

Instruction From God

Exodus

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Bible Text: Exodus 13:1-22
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Well, if you would then, if you'll take your Bibles and let's turn together over to the Old Testament book of Exodus, Exodus 13, I want to begin reading at verse 17 and I'm gonna read verse 17 through the end of verse 22, and then we're gonna pray.

17 When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, "Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt." 18 But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. 19 Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here." 20 And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. 21 And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. 22 The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

This is God's word.

Let's pray.

Father, would you by the aid of your Spirit today help us to see through this example that you do, indeed, lead your people; that you do just as the Scriptures say, you go before them; and that you deeply care for your people and that though the way will become difficult at times, you are with us, you will never leave us, and you will bring us safely home. For the sake of Christ we pray. Amen.

Well, let me begin with a question today: is the shortest route always the best route? That's not a trick question. Is the shortest route always the best route? You know, we're trying to get there quick, trying to cut all the corners we can to save as much time as possible. Well, those who are what are called route planners would say that this idea of the shortest way being the best way is a common misconception.

The delivery business is much more complicated than just simply finding the shortest route. For example, UPS, I was reading about UPS this week, they say that though the route may be shorter, the main question is this: is it safe? Is it safe? UPS discourages lefthand turns. They claim that it saves fuel and, of course, reduces accidents and they're probably true. Even though when they select routes that are longer and they often do that, they select routes that are longer, in spite of that, they actually save money on fuel and cut delivery time. Drivers spend less time waiting at traffic lights and that reduced fuel consumption by 10 million gallons a year. So the shortest route is certainly not always the best route and we will see confirmation of that this morning from God's word.

Now those of you who have been with us over the last few weeks, you know that we're working our way through the book of Exodus and we've come to that place in the account where the firstborn of the people of Exodus have died and this has been such a cataclysmic event that Pharaoh, Pharaoh of Egypt, has relented and let the people go. Up until now he would not let them go. He would think, "Well, I'll let them go," and then he would pull back. Then he was like, "I'll let them go," and then he pulled back. But now after the death of the firstborn, after the death of his own firstborn, he let the Israelites go. So the Israelites are finally now, think about it, they're finally embarking on their road to freedom and God is with them for the journey. Now I want you to see this morning what we call the big idea. It's real simple, simple message this morning. Our Triune God is the divine route planner, the curator of promises, the leader of his people, leading them day and night until they are safely home.

Now as I thought about that this week, I am really thankful for that, and I hope by the end of the day that you'll be more thankful than you already are that we really do have a God who has devised the route and he is a curator of great and precious promises, and he leads his people and he's going to get us home safely. We're going to arrive at future glory one day and he's going to get us there, but here's the way I want us to think about it. First, I want us to think first about God the divine route planner. Now out of the many options for departing from Exodus, what is the best route? What is the best route? And as we look at our verses and I want to draw your attention to verse 17, it said, "God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near." I want you to see a map with me, and here's where the people of Israel are at this time. Right here in this area. And there's a number of different routes you see marked out here. Now the first one, the shortest route, is toward the land of the Philistines, is what it's called. It runs by the way of the sea and it leads up into the Promised Land. It's called the Via Maris and it is the shortest route. In fact, if the Israelites had gone that direction, they would have made it to the Promised Land in a minimum of two to three weeks, but notice here, it said God did not take them that way and he gives a reason that we'll look at in a moment. But then there's other routes, by the way. There's the direction toward Shur. Now it's a little bit longer but it's certainly shorter than the Pilgrim's Way which is across here, okay? But then the fourth way is outlined in red and that is the way of the wilderness and that is the route that God chose for his people.

Now that's the longest route. Why did God choose this route as opposed to the others? Well, he didn't choose the shortest, we're told why in verse 17, "God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, 'Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.'" You see, up in this northern area that was on the shortest route, right around in here, there were Egyptian fortresses at this time and what it meant was God knew that when his people encountered these fortresses and encountered opposition, they would be inclined to turn back and go back into Egyptian slavery, but God had redeemed his people, God was bringing them out of slavery to come and serve him.

