
Saved -- But Miserable!

By David Wilkerson

May 2, 1994 Thousands of God's people lined the shore, watching as a miraculous scene unfolded: "The swift waters of the sea had collapsed over Pharaoh's great army!"

What an incredible scene it must have been -- the sights and sounds awesome to behold! Horses bellowed, soldiers screamed, chariot wheels spun off in all directions, men bobbed up for air and then disappeared beneath the flood tide, thousands of bodies washed up on the shore.

An estimated one-and-a-half million Israelites watched all this take place - - 600,000 men, Scripture says, and probably another 900,000 wives, grandparents and children. I picture the people as simply awestruck -- falling on their knees, their hands raised in praise, overwhelmed by the sight of God's power at work. Moses' sister Miriam spontaneously led hundreds of dancing damsels in a victory march. Thousands of tambourines rattled, while tens of thousands of exuberant voices shouted out loud hosannas!

If you had been there that day, you might have asked any Israelite, "Hasn't this great, miraculous sight made such an impression on you that you'll never again doubt God -- no matter what you face in the journey ahead?"

Almost certainly the answer would have been, "Yes! Yes! How could anybody doubt a God who buries a whole army? He's a miracle-working God -- we've never seen anything like it. We'll never doubt Him again!"

That great faith in Israel lasted exactly three days! I believe the people of Israel wanted to trust God with all their heart, and probably were convinced they would. The men and women of renown and the elders of high principles all greatly desired to spend their lifetime trusting Him completely. They fully intended to march every mile to the Promised Land full of faith, and to enter it saying, "We've seen the ten plagues of Egypt. We've seen how God marvelously opened the Red Sea and destroyed our enemy. We've witnessed all the miraculous things He's done. Who could ever doubt such a great and mighty God?"

And so it is today! Nearly all true followers of Christ expect to trust God to the very end. We all intend to live our lives full of faith, never doubting, never complaining. We say, "I've seen miracles in my own life -- I've had my own Red Sea experiences. How could I doubt Him, when He's done all these things for me?"

Yet I ask you: Have you ever thought that one day you might end up like ungrateful, complaining, doubting Israel? Sadly, many Christians in these last days have already become like Israel! The Bible declares that in the end times many will lose their faith and leave their first love. They will end up in a desert of doubt and unbelief -- saved, but miserable!

Paul wrote to Timothy,

* "(Keep) faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck" (1 Timothy 1:19).

Paul wrote these words soon after Pentecost -- just after God had moved mightily in their midst. And he was saying that already many had been shipwrecked by unbelief!

Jesus Himself said,

* "...when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8).

In other words: "When I return for My people, will I find true faith among them?"

I once had a hard time swallowing those words. "But, Lord -- look at the great faith that's all around! So many are walking in faith, talking of faith, preaching faith. There even are so-called faith ministries!"

Then the Lord reminded me: Out of those 600,000 Israelite men who determined to trust Him always, only two kept their faith! That's right -- 599,998 lost their faith! Only Joshua and Caleb believed and never doubted -- and they were the only ones who entered into the Promised Land. Every other Israelite over age twenty -- each of whom had witnessed the plagues on Egypt, had praised God for deliverance at the Red Sea -- died in doubt in a miserable wilderness!

This Message Is About How a Person Can Be Saved -- But Very Miserable! I want to talk to you about how you can come out of terrible bondage and yet never enter into the fullness of Christ! The truth is, many Christians spend their entire lives lost in a wilderness -- plagued by depression, fear, restlessness and unbelief.

First, you need to know what the Promised Land signifies. It does not represent heaven, as many think. On the day the Israelites entered Canaan, wars began -- yet we know that when we get to heaven, all wars will cease.

Rather, Canaan stood for life at its fullest -- abundant life. Canaan was a land "flowing with milk and honey" -- and that meant abundant blessings, a peaceful way of life, rest from all fear.

