

THE 'RED SEA' EXPERIENCE

By John Gagliardi



Most of us (and “most of us are like the rest of us”) have had “Red Sea” experiences – times when our backs are to the wall, and unless God comes through for us, we are done. You might be having one right now.

It is always good to read the stories of how God moves “just at the right time – in His perfect timing” – not in our timing. It happens enough for it to have become a Christian “cliché” – that God comes though at the 11th hour – or sometimes it feels more like the 59th second of the 60th minute of the 11th hour.

Having had my share of times of dipping my toes in the red Sea, I have come to the conclusion that it is all about coming to the end of our resources. It is us finally saying to God, “I’ve tried in my own strength – it hasn’t worked – over to You, Lord”.

The Bible tells us that His strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12: 9). That what is impossible for us, is possible for God (Matthew 19: 26). I have written previously on what Selwyn Hughes (Every Day with Jesus) once called the “3 R’s” – Revelation, Reversal and Restoration.

It is a pattern we see in the lives of many Biblical heroes, Joseph being one of the best examples, where God implants a dream or a vision (Revelation), followed by a time of confusion, failure, false starts and anxiety (Reversal), finally leading to a time where we give up in our own strength, and finally turn it back over to God, whereupon He moves miraculously to bring the vision to reality in His time and in His way (Restoration).

Ring any bells with you? For Moses, he had the “burning bush” experience, and God’s command to him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land (Exodus 3:1-10):

"Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh, and that you may bring My children, the children of Israel, out of Egypt".

Calls from God don't come much clearer or more dramatic than that – and after some interesting encounters with everything from flies and frogs to locusts and hail, the massed Israelites finally walked out of Egypt and set out for the Promised Land (Exodus 13: 41,51).

So far so good for Moses – out of Egypt, collecting silver and gold, and off into the wild blue yonder, with pillars of cloud and fire to lead the way – "a piece of cake", he must have thought. But he had forgotten that pesky "second R" – the Reversal.

"Now it was told the king of Egypt that the people had fled, and the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was turned against the people ... so he made ready his chariot and took his people with him ... he took 600 choice chariots ... and he pursued the children of Israel... and overtook them camping by the sea beside Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon" (Exodus 14:5-9).

The Bible records – not surprisingly – that the Israelites were "very afraid", and started regretting ever having left Egypt. They took their fear and anger out on their leader, Moses: "Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? ... It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness" (Exodus 14:10-12).

With the Red Sea in front of them and the Egyptian army behind them, it was very much being between "a rock and a hard place" for Moses and the Israelites. No wiggle room at all. It was a stark choice – faith or fear?

Moses, God's anointed leader, chose faith – he turned to God, and the Holy Spirit spoke through him these timeless words of absolute trust and obedience:

"Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For these Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace" (Exodus 14:13,14)

God told Moses to stretch out his rod towards the Red Sea, and when Moses trusted and obeyed, God did the miracle – He parted the Red Sea: "Then 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 ... so the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left" (Exodus 14:21,22).

Henry Blackaby in his "Encounter" note in his Blackaby Study Bible says of this passage: "Following God's will can sometimes be difficult. Don't panic. Stay where God has led you. Quitting or fleeing is evidence of a doubting heart. Remain where God placed you and you will witness the miraculous".

Moses stood in faith through the "second R", through the Reversal phase, until he saw God move miraculously, part the Red Sea, save the Israelites and drown the Egyptians – as precise and dramatic a "third R" – Restoration as you're ever likely to see.

If you feel right now like you are at that "Red Sea" place – the 11th hour has come and you are still waiting – listen to God's voice telling you to "stand still" – stand in faith, and wait on the lord. God is good, and God is faithful – if He says he will do it, He will do it, no ifs or buts.

"Every Word of God is pure: He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him" (Proverbs 30: 5).
"The grass withers and its flower falls away, but the Word of God endures forever" (1 Peter 1: 24).