So he does not want them to turn back and that's an interesting thought here. He doesn't want them to return to Egypt. As you think about that, that will always be the constant temptation is to turn back. Kathryn and I became followers of Christ back in the fall of 1980. We were in our mid-20s and the church that we were attending was a warm place, it was a place where we felt loved and we felt cared for. We fell right in and they loved us even though we looked, still looked a lot like the world. They welcomed us, loved us, cared for us, and the pastor there was a gentleman who was in his 50s at this time and a warm, jolly kind of a guy but you can be warm and jolly and not be the wisest person. This dear man, he loved to cut up and loved to laugh and loved to make everybody feel at ease, but he had some unwise practices that eventually got him into trouble. He would come up behind a woman and he would take his thumb and he would start at the top of her neck and run his thumb down her back as if he was unzipping their dress just to give that sensation, and it was terribly unwise, terribly unwise, and that led to some accusations that were leveled against the pastor. Now you might imagine that really split the church. There were those who dearly loved this man and could see no wrong and felt like, "Look, this is just a minor thing." And then there were others who were like, "No, look, this is really not good."

So the church was split and it led to a vote on a Sunday evening and Kathryn and I were there. Again, we hadn't been believers less than a year, and all this divisiveness, people were so angry at one another and the tension was high, and it came down to a vote that night and he was voted out as the pastor and it sent a shock-wave through the church. After the meeting was over, people were filing out down the aisle and I wouldn't have believed this had we not seen it with our own eyes. There was a young lady who was a strong advocate for the pastor and then there was a young man who was for his removal, and they were moving down the aisle, people were trying to move out, people were grumbling and really upset, and it reached such a fever pitch that this young lady, she was in her late 20s, she jump straddle of this young man's back, she jumped on his back and began screaming all kinds of profanity because she was so upset because of the way things went. And Kathryn and I saw this, heard all of this, and obviously we would have expected that in a bar, in a nightclub maybe, you know, but this was like total shock to us and we began to wonder, you know, we had some questions like, "Wow, you know, is this really for us? Is this what Christianity is about? I mean, I thought Christian people would behave differently and that sort of thing." Then actually there would be some other things that would happen within that first year that could have soured us, you know, it

could have soured us and could have sorely tempted us to turn back to our former way of life.

Now we didn't and it's by God's grace but we've often wondered why did God allow us to see those things? Why did God allow us to face those things that could have caused us to turn back? Why did he allow us to see what is sometimes the ugly underbelly of the church? That's true, that's true, the ugly underbelly. Now I know that some of you have experienced what I'm talking about, you've experienced people in the church behaving, you know, less than Christ-like and I don't know why and I've got my speculations as to why God allowed us to see these things, but my point is he led us and he kept us and we did not turn back.

So when I read this, this week, I thought about that and then I also thought about this, this short route was only two to three weeks, why did God take the route that would turn out taking 40 years, 40 years to reach the Promised Land? I mean, why didn't God just say, "We're gonna go, we're gonna go the two to three week route, get you there, get you all settled in and everything will be great." Why did he take the long route? Why so long? And it made me wonder about this question and maybe you've wondered this as well: why is the journey of our sanctification so long? Sanctification, by the way, is becoming more like Jesus. That's God's will for you, okay? If you have answered the call to follow Jesus, God's will for you is to become more like Jesus. That's what the Bible calls sanctification. So God's will is that we be sanctified, but why does it seem to take so long? I mean, many of you here, you've been walking with the Lord 50 years plus, some of you 40 years, 30 years, and there are those times when you feel like, "Making some progress. I'm really making some progress," to all of a sudden wake up and find out that there's more progress to be made and you wonder sometimes why does it seem to take so long?

