

GOD IS KEEPING HIS PROMISES BY PUTTING US IN IMPOSSIBLE SITUATIONS

Exodus 13:17-14:31

Please review this week's catechism question.

Did you meet anyone new this past Sunday morning at church?

INTRODUCTION

Describe a seemingly hopeless, humanly impossible situation you have been in or are in.

It is impossible to live in this world and not be confronted by hopeless situations. Whether it is failed health, failed relationships, failed businesses, failed government or failed dreams you don't have to look very far to find hopeless conditions. If you are not currently confronted with an impossible circumstance it is only a matter of time before you will be. This story that we are going to consider today is given to us so that we can find hope in hopeless situations. We will discover through this account of God's rescuing the nation Israel from Pharaoh and his army how God brings impossible circumstances into our lives for very good reasons. We don't need to despair when we are powerless in the face of circumstances in our lives because God is the one who creates the difficulties and saves us through them for our good and his glory.

STUDY

1. In 13:17 to 14:4 what are the things that the Lord did to lead the people of Israel and help them trust him?

He led them away from the road along the Mediterranean Sea through the territory of the Philistines to the southeast towards the desert bordered by the Red Sea. He did this because he knew they could not handle being confronted with war but would immediately want to return to the "safety" of Egypt. He led them to a camp along the Red Sea where they were hemmed in by mountains, marshes and the sea.

God made sure the Israelites carried the bones of Joseph with them. These bones were a physical reminder that God was fulfilling the promises he had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These bones witnessed to the fact that God had promised to bring them out of the land of Egypt through Joseph some 400 years prior to this event. God made his presence visible by providing a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to lead them on their journey. God told Moses to tell the Israelites where they were to go and what would happen when they did so. The Lord told Israel, through Moses that he was going to harden Pharaoh's heart so that he would think they were "wandering around the land in confusion" and so he will pursue them. The Lord told them the reason he was going to do this was in order to gain glory through Pharaoh and his entire army. In short, God has not only miraculously delivered Israel out of Egypt but he has through many different ways shown them he is with them and he is leading them and he is directing all the events that happen to them for his glory.

2. Does God tell Israel everything he plans to do and every reason as to why he is doing what he does? What do the Israelites know for sure?

God does not tell them why he is preventing them from taking the easy road along the coast. He does not tell them any details of the future except for what Pharaoh will think when he hears about their journey and that he will then pursue them. What they know for sure is that God is fulfilling the promise he made long ago to lead his people out of Egypt and into the land of Canaan. They know that he is going to get glory for himself through Pharaoh and his army pursuing the Israelites. They know by a visible sign that God is with them and leading them.

3. What is the relationship between 14:1-4 and 14:5-9?

God says what Pharaoh is going to do and states he is going to harden his heart so that he will do these things and then we see Pharaoh doing exactly what God said. God's word is the ultimate cause behind the effect of Pharaoh's choice to pursue. Yet, we also see that Pharaoh and his advisors are making a real choice with real reasons. They are not doing what they do contrary to their desires but

completely in line with their desires. They want to pursue Israel and bring them back and God wants them to pursue Israel.

4. According to Romans 8:28, 11:33-36, Ephesians 1:11, Isaiah 45:7, how much of reality is God personally directing? How many things is he working out as he desires?

God is working out all things according to the purposes of his will for the good of his people. All things includes all good and all evil in the world.

5. How many of the details/circumstances of your life has God ordained? How does this make you feel?

6. What can you know for sure about God's reasons for all the circumstances of your life? How does this make you feel?

He is leading you into these situations for your eternal good and his glory.

God creates hopeless conditions and saves us through them so that his greatness is seen and admired by wisely directing all the details of our lives.

7. What do 13:18b and 14:8b tell us about the Israelites (The word translated "boldly" in the NIV can also be translated, "defiantly, proudly". It literally means "with uplifted hand". Think of athletes' hands when they win the race or score the touchdown or hit the homerun)? What was their emotional condition as they left Egypt?

They think of themselves as a strong and powerful army. They have plundered the Egyptians and are free men and women. They are full of pride and self-confidence. They view themselves as powerful victors.

8. How do the Israelites respond when they see the Egyptian army approaching them?

They are filled with terror and cried out to the Lord. Their self-confidence is crushed and they are filled with despair and hopelessness.

9. What is the connection between their "crying out to the Lord" and in the next verse, "they said to Moses"? What kind of "crying out to the Lord" did they engage in?

This is not the "crying out" of faith. This is the crying out of unbelief and blame and accusation. While they speak to Moses, they are actually talking to the Lord. They accuse the Lord of not loving them but of actually plotting their destruction. They treat God as if he is powerless and the Egyptians are powerful. They believe being slaves in Egypt is better than being the people of God in the desert and being threatened by the Egyptians. They claim they knew better than the Lord. They were right when they told Moses to leave them alone in Egypt and the Lord was wrong bringing them out. They say they wish that God would never have talked to them or come to their rescue.

10. What kind of life do the Israelites expect God to give them?

They expect a trouble free existence. Anything less than that proves that God is powerless and/or cruel.

11. How does Moses respond to their cry of terror in vv. 13-15? (Note the implication in God's words to Moses in v. 15.)

Moses tells the Israelites not to be afraid but to stand and watch God fight for them. He says that the Egyptians they fear right now they will never see again. All they have to do to see this salvation is be still, be quiet and watch. Then he prays and asks God to do what he has just told Israel that he is going to do.

