

## Go Forward

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**Bible Text:** Exodus 14:15  
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Let us read again in Exodus 14. Exodus 14 and we shall read at verse 15. Exodus 14:15.

15 And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward:

Sometimes in God's providence we are brought into a situation where we have a difficult choice to make. We have two options and we've got to choose one of them, Option A or Option B. We have a fork in a road and we need to choose Path A or Path B. Often very difficult to know which way to go. And sometimes in God's providence, he doesn't just bring us into a situation with a choice to make but into a situation where we have no choices. He challenges us with a situation where there isn't A or B, there isn't left or right, there isn't this road or that road, there's just one path and we have to take it. That's far more challenging, far more difficult, and that's the kind of situation that Moses and the children of Israel found themselves in, in Exodus 14. We'd like to see how they met this challenge in order to help us face our own challenges when we have no choices left.

We're going to notice, first of all, how God confuses his people sometimes. God confuses his people sometimes. God had, of course, led Israel out of Egypt after many miraculous plagues and, above all, the miracle of the Passover. He had been leading them through the wilderness and they were only 10 days away from the Promised Land when he told them to backtrack, to turn back, and when they did and they followed the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night, they ended up in what we might call a cul-de-sac, in a place where there was no outlet. On the one side were the mountains of Baalzephon, on the other side the treacherous sands of Migdal, in front of them was the Red Sea, and behind them was this murderous, malicious army of the Egyptians coming to destroy them. There was nowhere to turn. They couldn't go left. They couldn't go right. They couldn't go back. The least worst option, you might say, was forward and the people are therefore in this great confusion, understandably so, and in their terror, they turn on Moses and they say, "I would have been better for us if you'd left us in Egypt." Better, in other words, to be slaves in Egypt than corpses in the desert. Moses, they were basically saying, "You've taken us into a dead end which promises only our death and our end."

They're in a state of great confusion but although Israel was in a state of terrible confusion, God wasn't confused. God was still in total and complete control. Of course, we know the end of the story, they didn't, but when we look at the whole story, we see that God led his people into a state of confusion in order to confuse the Egyptians. The Egyptians looked at this situation, they looked and they said, "Ha, ha," and they're rubbing their hands with glee. This nation, this terrible people, they're trapped. Indeed it was a trap, for sure it was a trap, but it wasn't a trap that would result in the death of Israel but a trap that would result in the death of multitudes of Egyptians. It wasn't a trap of God but a God who laid a trap.

And you know, this situation, really, we find another example of this when we fast-forward to the New Testament and we think of Jesus Christ, especially we think of him at the time of his crucifixion. It looked there, too, as if God was trapped, as if circumstances, events, people, enemies had so conspired as to leave God and Christ in a terrible situation, in a dead end, in a cul-de-sac with no outlet. And just as here where the Egyptians are closing in for the kill, it looked to God's people then, too, terrible situation, confusing situation that was only going to result in death and destruction and a scattering of God's people. But just as here and just as there, God effected a great deliverance.

Should this not remind us all that God sometimes brings us into a state of confusion but his great purpose is not to confound us but to confound and confuse his enemies. God so arranges his providence and his events in our lives that, yes, we're sometimes in the situation where we just think there's no way out. We are utterly trapped. We're finished. I can't turn to the left or the right, behind is death. What do I do? And God allows us to be brought into this situation of great weakness and great distress in order, as here, to confound the devil, his agents, and all God's people's enemies and to effect an all-the-greater deliverance. This should be tremendously encouraging to us if that's the situation we find ourselves in today, and many of us can look back and see many Red Seas in our own lives, can't we? Times when we felt we were in exactly that position and all was lost, we're in a state of terror and confusion, and then by remarkable providences and divine interventions, God transforms the situation, delivers his people, and scatters all opposition.