Beloved, our Promised Land today is Jesus Christ alive in us! He is our inheritance. We rest in His faithfulness, we enjoy His presence, and we are joyful in Him all our days. God never intended for us to become stuck in a wilderness of emptiness and drought. Through His Son, He has provided for us abundant life -- a life free from all worry and anxiety. It is a life that is totally surrendered into God's hands -- trusting fully in His will and love!

But it was because of doubt that Israel sent out twelve trusted men to spy out the good land. I often have wondered: Why would they send out spies if God had already told them the land was good and was theirs?

It was because of fear! In fear they sent out the twelve -- and ten of them returned with a coward's report! They told stories of giant people, great walled cities, impossible barriers. They warned, "The people there are like giants -- we're mere grasshoppers compared to them. That land will eat us up!"

Only two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, kept their faith in God's power to deliver. They testified, "We're able to go up against them if God is pleased with us. They are meat for us! How can you compare giants with our mighty God?"

But that night the other ten spies went from tent to tent and tribe to tribe, spreading doubt and fear. And all night long the people could be heard weeping in their tents:

- "And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night" (Numbers 14:1).

What a night of infamy it was -- and how grieved God must have been! The angels in heaven must have been incredulous, wondering, "How could such a thing happen? How could a nation so miracle-saturated forget God's power and faithfulness to them? How could anyone conclude that God is not able to bring them into the land?"

Yet listen to Israel's blasphemous words of doubt and bitterness:

- "And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in his wilderness! And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return to Egypt" (verses 2-4).

Go back to Egypt? With no water, no manna, no direction, no cloud or pillar of fire to guide them? They couldn't have lasted a week on their own! Even if they did make it to the Red Sea, how would they cross it? And if they did cross it, how would they face an angry nation that had lost all its firstborn, its army and its Pharaoh? Egypt would seek revenge!

Perhaps right now you're in the fight of your life. The enemy is coming at you on all sides. You know you have a mighty God on your side -- but all you can see is the battle in front of you. You're saying, "Oh God, why did You bring me into this mess? I can't make it! When I got saved, I didn't know it was going to be this hard, that I would have to fight so much. I thought I'd just march along in Jesus, and everything would be okay."

So now some are thinking about simply packing it in and going back to their old life. But how far do you think they'll get? They have no direction, no provision, no Spirit of God to lead them. And what do you think the devil will do to them once they make it back? He's mad they were saved in the first place -- and now they've stood up and testified against him. Do you think he's going to open his arms to them? No! He'll be after their blood -- he'll try to kill them! He wants revenge!

Recently, two troubled young women walked away from our Hannah House. And, tragically, within a few weeks they walked right into death: Both overdosed on drugs. We've seen destruction come time after time to those who say, "I'm going back to Egypt!" It is because the devil is a harsh taskmaster -- and the wages of sin are death!

Nehemiah said of Israel:

- "...and in their rebellion [they] appointed a captain to return to their bondage..." (Nehemiah 9:17).

They returned to bondage! They thought they would go back to something easier than the spiritual battle they'd been facing. But they hadn't seen anything yet!

Listen to these incredible words from the Lord:

- "...How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they" (Numbers 14:11-12).

God said, "I've had it with these people! They're confirmed in their unbelief. The more I do for them, the more they act in doubt and fear. Now I'm going to wipe them off the map! I'm going to destroy them, Moses. And then I'll build a new nation out of you, because you've been faithful."

But Moses pleaded with God to show His great mercy, long-suffering and forgiveness:

- "Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now" (verse 19).

This brings me to the very heart of my message:

You Can Be Forgiven -- But Shut Out of Fullness! You can be the recipient of God's great mercy, blessings and protection -- yet never enjoy the life of power and rest He intends for you. That is the consequence of unbelief!

Now, God heard Moses' pleading, and He pardoned Israel's horrible sins:

- "And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word" (Numbers 14:20).