12. List all the things both Moses and the Israelites have seen, experienced and been told by God.

All these people had seen God deliver them with ten powerful plagues, all of their firstborn sons had been spared under the blood of the lamb, they had plundered Egypt, they were no longer slaves, they had the

pillar of fire and cloud visibly present to them, they had the bones of Joseph as a sign of God's faithful promises, God told them through just the day before that this was going to happen.

13. What does this rebellion by the Israelites and this faith and prayer by Moses tell us about God's purposes in sending trouble to those who profess to follow Christ? What do we learn about how to respond to hopeless conditions?

When life is going your way, when everyone is safe and healthy, when the bills are paid, when the retirement fund is growing, when vacations come at regular intervals, when the children are obedient and doing well in school, when there are friends to do things with on Friday nights, it is easy to say you are trusting God. When there is nothing standing between you and the perfect life you want, it is easy to act like a Christian. But when God sends trouble that interferes with the perfect life you deserve, that's when you get to find out what you are really trusting in. When God sent the Egyptian army and all their hopes for an easy life were threatened, what was truly in their hearts came out through their lips. These are not a believing people. These people are trusting in themselves, not in the Lord who has promised to save them. The Israelites stand before us as the chief evidence of the depth of human sinfulness.

Moses, on the other hand, believes what God has said. He shows them and us how we are to respond to hopeless conditions. We are to believe the promises of God. Moses did not know how God was going to deliver them. God had not told him the specifics. He only knew that God would do what he had promised. He knew that God was the one who sent the Egyptian army. He knew that God had promised, beginning with Abraham, to bring his people safely to the Promised Land. Therefore, he knew that these Egyptians would not prevail against them. Knowing God was in charge did not discourage him from prayer but motivated him to prayer. He is no fatalist. He prays and he tells Israel what to do.

14. How do you normally respond when things you want or need or love are threatened? What can you do to respond in faith more than in fear?

God creates hopeless conditions and saves us through them so that his greatness is seen and admired by exposing us to threat in order to expose what is in our heart.

15. How does God respond to the unbelieving Israelites and praying Moses?

Apparently God ignores the stunning unbelief of Israel. He tells Moses to stop praying to start acting. He is to tell the Israelites to pack up and head for the sea. He commands Moses to lift up his staff over the Red Sea to divide the waters so Israel can pass through on dry land. He reminds Moses of what he said before. He is going to harden hearts of the Egyptians so that they will follow Israel into the midst of the sea and then he will get glory through Egypt. Then he commands his messenger to move to the rear of Israel and so they pillar of cloud moves between Egypt and Israel and so keeps Egypt at bay all night long. They pillar of fire gives light to Israel all night but immerses the Egyptians in darkness. God sends an east wind through the night so that the water of the sea is divided. The Israelites go through the sea on dry ground throughout the night with a wall of water on their left and on their right. In the morning the pillar moved (presumably) and the Egyptians pursued Israel into the sea. Then the Lord threw them into confusion and they suddenly realized that the Lord was fighting for Israel. It was their turn to be terrified and they turned to flee from before the Lord but it was too late. The Lord told Moses, on the other side of the sea, to stretch out his hand and when he did the waters returned to their original place, drowning all the soldiers who followed them into the sea.

16. Do the Egyptians deserve to be destroyed? Was it just for God to destroy them? Why or why not?

Egypt deserves what it gets. These are wicked people who have refused to submit to the Lord, in spite of his revealing himself and his will in the most graphic and clear of ways. They are racists, they are full of hatred for Israel, they are greedy and cruel. They only care about using and abusing the people of Israel and have no interest in

trusting or worshipping the God who made them and who gives them life and breath and everything else.

17. Does Israel deserve to be saved? Why or why not?

Israel does not deserve to be saved. The most startling thing in this story is not the destruction of the Egyptians but the salvation of the Israelites. In spite of all that the Lord has done for them, in spite of all the evidences of his trustworthiness, they refused to believe. Yet, God, contrary to what they deserve and not because of anything they have ever done delivers them from this great threat. You can find no reason in the Israelites for why God does not cause the waters of the Red Sea to cover them. Notice, God saves them and then they have faith. God did not save them because of their faith. His salvation was a completely free and sovereign decision on his part to be gracious, to act contrary to what Israel deserved.

18. How is what happens to Israel a perfect illustration of Romans 5:8?

Just like Israel we are sinners deserving God's wrath. God has been amazingly kind to everyone in this room and yet we refuse to trust him and we blame him for any hard thing that comes our way. Yet, God looks at us in our sin and decides to love us and he shows that he loves us in killing his son for us. Rather than kill us, he kills Jesus. The result is that we walk through the waters of his wrath safely due to God's punishing Christ in our place. God rescues us from the greatest danger we face, his wrath due us for our sin. This is in spite of the fact that we exhibit, on a regular basis the fact that we do not really trust God and do not in any way deserve to be treated well by him. There is a day coming to all those who belong to Christ when the most impossible thing you can imagine will happen. God will welcome sinners into heaven forever, for the sake of Jesus.

19. How did Israel respond to God's salvation (v. 31)?

They feared the Lord and they trusted him and his servant Moses.

20. What comes first, God loving and saving or our believing? See John 3:1-8 & Ephesians 3:8-9 for another statement of this fact.

Faith is the product of God's saving work, not the cause of it. Everyone whom God saves believes the gospel but faith itself is part of the effect of God's saving work.

God creates hopeless conditions and saves us through them so that his greatness is seen and admired by graciously saving us from the real threat.