Well, I have a little bit of an answer, I think. This week, I was reading and this particular verse stood out to me in 2 Corinthians 4. You'll see it on the overhead. Paul says, "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day." In other words, there's gonna be some things on the journey that's gonna cause the possibility of losing heart. If possible but we don't lose heart though our outward body, our outward nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. Now why is that so important? It tells us this, that every day the believer gets depleted. Every day as we follow Jesus in this fallen world, we become depleted. A little bit of our hope fades. A little bit of our hope diminishes and it needs to be, what? Renewed, right? A little bit of our encouragement wanes and it needs to be, what? Renewed. In other words, what this verse tells us is for the believer, every believer leaks. Every believer leaks a little bit. A little bit of encouragement today. A little bit of hope. And that's why that we need to be renewed. We are dependent upon day to day renewal and if we're renewed day by day, we'll not lose heart. But you see, that answers the question. You see, yes, God wants you and I to be holy, his will is that we make progress in sanctification, but that's not his only goal for our life, he also wants you and I to learn to treasure Jesus with an ever increasing dependency upon him for everything in our lives. It's not just becoming more like Jesus, while that's God's will for us, it's also that we

no matter how long the journey is, that we remain dependent upon him. He said, "Without me, you can do nothing." And so one of the reasons, I think, the route is so long in sanctification is because it's not just the goal of becoming like Jesus, it is remaining dependent upon him all the way to the end.

So why did God choose this route? Well, you see it in verse 17, "Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt." It's because God cares deeply about his people. God cares whether you turn back or not. He cares that you stay on the journey. He cares that you remain faithful and you persevere to the end. God cares and he's at work going before his people making the route in such a way that we'll not lose heart.

The second thing, God is also the curator of promises. Now if you were paying attention when we read the text, you might have wondered why in the world is verse 19 in there. What in the world does verse 19 have to do with what's taking place here. It says, "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.'" Now you do understand the exodus is taking place. This is massive. I mean, all of these people that have been crying out and, "Help us!" God has come on the scene and there's been 10 plagues and finally there's the death of the firstborn and now Pharaoh said, "Go! Go!" And then there's been the Passover which we looked at last week, and now God's people are on the move. What in the world are they fooling with Joseph's old dead bones for?

Well, let me read something for you, if I may. Back in Genesis, Joseph was dying and here's what happened. Joseph said to his brothers, "I'm about to die but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land," this land being Egypt. "He'll bring you out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear saying, 'God will surely visit you and you shall carry up my bones from here.'" So years earlier, think about this with me, track with me, years earlier, Joseph is about to die and he's gonna die in Egypt and he said, "I want you to promise me something, family. God is one day gonna come and visit you and he's gonna bring you out of this land into the land that he promised Abraham." Now what's that all about? Well, Joseph, you see, Joseph had been told that his descendants would be slaves in Egypt but he also knew that God would rescue them because God had promised Abraham that he would do it and we see that promise in Genesis 15. Let's look at it. Here's the promise that God made to Abram, "Then the LORD said to Abram, 'Know for certain,' know for certain, "'that your offspring will be sojourners in a land,'" that's Egypt, "'that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.'" And they were. "'But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.'" Now think with me, that's what we're reading about in the book of Exodus. We're reading that account. We're reading that promise.

So what does this tell us? Why the bones? It tells us that God is a curator of promises. Now the word "curator" means, it's Latin for "taking care of," or another way of putting

it, "a keeper of a collection," another way of saying it, "a content specialist." Like in a museum, a museum has a curator and they are gathering items, they're taking care of items so that they can put them on display and show them and bring them out to exhibit. God is a curator of his great and precious promises. He makes the promise and then he displays the promise in time. He made the promise to Abraham, be certain about this, it's gonna happen, and then when it came time to happen, it happened. That's why Joseph is, in effect, saying back in Genesis, "Look, I know, I know God's gonna get you all out of here. I know there's gonna be an exodus. God's gonna visit you, he's gonna get you out of here, and he's promised, he promised that to Abraham, he's gonna do it and when he does, would you bring my bones with you?"

