

The Passage of the Red Sea

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith in passing through death and judgment, and the role of the blood of the lamb in satisfying God's justice and securing our deliverance.

Scripture: Hebrews 11:23

Topics: "The Blood of Christ", "Faith and Deliverance"

Description

John Nelson Darby illustrates the passage of the Red Sea as a profound representation of God's deliverance of His people from the bondage of sin and the power of Satan. He emphasizes Moses' faith in identifying with the afflicted people of God, despite their weaknesses, and how God's providence guides His people through trials. The sermon highlights the significance of the blood of the paschal lamb as a symbol of salvation, ensuring that God's judgment passes over those who believe. Darby encourages believers to recognize that true deliverance comes through faith in Christ, who has conquered death and judgment, allowing them to walk in freedom. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of God's grace and the assurance of His presence in the journey of faith.

Transcript

THE PASSAGE OF THE RED SEA

HEBREWS 11 : 23-29

We have in these verses a little picture drawn by the Spirit of God, of the ways of God in bringing up His people out of Egypt, by the hand of Moses. And we may say it is just a picture of the deliverance of the church from the power of Satan, of the salvation of God and the means by which it is brought about.

Verse 23 : God had taken the tenderest care of Moses in his infancy. So in the days of our natural estate, God's care has been over us in a thousand ways.

Verses 24-26 : A word, here as to guidance through the providence of God. Many cling to providences, as though they were to be the guide for faith. Nothing could be more remarkable providence than that which placed Moses in the court of Pharaoh, but it was not the guide for the faith of Moses. Brought up as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, mighty in words and in deeds there providence had placed him. If ever there was a remarkable providence, it was the case of Moses. After having been hid three months of his parents, till they could hide him no longer, he is put in an ark of

bulrushes among the flags by the river's bank. Thus exposed and crying, the babe attracts the attention of Pharaoh's daughter, who with her maidens is brought down to the place just at the moment. She has compassion on him, listens to the suggestion of the young woman his sister, gives him in charge to his own mother to be nursed for her ; and he becomes her son. The first thing he does, when come to years, is to give it all up. Had Moses reasoned, his reasoning might have had great scope of argument; he might have said, God's providence has placed me here ; I can use all this influence for God's people, and the like. But he never thought of such a thing. His place was with God's people. He did not act for God's people merely; he did not patronise God's people ; his place was with and amongst God's people. God's providence had given him a position which he might relinquish; but it was no guide for conscience. There may be the most plausible reasoning about the thing ; but when the " eye is single," the " whole body will be full of light." Moses saw in his brethren (though a feeble people) 64 the people of God," and he identified them as such with the glory of God. This is what faith always does. They may be in a feeble and failing position, or they may be in a blessed position ; that is not the question : faith identifies the people of God with the glory of God, and acts accordingly.

The children of Israel were in a very bad condition: still they were " the people of God " ; and the first thing recorded of the faith of Moses is, that he took his place amongst the afflicted people of God. If reproach was on them, it was " the reproach of Christ " ; and he " esteemed it greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." He reckoned with God, and this kept his soul clear of every other influence. He looked right on : " Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee," etc. The light cannot shine down along another path.

Verse 27 : Faith had brought Moses into a straight line with " the recompense of the reward " ; and when in that path, faith enabled him to identify himself with God, to look up to God as his power. At once came " the wrath of the king." But the same faith that saw glory for him at the end of the path saw God for him all through the path. This is the secret of real strength. What unbelief does is to compare ourselves and our own strength with circumstances. What faith does is to compare God with circumstances. Take the case of the spies; Numbers 13, 14. They said, "all the people of the land are men of a great stature ; and we saw the giants there, the sons of Anak, that come of the giants ; and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight." If the Israelites compared their stature with that of the Anakims, they had no business there. What said Caleb and Joshua ? They stilled the people, saying, " They are as bread for us their defense is departed from them, and the Lord is with us fear them not." That is, they compared these sons of Anak with God ; what matter then whether they were giants or grasshoppers ? They spoke the language of faith. It was no reasoning about circumstances ; it was just simply saying, Greater is He that is for us than all that can be against us. God was there. That is what makes the path of faith so simple. How did David reason ? He did not go and reason about the height of Goliath and about his own smallness of stature; he brought God in. There is an " uncircumcised " man, he said, defying " the armies of the living God "-right, and very good reasoning!

