

The Lord's Battle

Rev. Michael Fintelman

Psalter 254:1–3

Scripture: Exodus 14

Psalter 92:1, 3, 5, 8

Sermon Text: Exodus 14:13–15

Psalter 126

Psalter 376

The Christian life is sometimes described in the Word of God as a battle. Paul exhorts his spiritual son, Timothy, to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:3).

The church has been called to battle in the Lord's army throughout history. As Old Testament Israel stood by the shore of the Red Sea, we also see them in battle for the Lord. As the Israelites march in the Lord's army, the Lord exhorts them, grants wonderful promises, and also gives them marching orders despite their many fears.

We see that in the passage of Holy Scripture we will consider today, Exodus 14:13–15: “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.”

We will consider this text with the following theme and points:

The Lord's Battle

1. The Lord's exhortations amid fear
2. The Lord's promises amid impossibilities
3. The Lord's marching orders despite desired retreat

The Lord's Exhortations amid Fear

Israel's crossing of the Red Sea is one of the most remarkable miracles of the Old Testament, if not all of Scripture. From this time forward throughout Scripture's history the servants of God would reflect back upon it and remind the people of the Lord's mighty power. Sixty-five years later Joshua reminded the people, "And I brought your fathers out of Egypt: and ye came unto the sea; and the Egyptians pursued after your fathers with chariots and horsemen unto the Red sea" (Josh. 24:6). Eight hundred years after this miraculous event Isaiah the prophet speaks on behalf of God, "But I am the LORD thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The LORD of hosts is his name" (51:15). We can read about this in the New Testament as well. Stephen preaches about it in Acts 7, Paul in 1 Corinthians 10, and so does Hebrews 11. Scripture reflects upon this amazing event some twenty times. Even today when we read the account of this marvelous deliverance in Exodus 14, we feel some of that same power displayed so many years ago.

In our minds as we join the Israelites at the edge of the Red Sea, we remember what briefly preceded their coming to that place. They had experienced God's preserving hand repetitively throughout the ten plagues. With the tenth plague—the plague of death, Pharaoh finally let the people of Israel go and they left Egypt. But the Egyptians complained to Pharaoh, "why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" (Ex. 14:5). Pharaoh then changed his mind and wanted Israel back. So Pharaoh gath-

ered a great army together, six hundred chariots, to pursue the fleeing Israelites and they overtook Israel at the shore of the Red Sea.

Picture this in your mind—Egypt’s finest military power thundering up on 2.5 million Israelites as they are encamped on the west edge of the Red Sea. The sea lies to the east, mountains lie to the south and west, and the Egyptians, the finest military fighting machine of the day, fast approaching from the north! Israel then “cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness” (vv. 10–12).

How quickly they had forgotten the Lord’s power, being spared most recently from the angel of death. We might think, “Israel, where is your faith?” They sounded like the disciples on the sea when Christ was sleeping in the ship and a storm arose. “Master, carest thou not that we perish?” (Mark 4:38). Furthermore, God promised Israel that they would worship in Mount Horeb (Ex. 3:12), which was on the other side of the sea. And now were they to die in the wilderness? How they failed in the hour of trial! How short their memories were! How much like ourselves! Far too often, no matter how many times God has granted deliverance out of difficult situations in the past, we tend to fear and complain just like the Israelites.

But then Moses, the man of God, spoke to Israel on behalf of God, “Fear not.” Calm your agitated hearts. This is one of the great reoccurring themes of Scripture. The Lord spoke to Abraham, “fear not, I am thy shield and exceeding great reward” (Gen. 15:1). To Joshua He promised, “fear not, neither be thou dismayed” (8:1).

Jesus Christ said to His own disciples “fear not little flock” (Luke 12:32). And He still says the same to us today. In our hour of trial and difficulty we are not to fear, for the Lord our God is with us.

Moses further exhorts Israel, “stand still.” All their self-efforts must cease. For what could they do? Dry up the Red Sea themselves? Level mountains, or destroy an elite army which was armed to the teeth? No, they must stand still. Israel, just like ourselves, are too often like Martha—busy and troubled about many things, while we ought to be sitting at the foot of the Master. There is a need to surrender in the way of believing for that is what Israel is exhorted to next.

Moses speaks, “See the salvation of the Lord.” All they can see around them are the mountains, the sea, and the Egyptians—impossibilities! But yet they are exhorted to *see* salvation. How can this be? This is not physical sight they are being exhorted to, but rather the spiritual sight of faith. Israel *first* had to “see the salvation of the Lord” with the eye of faith *before* the Lord would show it to them with the eye of sense. Faith precedes all. Hebrews 11 notes, “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” with the physical eye. Faith is the mother grace. This is why we are constantly exhorted to faith in the Lord. Thomas Brooks once wrote: “Till men have faith in Christ, their best services are but glorious sins.” And faith is coupled with standing still. For faith is ceasing from our own works and trusting in the Lord and His Word and promises. This history bears out that truth as well.