You see, what we ought to see in verse 19, again, is God is keeping his promises. Isn't that great? I mean, let me tell you something, when you're on the journey, when you're on the journey and you're walking by faith and you are trusting that God is renewing you day by day, isn't it great to be reminded that God is a curator of promises? His promises are great and precious and we have an example of it here and we should not doubt that in 2018 he is still keeping his promises. For instance, the Bible stories are not just a selection of something here, something here, something here, it all has unity, it all fits together. Pay attention, God is doing something great. Get on board. Let him lead you. Walk with him.

He keeps his promises, but then one other thing, God is the leader of his people. Verses 21 and 22, notice verse 21, "And the LORD went before them." Now just that phrase alone is really sweet and we'll come back to it in just a second, but he went before them "by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night." So what do we see here? The Lord is going before his people, leading the way, guiding them by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. So what do we say to that? We might be inclined to say, "Hot dog! I want a cloud too! Give me that kind of guidance!" Right? I mean, have you ever had those times where you kind of wished you would, "Please tell me what I should do? What job should I take? Should I move? Should I move? Should I uproot my family? Should I marry her? Should I marry? Should I invest my emotions and my energy into this? Is this who you want me to marry?" Wouldn't it be great if there was this marriage cloud, you know, and you look and it moves over toward her and you go, "That's it. She's the one." Then the cloud moves away, "Nope, she's not the one."

God's guidance is such an interesting subject but can I just warn you here about something? How God has guided his people in the past by no means tells us his normal practice today. In other words, I would not suggest to you to be looking for clouds, a pillar of fire by night and clouds by day, to gain guidance because just because we have this account, should we expect this form of guidance because this often trips people up. You know, we start reading the Bible and we start reading in Genesis and Exodus and we start seeing these things and we start going, "Man, you know, I could really get on board with a God who'd be that clear. You know, that clear." But here's what, just remind you, here's what we're gonna see as time goes on through this story, we're gonna find that even though the Israelites had clear instruction, it did not result in stronger faith. Though these

folks had a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, still they grumbled and rebelled, still disobeyed.

Let me ask you something this morning. As you think about this, you might be tempted to say, "Boy, I wish for the days of a cloud or some kind of clear instruction." Let me ask you something: do you want the cloud or do you want the Lord? Do you want the cloud or do you want the Lord? I ask this because sometimes people will desperately want God to be clear to them. They want, "God, tell me what to do. God, tell me what to do." And then it's like when they feel like they got the answer, they kind of disconnect from God. Once they feel like they've got the answer to their solution, the answer to their problem, then they become less interested in what God has to say about other things. You see, do I merely want his guidance or do I want him? That's an important distinction. Do I just want him to give me the goodies and tell me how to make decisions, or do I want him above all?

You see, this is why it's important, if it's him, if it's really him, then when I'm on my journey, if I make the right decision, he's with me, but also if I make the wrong decision, he'll be with me. Anybody here made wrong decisions before? Even as a follower of Christ, made a wrong decision? I have, but God has been abundant in mercy and grace. That's why I'm so thankful for his amazing grace. You know, sometimes we make a wrong turn and, you see, if it's just guidance we want, then we're all frustrated, "Why did God lead me this way? Why did....? Why did that happen?" But if it's God we want, he'll be with us when we make the right decision and he'll even be with us in grace and mercy when we make the wrong decision.

You say, how so, though? If it's not a cloud, it's not a pillar of fire, how so? You'll notice some verses on the overhead and let's wrap up this way. Jesus was getting ready to ascend into heaven after the crucifixion, after his resurrection, he would ascend into heaven and the disciples would be, they thought, alone. Jesus said, "I don't want to leave you orphaned. I'm gonna send the Comforter. I'm gonna send the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity." And here's where he begins to talk about him in John 14, he said, "even the Spirit of truth, he dwells with you and will be in you." Okay? Now this is the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, he's gonna dwell with you and be in you. Now that goes off the map, okay? There's nothing we can compare to that. The Holy Spirit is gonna come, dwell with you and be in you. We find out later he says this, "He," that would be the Holy Spirit, "He will glorify me, he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