When the glory set before us leads in the way of the promises, and we take our place with the despised and afflicted people of God, the world will not like it, and the " wrath of the king " will be the consequence. Now this is always a thing feared and trembled before, until God becomes clearly known by the soul as a God for it. When Pharaoh pursued after the children of Israel (Ex. 14) with all his chariots and his horsemen and his army (he had let them go from serving him, but there was no change of heart towards them), the Lord allowed the people to be shut in between the pursuit of Pharaoh (the power of evil) and the Red Sea. They were quite shut in ; and then he says, " Fear not, stand still, and see the salvation of

the Lord," etc.

But if God is coming to deal with sinners, He must deal with them as what He is—a holy God. Let them be Israelites or let them be Egyptians, He must deal with them as what He is. The judgment of God against sin must be met. God's purpose was to save Israel, and in doing this He was about to judge Egypt: But then, He says, if I come to deal in judgment with the Egyptians ; if I come to deliver my people ; I must come such as I am; and I must therefore raise the question of sin. And it is always so. When God deals with the heart, if there is a question between it and Satan's power (and when the soul is freshly awakened, the miserable consciousness of Satan's power, the slavery of Satan's service, will often have more real power in producing exercise of heart than all the fear of the consequences of sin), that is not the first question. God never begins there : He does deliver from it; but He never begins there. He begins by raising- a question between Himself and the sinner.

The children of Israel had fallen into idolatry. They were worse than the Egyptians ; they had the promises of God (Gen. 15), and were worshipping the idols of Egypt. But they felt not their sin against God. They groaned under their taskmasters, and sighed by reason of their bondage. Well, in all the tender commiseration of His having seen the affliction of His people and His being love, God came down and spake to Moses as to about to deliver them. But if judgment against sin was coming in, Israel must be secured from that judgment, or it would fall on them as surely as it did on the Egyptians. The question was not whether Israel could stand in the presence of Pharaoh, but whether Israel could stand in the presence of God.

Verse 28 : God told them (see Exodus 12) to take of the blood of the paschal lamb, and strike it on the two side-posts and on the door-posts of the houses wherein they dwelt. "For," said He. " I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast . . . and the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are : and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt." The destroying angel passed through the land. In the darkness and dead of night he did his work. He knew no difference between the houses of the Israelites and those of the Egyptians, unless marked with the blood. Over such a house he passed ; he saw the blood on the lintel and on the door-posts, he looked no further—he entered not into the house.

All God's dealings with sinners must be upon the ground of His holy judgment of sin. But then, in the case of salvation He awakens the soul to the sense of this ; He says, judgment is coming in, and there is the consequence of it. And then He puts upon the lintel and the door-posts the blood. Before God sets us out on the journey He makes it evident that He has settled the question of sin ; that the demands of His justice have been perfectly met. God will not go on with us until the question between Himself and us is settled. He may deal -with us in grace, but He does not set out with us on the journey until that is done which entirely satisfies His moral being. Before Israel began their journey God had passed through the land, and over them, in judgment. They had feasted in the happiest confidence under the protection of the blood of the lamb.

Before we commence the walk of faith, the question of God's judgment of sin must be a settled question. All that which is properly speaking Christian life, the path of experience, the life of faith, is based on God's having passed over us. He cannot pass over sin. What He does (working faith in us by His Spirit) is, He shews us the blood. Having awakened us to the consciousness of sin, before we are even beginning the journey of faith, He teaches us that He has settled the question about it once and for ever. " Your sins and

iniquities I will remember no more." Then He becomes a God for us by the way. Faith sees and apprehends (not that there is no sin, no judgment, but) that by God's own work and word the question between itself and God is a settled question. Blood has been put between the soul and God-the blood of God's own Son. Never was there such a judgment of sin. I may see myself to be the vilest of sinners, but I see that which has perfectly met the demands of God's justice. " The blood shall be to you for a token," etc.

