-9)

- A. A man as arrogant and tyrannical as that Pharaoh simply will not surrender. He and Egypt had had the stuffing kicked out of them and yet here they were in hot pursuit of Israel. Even after all the blows they had taken, this was a formidable army. The chariots alone put them in a different league than the people of Israel. But their Achilles Heel was their arrogance—Pharaoh, his officials, and his army. No matter how strong or smart someone is, a proud heart hardened against God is a mortal weakness.
- B. God had actually taunted Pharaoh. Look at **v.8**: "*he pursued the Israelites, who were **marching out boldly**.*" Or *defiantly*. His slaves were marching out of Egypt, not hot-tailing it in fear but as an army in formation, not in poverty but made rich by Egyptian plunder, not licking their wounds but without a single casualty in a war that had cost Egypt every firstborn son and animal. You bet they marched out boldly and defiantly! And it galled Pharaoh and his army.

God does the same thing with us. The most familiar passage in the Bible about God's leading is **Ps. 23**, which includes the phrase, "*you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*" Our unassailable fellowship with God is a taunt to our teeth-grinding enemies.

- C. Pharaoh was a man after Satan's own heart. What Israel faced from him we face from Satan. Even after God saves people from slavery and death, Satan (like Pharaoh) arrogantly assumes (1) *these people belong to me, not God*, and (2) *these people are no match for my might*. Satan will absolutely come after us once the Lord saves us. He's so arrogant that he believes you owe him your service. And he is so arrogant he keeps believing, despite all the evidence, that God cannot stop him; that he will ultimately win the war.
- D. Here's a humbling truth: God does not use us to lure Satan into a trap because we're so strong, but because we're so weak. **V.3:** *"Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.'"* God uses our weakness to draw Satan into a battle he cannot win.

So when you're at your most vulnerable don't be surprised that on top of everything else you feel the thundering approach of the enemy. Don't be surprised that you feel like a sitting duck in your weakness. Satan brings to already hard circumstances his sinister sense of evil and darkness. He lies better than anyone. He accuses like one who knows all your secrets. He torments us with temptation.

- E. But God uses us to draw Satan and his forces further into their own destruction. It is one way we share in the sufferings of Christ. The very death of Christ baited Satan into his worst and everlasting defeat. Jesus *"made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them **by the cross.**"* Col 2:15. Jesus at his weakest—in death, for goodness sake, lured Satan to total defeat. Satan will try to trouble us, terrify us, torment us but *"in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."* This whole story will be repeated on a global scale when the end of all things comes. Listen to **Rev. 20:7-10...**

So God's plan worked like a charm. He had Pharaoh and his army right where he wanted them. But then the Israelites lost their nerve: **vv.10-12...** From this distance we might be critical of them but I for one know what it is like to panic in the face of trouble.

Here's something else that is true when God leads, even into terrible situations, (to borrow from Franklin Roosevelt):

III. THE ONLY THING WE HAVE TO FEAR IS FEAR ITSELF (14:10-14)

- A. There's a paradox here that we all understand: They cried out to the Lord in one breath and gave up on him in the next. Fear can empty our prayers of every last drop of faith. *"It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"* No, it wouldn't! Because you don't belong to them. You belong to the LORD. Our faith in God changes everything. Paul speaks for all of us when he says, *"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*
- B. Desperate situations are actually the believer's high ground. Here is where we have the advantage. Israel would soon see that here. Read about Job or Joshua. Ask Gideon or Jehoshaphat, David or Daniel or the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace. The Garden of Gethsemane and Golgotha and a graveyard—the high ground of Christ himself. God told Paul, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* 2 Cor 12:9
- C. The one thing required of us is to push back the fear and stand our ground: vv.13-14... There are about 120 verses in the Bible that tell us not to be afraid. Probably nothing so encroaches on our faith as fear does. I don't think we can just summon up fearlessness but **there is a craft to courage.** Primarily, courage rises when we take the truth of God into our minds and hearts—just as we are doing in this passage. **Fear gets its footing on the lie that we are in danger. But the Bible counters, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"** Courage is fed by God's truth.

See what Moses tells them in **v.14**, *“The LORD will fight for you; you need only to **be still.**”* That means be quiet. Stop your moaning about dying in Egypt. Stop pushing lies into your souls. **Listen to God’s Word, stand your ground, and stop giving voice to your faithlessness.**

- D. Courage requires us to stand and watch. Watch for what? Israel was told they *would* see God’s deliverance and soon they *would not* see the Egyptians ever again. **Often, the real test of Christian courage lies not in the fight but in the waiting.** Ps 27:14 says, *“Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.”* Eph 6 commands us to *“put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to **stand** your ground, and after you have done everything, to **stand. Stand firm then...**”* So that’s what believers do. White-knuckled and wide-eyed sometimes but we stand. Weeping and weary sometimes but we stand. Scarred and scared by the evil and turmoil but we stand.
- E. It is not actually true for all people that “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” But it *is* true for those of us who belong to the LORD. The enemy, as fearsome as he is, cannot touch us who are hid in Christ. But our fear robs us of the peace God offers and diffuses the glory of God.

Back to Ex. 14:15-16: *“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.’”*

What?!! That’s impossible!! In the most dramatic event since the creation of the world God was about to deliver his people from between the devil and the deep Red Sea and to crush the world’s mightiest tyrant in the process.

IV. WHEN GOD LEADS US SATAN IS TRAPPED AND DEATH ITSELF WILL GIVE US SAFE PASSAGE (14:15-18)

- A. When God parted the Red Sea it was a stunning miracle but it was only a foretaste of a greater miracle when death itself parted allowing a dead man to walk out as an immortal, the pioneer and pathfinder for countless others of us who follow him. In fact, when we want to celebrate our salvation we joyfully and fearlessly and defiantly go under water and come back up with smiles on our faces.
- B. We face many deaths over our years. Deaths of dear ones and our treasured things. Deaths of our dreams and our work and our gifts. But when God leads death always gives way to victory. Next week we will see the shape of God's astonishing salvation in this epic story.
- C. Illus.: In Part II of **John Bunyan's** allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress* a stalwart saint named Mr. Valiant-for-Truth is summoned to cross through the river of death to the Celestial City. He says,

"I am going to my Father's house: and though with great difficulty I have got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the troubles I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me that I have fought his battles, who will now be my rewarder."

When the day that he must go home was come, many accompanied him to the river-side, into which, as he went down, he said, 'O death where is thy sting?' And as he went down deeper, he cried, 'O grave, where is thy victory?' So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side."

*Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side.
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.*

*Leave to thy God to order and provide;
In every change, He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heavenly Friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.*