God confuses his people but, secondly here, God calms his people. In verse 12 after they had said, "It would have been better for us to be in Egypt, better to be slaves there than corpses in the wilderness," Moses says to the people, "Fear not. Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord which he will show to you today." Here Moses brings a word of calm and peace from the Lord and, you know, it contradicted every single instinct in the Israelites' bodies. When we are in these terrible cul-de-sacs, these crushing vice-like situations, the last thing we want to hear is, "Stand still." Every fiber in our body cries out, "Do something! Fight! Work! Run!" Something but stand still and see? Stand still and watch. Instead of fight, stand? Instead of run, stand? Instead of speak, take counsel, plan, they are told here, "Say nothing." It goes against every fiber of our natural make-up, doesn't it? God is saying through Moses all attempts at self-help and self-deliverance must cease. All physical effort, all mental reasonings, they have to end. He's saying do the hardest thing that you find to do which is do nothing. Do nothing.

And it's really quite a remarkable promise they're given. "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord which he'll show to you today for the Egyptians whom you have seen today. You shall see them again no more forever for the Lord shall fight for you and you shall hold your peace. You'll do nothing, you'll see nothing. He'll do everything and speak massively into this situation. These Egyptians that you'll look behind and you see and they are causing you such terror, these same Egyptians, you're not going to see them again ever." They're being asked here to [unintelligible], "Do nothing and just watch. Look at what I'm about to do and if you do this, you'll see what I can do. If you do this, very soon you will see probably hundreds of thousands of Egyptian bodies floating down the Red Sea. Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord."

Again, if we fast-forward into the New Testament, we find a similar incident. You remember the disciples in the boat on the sea of Galilee in the midst of the storm. They're again in a state of great panic and terror, thinking they're going to perish and God's given up on them. And again, they watch and they see God intervening, calming, stilling. They said nothing. They did nothing. They just watched and got the benefit of all he did. And does this word not speak also if we fast-forward into our own situation? When we're panicking and stressing, when we are racking our brains for solutions and answers to our puzzles and providences, here is the word from God, "Fear not. Stand still and watch. See what I can do." The God of the Red Sea, the God of the sea of Galilee is the God of your sea and your storm as well. He's the same yesterday, today and forever. The same.

God calms his people but, thirdly, notice here after calming his people, he challenges them. He said, "Stand still. See the salvation of God. God will fight for you. You shall hold your peace." Then verse 15 we read these words, quite surprising words, the Lord said to Moses, "Wherefore cry you unto me? Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward." I think what we can envisage here is God's spoken this word of peace, God's calmed them down, he's pacified them, and they're waiting and they're crying out to him as well. They're praying and God says, "Stop praying. Why are you crying to me?" As far as I know, it's the only time in the Bible where God says stop praying.

"Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward." He's saying the time for prayer and calling and crying is over. You're calm. You're still. You've been pacified. Now it's time for action. It's time for movement. I've done my divine sovereignty bit, now it's your human responsibility bit, you might say.

"Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward." He's calmed them with his word, now he challenges them with his word. They believed his word of peace, now they have to act on his word of challenge. We all like the peace bit, don't we? We all like the calm down, don't stress, be calm, and maybe many of us just like to stay there with that comfort, that peace, that stillness, but God doesn't leave us there. He says on the basis of that, because of that, from the strength of that, now act. It's an important order, isn't it? He doesn't say work and work and work and work and I'll give you peace. No, he says be at peace, believe, trust, and then there's obedience that follows and service that follows.

So here Moses gathers the children of Israel together and starts marching towards the Red Sea, still full, flowing, probably lots of turbulence. They're walking towards it and it parts. It separates. We're told in Hebrews 11 that the children of Israel walked through the Red Sea by faith. This was something they did trusting in the Lord but they did it. It's trust and obey. This is what we find here. They go towards this dangerous scene but they're trusting in the God who rules sovereignly over all this. And again, it may be that we are facing our own insurmountable obstacles, our own impossible dangers, our own Red Seas, and God has maybe worked in our lives and given us a measure of calm and peace and trust but now he's saying go forward. Move on. Go forward. Don't stand still anymore. Go forward. Don't go backwards. Go forward. Don't go sideways. Go forward now, not later. Go forward. Go forward despite continuing fear. Go forward despite continuing unbelief, because none of them had perfect faith, and many of them as we can see from the chapters afterwards, had really very little of any faith at all. Go forward despite unbelief. Go forward despite the risks. Go forward despite the enemies coming in and closing in. Go forward despite potential consequences. Go forward. He's challenging, isn't he? Go forward in faith. Go forward in the exercise of faith. Go forward in the obedience of faith. Go forward in producing the fruits of faith. Go forward in the service that faith produces. God has put a challenge in front of many of you in your lives and he's asking you to not only face it but to go forward and meet it, and go forward through it.