But then the soul has been accustomed to be a slave. After the children of Israel had seen the blood upon the door-posts, we find them trembling before the power of Pharaoh. They were on the road, but they were not out of Egypt. They were still in Pharaoh's territory. They had the knowledge of deliverance from the judgment of God that had fallen upon the firstborn (of the blood of the lamb as having met and sheltered them from that), yet they were still in conflict with Pharaoh. At the appointed time they set out on their journey. Leaving the world, they forsake Egypt, the place where they had been slaves ; and Pharaoh, the prince of the world, pursues after them. Then comes dread and dismay. Till we know that the death of Christ has emancipated us from the country of Satan, we never know full rest of soul. Satan can make some claim on us till we can tell him that we are dead and risen with Christ. Because they had been slaves to the power of Pharaoh, and because they dreaded Pharaoh (and there is no wonder), they had not the faith that says, " If God be for us," etc. Pharaoh was stronger than Israel ; but God was stronger than Pharaoh. When they lifted up their eyes and beheld the Egyptians marching after them, they were sore afraid. 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." They were here in a worse condition as to their feelings than ever before. And it is so often with saints. We have need of the power of God with us and for us, and to know it too (as well as that when the judgment of God was against us the blood satisfied His judgment) in order to fulness of peace. I may have seen the virtue of Christ's blood to screen from judgment; but it is quite a different thing to have a constant settled certainty that God is for me.

The first thing, when God has awakened the soul to a sense of sin in His sight, is the question how it may be secured against its righteous judgment. Then it sees the blood on the doorposts, and gets peace. Therefore if I lose sight of the blood, God is still, to my soul's apprehension, a judge. Now that is not at all the proper place for a believer to be in. There is the justice of God, and " without shedding of blood, is no remission." If I can say that the blood which has been shed has satisfied that justice, I can see that God is no longer a judge-His justice has been satisfied. But if on the other hand His justice has to be satisfied, God is still a judge.

The Israelites got so terrified, distressed, and dismayed, so under the power of evil which was against them, that they got into the practical question in conflict whether God or Satan was to have them. And so constantly it is with saints. We have been such slaves to the power of Satan that we have not a consciousness of redemption to God. There was Pharaoh (Satan to us), the power of evil, pursuing them, and driving them up to this point, till death and judgment (of which the Red Sea is the symbol) stared them in the face. The question must be settled, if they could get through death and judgment. They could not get out of the difficulty by their own strength : the Red Sea was before them, and they could not get through it ; Pharaoh and all his host behind them, and there was no escaping by another road. They were quite shut in, and brought to the sense that there must be a deliverer or it was A over with them. All this

was exceedingly alarming in itself, but it was God's way of delivering. " And Moses said, 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." You can neither go backward nor forward ; you must just stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. " The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."

The Lord steps in, and puts Himself between Satan and His people. " 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; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these ; so that the one came not near the other all the night." Before He gives the comfort of deliverance, He always takes care that Satan does not touch us.

What comes to Israel then ? Verse 21 : The very thing that seemed to be their destruction becomes their salvation. " And Moses stretched out his hand 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, And the children of Israel 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." It was no battle for Israel against Pharaoh. " And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, and took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily : so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel : for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians. And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared ; and the Egyptians fled against it ; and the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them : there remained not so much as one of them. But 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."

Death is the wages of sin ; there is no escape ; the Red Sea must be passed. " It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." There is not one into whose hands this may fall, looking at it as our natural portion (I am not now speaking of Christ taking it for us, as He has for all those who believe ; as it goes on to say, " So Christ was once offered," etc.), but must come there. It is the natural consequence of sin. No matter whether Egyptians or Israelites, death and judgment overtake all. The Red Sea must be passed. But if met in grace, as it was by Israel, we shall see that this very thing is our full and unmingled deliverance. There poor Israel stood and looked at the eternal overthrow of their enemies. When the Egyptians were lying dead on the sea shore, they were safe, singing the song of redemption. True, the wilderness had to be passed, Amalek to be fought with, and the like ; but they were out of Egypt. They were singing the song of deliverance in simple-hearted confidence ; Egypt was left, and left for ever; the power of Pharaoh broken; not an Egyptian to be seen.