But what was the people's reaction?

- "(They)...refused to obey, neither were they mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but they hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not" (Nehemiah 9:16-17).

God still showed His mercy, love and longsuffering toward unbelieving Israel:

- "Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go. Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, and withheldst not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst. Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not" (verses 19-21).

You may be thinking, "They were in good shape! They were pardoned, still being guided, still enjoying the Spirit in measure, still being cared for, fed and clothed. What more could they want?"

Oh, but there is something terribly wrong here -- something most sad and tragic! You see, they were saved, forgiven and blessed -- but they were going nowhere! They were wasting their lives, because they had been shut out forever from God's best. They were doomed to a "wilderness life" -- being dry,

troubled, restless, empty, miserable for the rest of their days. And they would never make it to the Promised Land!

- "They shall not see the land..." (verse 23).

They were shut out, disinherited! God literally broke His promise to them -- the promise of bringing them into a life of peace and rest:

- "...and ye shall know my breach of promise" (verse 34).

Why did God take such drastic action? Why did He breach His promise and condemn them to a life in a howling, dry desert full of serpents? It was because of unbelief -- plain and simple! They had made it a habit to forget all of God's past faithfulness. And in each new crisis they murmured and complained!

But, beloved, these were not a forsaken people! They were saved, freed from bondage. The blood sacrifices continued. The manna kept coming. The water from the Rock still flowed. The pillar and the cloud were still visible. Yet Israel was a flawed, lifeless people. God called them evil!

* "But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:17-19).

Israel wasn't cut off because of idolatry, fornication or covetousness. It was because of unbelief! God told them, "You're not going anywhere. Your life is going to be wasted in the wilderness!"

Can you imagine the misery of living in fear an entire lifetime? For forty years these people went in circles, their lives wrapped up in simply surviving. They became lost in petty problems -- bored, going through the motions, always arguing, always sick, constantly worrying about things that would never happen.

This is a picture of what happens when you lose your faith! You worry about every petty, little problem that comes along. You always question God, "Why?" And you never have any strength, power, joy or hope. God says to you, "Go back to the wilderness! No, I will not forsake you. But you'll never get anywhere!"

You may object at this point, "All of this is Old Testament theology. In the New Testament, God doesn't treat His children so severely."

But the writer of Hebrews answers, "Oh yes, He does!"

- "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God... Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:12; 4:11).

We are warned not to fall into the same unbelief that doomed Israel to the wilderness life: "You will

never enter in! Your life will be wasted and dry! God is going to give you over to doubt and unbelief -- and you'll spend the rest of your Christian walk in utter misery!" Unbelief can keep us from entering in, as it did Israel!

I am so glad I was not in Moses' shoes during those forty years in the wilderness, pastoring that motley congregation! How would you like to be a pastor who is told by God, "Don't preach faith to your people anymore. It will do no good! They're hardened in their unbelief, confirmed in their doubt, habitual complainers. I'm going to forbear them -- but they will live out their days in misery, going in circles. You have forty years of unhappy funerals ahead of you!"

Even Moses had to learn: God's mercy, forgiveness and lovingkindness cannot erase the consequences of deep-seated unbelief! Unbelief breaches every promise of God. It shuts you out of the fullness of Christ, out of all hope. And it drives you into a dry wilderness!

I believe the great majority of Christians never enter into the restful life of Christ's fullness. They spend all of their days saved but miserable! They do not experience the joys of victories won by faith; they never know a life free from continual worry; they never enjoy the peace and joy that come to those who trust all things into the Lord's hands. Only a few Joshuas and Calebs ever enter by faith into the abundant life!

Here is another great lesson we need to learn from Israel's experience:

We Need to Be Very Careful of What We Say Before the Lord When Facing Difficulty! How dangerous it is to speak doubt to others! Scripture says the ten spies who "...did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the Lord" (Numbers 14:37).