Moses was not the only Biblical hero to be in that “rock and a hard place” position – it almost seems like this is the normal way God operates as He leads us from strength to strength and from glory:

- King Jehoshaphat was facing hordes of enemies, “a great multitude”, and instead of turning tail and running, he instead chose, like Moses, to turn to God for His miraculous provision and deliverance. God said to him: “Do not be afraid or dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's ... Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem.” The enemy hordes were defeated, and Jehoshaphat and his army were three days collecting the plunder! (2 Chronicles 20: 1-25)
- King Hezekiah was in a similar position, under imminent threat from the Assyrian army led by Sennacherib ... like Moses and Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah turned to the Lord as His first (and only) option: “Therefore thus says the Lord, concerning the king of Assyria: ‘He shall not come into this city ... by the way he came by the same shall he return ... for I will defend this city to save it.’” True to His Word, as always, the Lord wiped out the Assyrians “...185,000; and when the people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses – all dead” (Isaiah 37:33-36)
- When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, they decided they would take matters into their own hands and wipe him out before he became an even bigger problem to them: “The Philistines went and deployed themselves in the Valley of Rephaim. So David inquired of the Lord, ‘Shall I go up against the Philistines?’ And the Lord said to David, ‘Go up for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into your hand’. So David went to Baal Perazim, and David defeated them there; and he said, ‘The Lord has broken through my enemies like a breakthrough of water’.”

In the New Testament, although there are not so many spectacular battles fought by God's armies, there are some very telling examples of people being brought into “Red Sea” experiences, where their last and only resort was God:

- Jairus, “one of the rulers of the synagogue”, came to Jesus because his daughter was “at the point of death”, and in fact, later died. Jesus said: “Do not be afraid; only believe”. He took the child by the hand, and said to her, “Talitha, cumi”, which is translated, “Little girl, I say to you, arise”. According to the Scripture, the little girl “ ... arose and walked, for she was 12 years old, and they were overcome with great amazement” (Mark 5:22,23,35-42)
- On His way to heal Jairus' daughter, a woman who had been afflicted with a “flow of blood” for 12 years, and who had spent all her money on doctors, reached out to Jesus and “touched His garment” with instantaneous results: “Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction”. Jesus said to her: “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction” (Mark 5: 25-34)
- As Jesus came down from the “Mount of the Beatitudes”, and as He entered Capernaum, a centurion came up to Him pleading for his servant, who was “paralyzed and dreadfully tormented”. Jesus readily agreed to “come and heal him”, but the centurion then delivered his famous speech, culminating in the faith-filled declaration: “I am not worthy that You should come under my roof, but only speak a word, and my servant will be healed’. Amazed by the centurion's absolute faith, Jesus said: “Assuredly I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! ... Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you” (Matthew 8:5-13).

Although more personal and individual than the battle stories cited from the Old Testament, the three New Testament examples are no less striking for the fact that people were at their

wits' end, saw no way forward without the intervention of God, and threw themselves on His mercy in faith.

Jesus, in these circumstances, made some of His most important statements on faith and believing:

- Do not be afraid; only believe!
- Your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be healed of your affliction
- Go your way, and as you have believed, so let it be done for you

By taking our fear and our anxiety to the feet of Jesus in faith, He promises to hear us and answer us. This is the consistent witness of the Word of God, and it doesn't matter whether our particular problem relates to our health, our finances, our family, our career, or our relationships, whatever it is, Jesus is always bigger than our problem.

He says to us: "Come unto me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28, 29).

It doesn't matter what you are going through, or for how long you have been going through it – in God's eternal timetable, the day of your salvation is today, if you will just humble yourself and come to Him in simple, childlike faith.

God's promise to help us in the time of His favour and salvation, set out in Isaiah 49: 8 and developed and made more immediate in Paul's famous passage in the sixth chapter of 2 Corinthians, is given a powerful and interesting new emphasis in The Message translation:

When the time's ripe, I answer you. When victory's due, I help you

I heard your call in the nick of time; the day you needed me, I was there to help. Well, now is the right time to listen, the day to be helped. Don't put it off; don't frustrate God's work by showing up late, throwing a question mark over everything we're doing.

Our work as God's servants gets validated – or not- in the details. People are watching us as we stay at our post, alertly, unswervingly ... in hard times, tough times, bad times; when we're beaten up, jailed, and mobbed; working hard, working late, working without eating; with pure heart, clear head, steady hand; in gentleness, holiness, and honest love; when we're telling the truth, and when God's showing his power; when we're doing our best setting things right; when we're praised, and when we're blamed; slandered, and honored; true to our word, though distrusted; ignored by the world, but recognized by God; terrifically alive, though rumored to be dead; beaten within an inch of our lives, but refusing to die; immersed in tears, yet always filled with deep joy; living on hand-outs, yet enriching many; having nothing, having it all.

Open up your lives. Live openly and expansively!