And now about the " assaying " to pass the Red Sea: it is that, alas! which many are doing at the present hour (in a better spirit indeed than these Egyptians, yet with an equally terrible result to themselves). I am not now speaking of the avowed enemies of God, though we are all by nature enemies of God; neither of

those who are pursuing after the people of God ; but of those who are " assaying " to pass through death and judgment in their own way. Just because they are in a Christian country and amongst Christians, they hope with the name of Christ to get to heaven in company with the people of God. But each must pass through all that is in God's road there. If we have got up to the Red Sea, death and Judgment must be passed; and where shall we be with all our Egyptian wisdom and learning, with all our chariots and horsemen, before death and judgment ? Death and judgment must be passed through. If we are " assaying " to do this without God for us ; if the question of death and judgment be not already and altogether settled (as it was for Israel when " by faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land "), it must be our destruction. People confess they have to die, and that after death there is a judgment, and that they must stand in that judgment ; but if they are "assaying" to do this in their own strength, it must be then positive and infallible destruction.

We must all, converted or unconverted, give up the world. The veriest votary of the world must sooner or later give up its vanities and its pleasures, its hopes and its interests ; he must give them up. The only difference is this, that the Christian gives them up for God; the worldling gives them up because he cannot keep them. The king of Egypt gave up Egypt and Egypt's court, as well as Moses ; but there is this difference, that the king of Egypt gave it up for judgment, Moses gave it up for Christ.

The very hopes people have will be their ruin. They see God's Israel going to Canaan, and they hope to get there too. But they are going to heaven in their own way, and they are going to heaven in their own strength. What does the Psalmist say ? Give thy servant a favourable judgment ? No : " Enter not into judgment with thy servant ? for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." They are hoping that it will be all well with them in the judgment; they take the name of Christ upon their lips, and think to get as safely to heaven as real believers. But they must pass through that which brings out into full light, clearly and evidently, what they really are ; they must pass the barrier God has set in the way ; they must go through death and judgment ; and there, there will " no man living be justified."

God's rod of power was stretched out when Israel was passing through, and there was no sea (except as a wall on their right hand, and on their left, shutting out Pharaoh). Where do we find the ground of the confidence of faith? It is altogether of a different sort from that of the mere professor. That sea! says the believer, I dare not go through it ; I dare not put a foot in it, except at the bidding of God, and then there is no sea. Because people call themselves Christians, the mischief is that they expect to get through as well as the real people of God. Because the way has been opened to faith, so that faith can tread it, and walk through as on dry ground, they think they can go too. The path is opened to faith, and there is not a drop of water there ; death is gone, and judgment is gone-all is over: it is dry ground, and God has made it so ; but it is the people of faith alone who can tread it. That which is dry ground to Israel is sea to all besides. Let the Egyptians attempt to follow, and things take their natural course : death and judgment are there, and there shall be no man living justified. The believer has no such thought as that of going to stand in the judgment. When God steps in between him and Pharaoh, what does he see ? The " salvation of the Lord." The very thing he dreaded becomes his security. Christ is there in the deep. He sees the judgment of God in all its weight and in all its power borne by Christ. " Deep calleth unto deep, at the noise of thy water-spouts : all thy waves and thy billows have gone over me." The waves and the billows of the Red Sea have gone over Christ. There I have seen death and judgment ; I have seen the Son of God sweating great drops of blood because of my sins ; I have seen the Son of God crying, " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ? " I have seen Him made sin, bearing the judgment due to sinners ; yes, I have seen all the weight and terror of those waves ; but they have passed over Christ. It is the thing that saves me, is

death ; it is the thing that saves me, is judgment. Grace has found its way into death, and it is all " dry land." God takes me there, and says, " Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord."