Do you think perhaps for some of you, you have the Lord's Supper next Lord's Day, over the years because of maybe your upbringing, many traditions that you've observed and experienced, it's like a Red Sea to you. It's like an impossibility. You think of all the consequences and you're in this cul-de-sac and you've been there maybe for many many years. You feel you can't go left, you can't go right, you don't want to go back and you can't go back, but you're just stuck and you see your faith and maybe God has calmed your heart and given you his peace like here, and yet you're still stuck and you're not going forward. The fears are so great. The consequences you built up in your mind are so massive. You think of what he may say, and they may say, and what might happen afterwards, and all this is just so much of a massive mountain or a deep sea in front of you and to you the word of God comes, God has calmed your heart and pacified your soul, God has brought you to peace in Christ. It's time to hear the challenge, "Go forward. Go forward. Yes, mixed with unbelief. Yes, mixed with fear. Yes, not knowing all the consequences. But go forward."

And this applies in every area of faith, and there may be a service God has put in front of you, a role, a witness, a ministry. Again, you feel the intimidation of it and you draw back and God's saying, "Go forward. Take a step, even a small step, but go forward." You know, in the Christian life there is really no such thing as standing still. You stand still in the Christian life, you start sinking, you start stagnating, you start, as it were, molding, fungus begins to grow. You're really either going backwards or forwards. You are really not standing still and therefore if you're not going forwards in faith, you're going backwards, and therefore to keep that momentum, that's the vital thing. Many many Christians start so well in their Christian lives, they go forward wonderfully well for a few weeks, months, or years, or even decades, but then challenges come, difficulties

come, old age comes, ill health comes and, well, the momentum slows almost to a standstill or even a reversal.

And it really doesn't matter where we are in our pilgrimage, the call is the same, "Go forward." Maybe you haven't even begun the life of faith. Here again is the pattern for you to stand still, to see the salvation that Christ has accomplished through this great redemption, through this great liberation of his people from spiritual bondage. Yes, we need verse 13. See the salvation of the Lord that is shown to you every Lord's Day, and then having seen that and enjoyed that and experienced that, use that as the energy and the power of a forward moving Christian life. Go forward.

What would happen here to the children of Israel when they went forward? Many wonderful things as we'll see shortly. God was glorified. The enemies were defeated. There was a wonderful testimony that even to this day even here we're still speaking about. There was the good done to their own souls. Think of all the wonderful consequences that flow from going forward. Go forward and do your own soul good. Go forward and glorify the Lord. Go forward and see God's enemies defeated. Go forward and increase and widen your testimony.

God challenges his people but notice here, fourthly, God covers his people. We read in verse 19, "the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel." Here this great cloud in which the angel of the Lord was residing went from leading them to protecting them, going before them to going behind them. And there was a double purpose here, it was to cover the Israelites from the Egyptians and to cover the Egyptians so that they wouldn't get at the Israelites. It's a cloud, really, that had both a protective and a judgmental side. This is God, isn't it, protecting his people, judging his enemies. On this side, not one loss. On that side, not one survived. On this side, covered in mercy. On this side, covered in wrath. That's where we all are today, we're covered one way or another by God. God and mercy and light and protection or God in wrath and judgment and condemnation. We're either with Israel or we're with the Egyptians.

And here this cloud separates them. It's really a wonderful sight here. Moses stretches out his hand, verse 21, "over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided." It looked as if all was lost, looked as if the enemies of God were about to be victorious, as if God's people were about to be scattered, and Moses lifts up this piece of wood and God works through this weak instrument to effect the salvation of his people and the destruction of his enemies.

