

Lift Up Your Rod

I've often said, "Use what God's put in your hand and you will achieve what God's put on your heart." For a Christian, this principle is essential to attaining success. Every one of you has something that God has placed in your grasp (or within reach), and when used correctly it will bring about spectacular results. However, the correct application of what you have in your hand is often reliant on two things – *faith* and *obedience*. **Faith** ensures that the outcome brings glory to God, and **obedience** guarantees that you get all the benefits.

Hebrews 11:29 says, "***By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land; whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.***" The crossing of the Red Sea is perhaps the most spectacular miracle in the Old Testament. And subsequent to this event, **Exodus 13:17** is the most significant verse in the life of the children of Israel. "***When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, 'If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt'.***"

In other words, there was a shorter and more direct route to Canaan that would have got them there sooner, and more importantly, it would have avoided the fatal pocket in which they had got trapped at the Red Sea. Yet God always knows best! So He will deal with us according to our mentality, strength of character and depth of determination. Like Peter, most of us imagine that we're stronger than we really are (**John 13:37**), and especially when it comes to temptation. Therefore, God will lead us in a way, and along a route, that is fully compatible with our frailties. Isn't this reassuring? God knew that His people had no stomach for war, and if threatened with serious conflict, they would have *changed their minds and returned to Egypt*. So he took them the long route and guided them by one of the strangest phenomena in history.

Exodus 13:21, "***By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.***" Wasn't this a marvellous act of loving-kindness? Here we see clearly that God is happy to accommodate our frailties; or as Calvin put it, "Adapt Himself to our ignorance."

The story of the departure of the children of Israel is a remarkable display of God's tender mercies but it's also a spectacle of the stubbornness of the human heart. Look at all those concerned... Pharaoh was given ten demonstrations of God's power and wrath, but it was not until he lost his own firstborn that he gave in. But he still changed his mind and took six hundred chariots to hunt down the Israelites. Nevertheless, such stubbornness was not limited to Pharaoh. The children of Israel were put to the test when Pharaoh began chasing them. And did they pass this test? No, they did not! Moses had called them a "stiff-necked" (stubborn) people and this was very evident.

Exodus 14:10-12, "***As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!'***" It is unbelievable that such people could be so forgetful and unthankful. But they were!

Notice, they prayed and called out to the Lord – which was quite normal and natural. Yet they didn't leave it at that. And this brought out a weakness in Moses as well. His first reaction (his public face) to the murmuring was this. ***“Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still”*** (Exodus 10:13-14). That was a very encouraging word and I'm sure he meant. But hidden between the lines of the very next verse we see Moses' heart of hearts. ***“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on’.***”

What's significant about this verse isn't what it says, but what was left out. After boldly proclaiming the salvation of the Lord, Moses must have thought, “What did I just say?” He got scared at his own words! Just imagine... Out of the corner of his eye, Moses sees Pharaoh advancing with his six hundred chariots. And in the face of this threat he tells the people to “stand still.” Everyone must have looked utterly confused! So Moses instinctively cries out to God saying, *“O God, what have I done? I'm going to get us all killed?”*

However, God responds with, *“Why are you crying out to Me?”* When living the life of faith, there comes a time when you should quit praying and **start doing**. There is a time when praying may be the cowardly thing to do, as it can be simply a ‘cop-out’. Too many believers opt for the sacrifice of more praying rather than to obey what God has already told them to do. God said to Moses, *“Get of your knees and tell the people to move on.”* And then He gives Moses specific instructions (verse 16), ***“Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.”***

Literally, *“Quit your crying and lift up your rod.”* Or, *“Stop your sobbing and use what you've got in your hand!”* This distinct action delivered the children of Israel and nothing else! Notice, the Lord will not ask you to do what He will not also equip you to do. We must understand that with every command that God gives comes the **power** and ability to perform it. Faith is simply accepting that if God said it that settles it! Nothing can cause God's word to be void of power. (Verse 21) ***“Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided...”***

Back to our opening scripture... ***“By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land.”*** Who can deny that God could have divided the Red Sea without Moses' stick? For God can do anything. But God gave Moses a rod, and He wanted him to use it. God forced Moses to initiate, as it were, this spectacular miracle. The Lord made him to obey! Moses didn't really have any other choice. It was do or die!

God has a unique and effective way of securing the correct response to His word. God didn't lead the children of Israel through the land of the Philistines, in case all of them went back to Egypt. He wanted instead to bring them to a place where they would have no choice but to turn to Him entirely and trust in Him completely. The Red Sea was the crunch – there was no turning back. For Moses, there was nothing else to do but use what God has placed in his hand. But for the people it meant stepping forward *in faith* knowing that there was no other way out. Both Moses and the people played their part, and God did the rest.

Notice, they walked across. They did not swim; they didn't run – they walked! Therefore, they were able to enjoy this spectacular sight close up. What's more, there was no need for wellies. The ground was perfectly

dry. *“By faith they had passed through the Red Sea **as by dry land.**”* And the waters were a wall on either side of them. Can you imagine being there? What an awesome experience it must have been. But see, it all started in fear and unbelief - with stubbornness and rebelliousness. Yet, God still got His way. Now, Moses’ work at the Red Sea was not finished. Equally great was Moses’ final use of the instrument that God had placed in his hand. Equally astounding was the miracle that ended the Egyptian’s threat. (Verse 28) ***“The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen – the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.”***

The very rod that was used to deliver Israel was also used to destroy the Egyptians. The same Word that saves some will condemn others. **Faith** does what those who do not believe cannot do. Besides (and perhaps our most important lesson from this story), faith also does what crying out to God cannot do. There comes a time that you must act. A time to **do** – a time to **obey** – a time to **lift up your rod!**

If God has placed a rod in your hand (and told you to do something), nothing will happen until you decide to lift up that rod. The *doing* is the vital part of this activity – it is true faith in action. So don’t be stubborn or neglectful, just place your trust in His faithfulness to watch over His word to perform it. And remember, *if you use what God has placed in your hand, He will grant you what He has put on your heart*. Your miracle is a movement away!