The Lord's Promises amid Impossibilities

Through Moses the Lord gives Israel three wonderful promises to base their faith and hope upon.

First, *the Lord will show salvation* (v. 13). The same Lord who brought His people in His perfect providence to this place will also show salvation and deliverance.

He will not fail them at the hour of trial. So also with His church today. The Lord will grant salvation through faith in Jesus Christ according to His own promises.

Second, the Lord promises, *the enemy will not be seen any more*. This is truly an amazing promise. Israel had seen the enemy for 430 long years. They had served in slavery with heavy labor for so long. But now everywhere they look there are Egyptians! The promises and providences *seem* to run counter to each other.

Maybe it is the same with you. You are in a way of difficulty that seems impossible just as Israel, and you don't see how God's promises can possibly be fulfilled in your life. But how necessary that we by His grace believe His promises just as Israel was exhorted to. Despite the thought that providence and promises will never run parallel, God's promises will always be fulfilled in His way and in His time.

Finally, the Lord promises that *He will fight for his church* (v. 14). It is His battle, not theirs. He had displayed His credentials as an able deliverer throughout the ten plagues. It is still His battle today. This Captain has a battle plan—the Holy Scriptures. That is the way He fights, with His own Word and Spirit. If we would be faithful soldiers in the army of the Lord we must remember it is His battle and remember that faithful soldiers follow His plans, not their own. We must simply bring the Word, praying for the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit. As parents, church leaders, and individuals we use these means realizing it pleases the Lord to defeat the enemy through His Word.

The Lord's Marching Orders

Despite Desired Retreat

Many responsibilities and challenges lie before the church of God. What need there is to cry to the Lord in prayer for help! As Israel stands with their leader, Moses, at the edge of the Red Sea, Moses feels this need

for prayer as well. Apparently Moses cried unto Lord in prayer though not a word of his prayer is recorded in Exodus 14. We read there, "The LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward" (v. 15).

The Lord says as it were, "Don't speak to Me in prayer only, but tell the children of Israel to march forward—put your prayer into action!" They wanted to turn back, but the Lord commands them to go forward.

This is important for us still today. We may not allow prayer be a substitute for obedience. It is good that we cry unto the Lord in prayer, but we must go forward.

Furthermore, this going forward does not *contradict* standing still but *complements* it. For this is not only a physical order, but also a spiritual one. Before the command to go forward, there were the promises. Faith must be based on the divine promise, and our obedience to those commands must spring from the faith produced. This command to go forward is to be done in faith. And by God's grace this is exactly what Israel did. "By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned" (Heb. 11:29).

We know how that went. Moses lifted up his rod over the Red Sea and the Lord delivered them, not *from* their circumstances but *through* them. Israel had to go forward despite fears and impossibilities and she did so by gracious faith. Israel went forward and the entire enemy was defeated. None were left, "not so much as one of them" (v. 28). The passage concludes, "then the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses" (v. 31).

Our encouragement is that the same God still lives today. He still turns men and women, boys and girls from desiring bondage and turns them to trust. He turns sinners from slavish fear unto filial godly fear.

Conclusion

Let us consider in concluding some lessons we can learn from this wonderful history and mighty display of God's conquering power.

This passage speaks of Christ making a way through death. The sea in Scripture is a picture of death. But Christ went the way of death; He conquered death and the grave and was victorious. The very sea Israel feared was the way in which they were delivered. So also the death believers may fear, one day will be a passage to the eternal Canaan where all enemies are drowned and gone forever. Where the Head of the church has gone the body is sure to follow.

In a practical way this Red Sea deliverance illustrates the absolute sufficiency of God. We may have trials and impossibilities, but our Lord promises His church, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee" (Isa. 43:2).

This deliverance is also reflected in the sign of baptism (1 Cor. 10). Paul reminds the Corinthians that *all* Israel was brought through the Red Sea, but with some God was not well pleased (v. 5). Baptism points to deliverance, and is a gracious sign and seal of God's grace, but baptism is not enough to save us eternally. If we are baptized we may have been saved from much evil and many enemies, but we need the Holy Spirit's work in salvation, by grace through faith, just as all Israel needed it.

Let us then go forward trusting in Jesus Christ who went through the sea of death, who parted the veil of eternal death and opened the way of eternal life with His work throughout life and on the cross as the almighty conquering King. One day for all of the Lord's true church all impossibilities will be gone. The apostle John was given a glimpse of that when he wrote, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven

and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea" (Rev. 21:1). The sea is a picture of trials and death. But one day for the church there will be no more sea. With that ever before us, therefore, let us see the salvation of the Lord by faith, trusting in His gracious promises, and go forward in the Lord's battle!