So understand what's happening. Jesus, it's always cool to have Jesus around in person, you know, that would be great. We've not experienced that but the disciples did. Jesus goes over here so we follow after Jesus. Jesus goes over here, we follow after him over here. But what happens when he disappears, he's not there anymore? How do we follow Jesus? How do we follow Jesus? He gives us his Spirit to dwell within us, to be in us, to lead us. Now there we go. You say, "Okay, okay, I got it. The Holy Spirit's gonna lead me but how is he gonna do it? How does that leading take place?" Well, notice he said, "He will glorify me." So the Holy Spirit will glorify me, Jesus speaking. He says the

Holy Spirit's gonna glorify Jesus, he's gonna magnify Jesus and he will take what is Jesus' and declare it to us.

Now what does all that mean? Well, I think it means this, look at Hebrews, you'll see this, Hebrews 1, "Long ago," let's say in the days of exodus that we're reading about, "at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days," now, now today 2018, "he has spoken to us by his Son." What God has to say to us today is in and through Jesus.

So you go, "Okay, but Jesus has ascended into heaven so how can we communicate here?" And that is why he gives us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is with us and in us to do, what? To unfold to us, to unfold to us the meaning of the person and work of Jesus in such a way that its beauty and importance are brought home to our mind day by day. Renewed day by day. Renewed day by day. Holy Spirit present to get our eyes upon Jesus. Listen, to get our eyes upon Jesus, not the woman who jumped on the guy's back. Oh yeah. You see, I know, I know there's people, you see all kinds of stuff in church and you go, "Ah, they're not any better than me. Bunch of hypocrites." And then you just leave Jesus, got nothing to do with his church, nothing to do with Christ, all because you got your eyes on the wrong thing. The Holy Spirit dwells within us to keep our eyes on Jesus and see the unfolding beauty of our Savior, the treasure that he is.

So as the Holy Spirit dwells within us, as he does so, it's the only way, listen, it's the only way that we're gonna be able to follow Jesus' command, "Follow me." Isn't it interesting that he would use those words, "Follow me. I'll lead. You follow me." And the way that we do that in 2018 while he's seated at the right hand of the throne of God, he has given us his Spirit to bring home to our hearts and minds the beauty of Jesus who leads us and we are to follow him.

So let me close with two questions. Have you answered Jesus' call to follow him? I mean, really have you answered that? I'm not asking about how religious you are or how good a person you are. I'm not asking about those kind of things, I'm asking have you genuinely said, "I want to follow Jesus." We're to go and make disciples. We're going to make followers of Jesus, declaring the Gospel, declaring what Christ has done for broken sinners like me and you and Jesus says, "Come, follow me. Come follow me." Have you answered that call? Have you been baptized as one of his followers? Are you learning from him? Are you being renewed day by day? Friend, don't, there will be a day, there will be a day when Jesus said there will be many who will stand before him and say, "Lord, Lord, didn't we cast out demons in your name? Didn't we heal the sick in your name? Didn't we do this? Didn't we do this?" And what will Jesus say to them? He'll say, "Depart from me, I never knew you. I never had a saving relationship with you." In spite of all the things, all the religion, all of the service, all that they did, they said for Christ, "We did it for you." Jesus said, "Depart from me, I never knew you." They were never following Jesus for Jesus' sake. They were never following Jesus as Savior. They were revealing that what they were doing was basically saying, "Here's what we've done for you. Now here's what you must do for us."

Friend, that's nothing but cold, hard, dead religion. You must look to Jesus as Savior, follow him. Have you answered the call to follow Jesus? And finally if you have, if you have and you're here this morning and you say, "Man, the journey has gotten tough," and Jesus never promised an easy journey, but if you're here and you say, "I said yes to Jesus but the journey has gotten difficult," I would suggest to you to do this in our prayer time this morning, that you would say, "I want a fresh supply of the Holy Spirit. I need a fresh supply of the Holy Spirit." And he will grant that. He will give that.

So are you following Jesus? If you're not, would you follow him today? Just say yes to Jesus today, and if you are following and it's gotten tough, he cares about you. He'll get you home. Say, "Lord, give me a fresh supply of your Spirit today."