I see this great and full salvation in a risen Christ ; and what I get is, that death is mine. " All things," the apostle says, " are ours " ; yes, death is " ours." Satan has meddled with death and judgment, and his power in death is completely broken. Like Pharaoh, he has been overcome in the last stronghold in which he held us captive. " Through death " Christ " has destroyed him that had the power of death," etc. Have the waves of the Red Sea, the billows of the wrath of God, gone over Christ ? He has abolished all that was against us. Satan has come and meddled, and what has he done ? He has put Christ to death ; but the triumph of the prince of darkness was but the display of his defeat. He has come and grappled with Christ, put forth all his strength against Him, struck Him with the whole sting and power he had in death; but Christ has risen out of it on the other side, beyond his reach ; and now, morally, death has no power for the believer.

As the captain of salvation Christ had come down and put Himself in the place of those over whom Satan had the power of death by the judgment of God. If He has taken their cause in hand, He must be treated according to their circumstances. He stood there, and felt all the weight and horror of the place. Knowing the terrors of the wrath of God, the bitterness of the cup He had to drink, He prayed that if it were possible the cup might pass from Him. But love had brought Him there: "by the grace of God" He tasted death. God has settled the question. All the account against me, the ground of Satan's accusations appealing to the righteous judgment of God, is gone. God's wrath has all passed over. The moment we come up on the other side of the Red Sea it is all done; we have only our song to sing - The Lord has triumphed gloriously," etc. The Egyptians whom we have seen to-day we shall see again no more for ever.

Israel could sing this song before they took one step in the wilderness ; they could say, " Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation. The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestine. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them ; by the greatness of thy arm shall they be as still as a stone, till thy people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased. Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established. The Lord shall reign for ever and ever."

There was all possible difference marked now between poor Israel who had God for them, and the Egyptians who (with a great deal more human possibility of getting through) were driving on in the carelessness and folly of their own power, to be met and brought to a stand-still by the power of death and judgment; just like poor unconverted people, who, because they see Christians going to heaven, are " assaying " to go also; but without the knowledge of the blood (that which can alone settle the question of death and judgment, so that they should have God for them to step in between themselves and Pharaoh), as having been sprinkled on the houses in Egypt. To all such the very place of salvation will be the place of ruin.

Israel never sang this song when it was merely a question of blood on the door-posts. They did not sing it till they had taken four of five days' journey from the place of their bondage, and had been shut up between the Red Sea and Pharaoh. They were on the road, they had journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, and from Succoth to Etham, and they were encamped before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and

the sea. They had left Egypt, and had brought over all the malice of Satan against them. But the power of God was with them and for them, and it was simply, " Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." The controversy was between God and Pharaoh (not between Israel and Pharaoh); and it was soon settled. God would have us broken down to this. They had seen the blood upon the door-posts (there was not any question of sin between themselves and God; weak, feeble, and failing, they might be, but their sins were blotted out) ; they had set out in good earnest from Egypt, with their kneading-troughs bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders. Now they sing of accomplished redemption. They had the desert to tread, where there was no way, nor food, nor water ; the manna had to be gathered day by day, and if the sun was up it was all gone. Spiritual diligence is needed : " The diligent soul shall be made fat." But they were redeemed, and they had God with them, and God for them, to lead and to guide them in the way.

Well, beloved, have our souls seen this redemption ? Have we been brought yet to the Red Sea, and to feel that we could not tread the path opened to faith in our own strength ; that if we attempted to do it we should be drowned ? And have we found that it is no sea, but dry ground, that there is not a drop of water left there ? If we have known the blood of Christ as our only hope before God, looking at Him as a judge ; if we have known that we must leave Egypt and tread the wilderness on our way to the promised rest, we may still be in measure unable to say, " Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed," etc. That does not mean that we are not on the road, but that we do not know, properly speaking, God to be for us. We may as sinners have looked simply to the blood ; but if we have not fully understood the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ as emancipating us from the country and power of Satan, we have not stood still to see the salvation of the Lord. The waves and the billows of God's wrath have gone over the head of Christ ; and He has made it to be no sea. He has come down into the very place of wrath on account of sin; and He has risen out of it, and all is over. The thunderbolt has come on the head of Christ, and the storm is over for faith. Nothing gives such a sense of the horribleness of sin, nothing is such a testimony to the judgment of God against sin, as seeing Christ under it ; and yet nothing is such a testimony to the love of God towards the poor sinner.

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