Again, we fast-forward, don't we, to Christ's time and we see again this great crisis in the life of the church, in the life of Christ as he's hemmed in and squeezed in and God, as it were, raises him up on a wooden cross. The results and the deliverance of his people and the scattering of his enemies. The crushing of principalities and powers and making a show of them openly. God here covers his people. God at Calvary covered his people and

that cover is still waiting and available for you today. Will you not run under it? Will you not seek it? Will you not ask that God would be your cover, cover you in mercy, cover you in love, cover you protectively?

There's a very solemn verse at the end of John 3, "He that believes not the Son, the wrath of God abides on him." It sits on him. It's like this heavy massive thundercloud. This person is living out his life, living out her life, and largely unknown to them they are under this horrific tornado of judgment that's about to touch down at death, and draw them into the vortex of God's anger. Covered in wrath. Wrath abiding on them. It needn't be the case. By faith we can come under the cover of God, the cover enjoyed by all God's people.

The children of Israel, we read in verse 22, "went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left." And look what happens to the Egyptians, they are going to be victorious, they're going to win the day, they pursue, they go in, God looks, God sees, God troubles them, takes off their chariot wheels, they start trying to reverse course, they see God is in this and he covers them with the waters. Moses stretches forth his hand, the waters return. The Lord overthrows the Egyptians and we read this in verse 28, "there remained not so much as one of them." Not so much as one of them. What a cover. What a defense. What a shield. Not one lost here. Not one survived here. And it's interesting that in the New Testament this incident is used as a type, as a figure, an illustration of how God deals with his enemies. In Revelation, a number of chapters, this imagery is used to say this is but a little picture of what God will do at the end.

Not one left. Not one survived. God covers his people. Then notice finally here, God confirms his people. We read at the end here, verse 29, "the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore." Try and picture that sea. Just minutes, hours earlier, you've got this terrified people in a state of utter confusion, they stand still, they let God's peace soak into their soul, and as result walk dry shod through the Red Sea covered by the Lord's protective cloud. Now as they're on the other side of that Red Sea that was previously an utter terror to them, they look back and what did they see? That sea that was their destruction they thought, ends up being their salvation as they see the corpses, the bodies of men and horses being swept away. Two million standing on the banks of the Red Sea, seeing the scene of utter carnage in front of them. It must have been awesome, just awesome.

It's little wonder that we read at the end of this chapter, "Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses." They acted in faith and God increased their faith. They went forward, no doubt hesitantly, but ended up stronger than they were before. They went forward, yes, shaking in their boots, now here they are firm on the other shore. No doubt trembling physically, who wouldn't as you go through that scene? Even surely the greatest believer amongst them must at times have looked up and seen the mountainous

waters on either side. But here on the other side of the great trial and challenge, we read they believed the Lord. They were utterly confirmed and made sure and steadfast and strong in their faith, and that's the Lord's great and gracious reward to anyone who does go forward in faith. He increases faith. We want, "Lord, give me the confirmation and then I'll go forward." And what God is saying is, "You go forward and I'll give you the confirmation." We say, "Lord, increase my faith and then I'll do." And he says, "No, you do and then I'll increase your faith." And again, so many Christians here can testify to this over the years, can't they? We maybe waited and waited and waited for that sign, for that signal, for that event, for that moment when God would do something extra-special and then we would respond. And it never happened, and it never came and we said, "Well, I'm not going back. I can't go left or right. I'm going forward fearfully but trustingly." And on the other side remarkable experiences of assurance and confirmation, renewed faith, strengthened faith all because of obedience to this great challenge, "Go forward."

Many of you will have an opportunity next Lord's Day to do exactly that, not just physically but spiritually. I want this word, these two little words to ring in your ears this week, "Go forward." If God has spoken peace into your heart, are you going to stay in the cul-de-sac? Are you keep sinking in the mire? Are you going to stay paralyzed by terror? Or are you going to hear this call and obey it? Go forward. Amen.