And what of the complaining congregation? What of all those who cried, "Why has God brought us into this land, to kill us by the sword? He should have let us die in the wilderness!"

God answered them: "All right. You'll die in the wilderness!"

- "As truly as I live...as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: Your carcasses shall fall in the wilderness; and all that were numbered of you...from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me" (verses 28-29).

These may seem like harsh words to you. You may think, "But the Israelites were only human! They were uprooted from the land, traveling here and there, worried about their children. They spoke out of human fear -- but their response was only natural. Surely God would understand that."

No! God isn't looking for "just human" responses -- He's looking for faith responses! He wants a people who will say, "I believe God's Word -- and I believe He is more concerned for my family than I am! I will not act in fear, because He is faithful to keep me in these troubled times. Even sickness and death cannot separate me from his love and care for me!"

- "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our

bodies washed with pure water" (verse 10:22).

If We Are Going to Make It in These Last Days, We Must Be Strong in Faith -- and Our Faith Must Be Founded Only on God's Word! Satan's strategy in these last days is to get you to doubt the reality of Jesus! He will do everything in his power to make you doubt that God is with you in all things. Satan has appointed seventy-four highly educated theologians to cast doubt on the divinity of Christ. This group is called "The Jesus Seminar," and they are supposedly among the top biblical scholars in America. They meet twice a year to vote on which words of Jesus are fake and which are authentic. So far, they have voted that almost all of His words are myth -- phony!

Revisionism is the theological fashion of the day. Three recently published books claim the following about Jesus:

- He was a low-caste illiterate.
- He did not preach salvation from sin through His sacrifice.
- He never delivered the Sermon on the Mount.
- He never healed the lame, cured diseases or performed a miracle.
- There were no loaves and fishes. There was no water turned into wine, no raising of Lazarus.
- There was no Crucifixion or Resurrection. Instead, His body was consumed by wild dogs.
- There was no Virgin Birth. All accounts of His life are myths.
- The worship of Christ is all propaganda.

Such rantings have gone on for centuries. But theologians are only now coming down from their ivory towers to propagate them.

One evangelical scholar has responded, "These men are trying to deconstruct Jesus and the gospels. But they can't provide a credible explanation for why through the centuries people have been ready to die for Him." He's right -- that kind of devotion isn't given to a man who's been eaten by dogs. It is reserved for One who has been resurrected and sits enthroned in heaven!

These blinded scholars are a joke; I don't think they cause even a flutter in God's mind. Yet what does affect the Lord's heart and move him to anger is the unbelief of those who claim to be devoted to

Him!

Let the Jesus Seminar mock God; let one million homosexuals parade through the streets and blaspheme His name. I don't think these are what offends God most. On the contrary, they are nothing in His mind compared to the worry and murmuring of His own people! What offends God most is unbelief!

Everything that riles God's Spirit is in His church -- because that is where his interests are! God's concern is that His people are being shaken in their faith, that they won't trust Him in their crises. Beloved, our worst sin is our unwillingness to believe He will do what He promised! And that offends Him more than adultery, fornication, drugs, alcohol or any other sin of the flesh!

His Word says,

- "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations" (2 Peter 2:9). "...God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Corinthians 10:13).

These verses are either the gospel, or they're lies. But if they're the gospel, then we must stand on them! God wants us to be able to say, "Lord, if I die standing here, trusting You to see me through, then let me die in faith. Live or die, I'm Yours!"

Let all the winds and waves of hell come at you. Let everything come at you. Our God said He is able -- and He knows how to deliver you!

He intended that you and I have all joy, peace, victory and rest in our walk. He is looking for men and women who will stand up against what's coming in this dark age -- servants who will stand with a calm and a peace because Christ abides in them.

God so desires for you to come into such a place of trust. He wants you never again to fear -- but to truly rest in His power and ability. He knows how to deliver you from all snares, all trials and temptations --

-- if you will but trust Him!

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