

The Image Of Liberty by Jeff Strite

Exodus 14:1-14:31

OPEN: (we showed the following video from the 10 Commandments with Heston and Yul Brenner) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jo0JMs-evQU>. (Beginning at 2:43 running till 4:09)

The year was 1856.

Artist Auguste Bartholdi was vacationing in Egypt and he was overwhelmed by what he saw. The grandeur of the pyramids, the stateliness of the Sphinx, and the beauty of the Nile all filled him with awe.

While he was there he met another visitor to Egypt, Ferdinand de Lesseps. De Lesseps was proposing a canal that would begin at the Red Sea and cut through the desert to ultimately join with the Mediterranean Sea saving merchant ships the long journey around the tip of the Africa.

Do you know the name of that Canal?

That's right, the Suez Canal.

Bartholdi was inspired by De Lessep's plan and he proposed designing a lighthouse for the entrance to this canal at the Red Sea. This was to be no ordinary lighthouse. This was going to be work of art. It would symbolize the light of Western civilization flowing to the East. Auguste worked on his idea for over 10 years... drawing plans and molding clay models. He scrapped plan after plan – until he found the right one, the perfect design.

His lighthouse would have been a huge robed lady standing taller than the Sphinx. In one hand she would hold the book of justice and in the other, a torch.

Only one problem remained. Who would pay for it? He looked everywhere, but no one was interested. So, when the Suez Canal finally opened – there was NO lighthouse.

Discouraged and disheartened, Auguste returned to France. Ten years of toil wasted.

But back home, the French government sought him out. They wanted to give a gift to America. They chose his lighthouse, which now stands in New York harbor.

Do you know the name of that grand lighthouse?

The Statue of Liberty.

(Joseph M. Stowell III in "The Upside of Down")

Now, the Statue of Liberty was originally designed to stand on the shore of the Red Sea at the entrance of the Suez Canal. But now Bartholdi's lighthouse stands in the harbor of New York City... and it has become the symbol of liberty for the world for over 100 years.

What we're reading about here in Exodus 14 is a different symbol of liberty.

It's not a statue.

It's an EVENT.

An event that – down through the centuries - has represented the power of God to give Liberty to His people. And it wasn't a statue standing on the shores of the Red Sea. It was the IMAGE of over a million people marching straight THRU the Red Sea.

Before the parting of the Red Sea, Moses spoke to the Israelites and said:
"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." Exodus 14:13

I love that line!

You see those Egyptians... you will NEVER see them again!

It's a great story. A powerful telling of the mighty hand of God.

And I think how exciting it would have been to have been there that day and seen the walls of water separate to let the Israelites pass through on dry ground!

How many of you would like to have been there to see that? (ask for a show of hands).

Me too!

But now the thing is this, none of the Israelites at the time were all that excited about being there. In fact they'd rather have been anywhere but there. They turn on Moses and say "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?" Exodus 14:11

They're terrified, panicked, filled with fear.

They want to be ANYPLACE but where they were right then!

And, it's not hard to understand why they're so afraid.

(I put up on screen a screencap of the beach a man named Joseph Freidman believes is the site of the Red Sea crossing. I got it from this youtube video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I4RV8unY7GE>)

This is the Google Map image of one of the possible sites of the Red Sea crossing. And if you'll notice, in order to get to this particular beach, the Israelites would've to travel through a winding canyon. As you can also see, there's only one way on to the beach... and one way off.

If this is the same place described in Exodus, the Israelites would have made their way down that winding canyon to camp on this beach by the Sea. But there's only one way off that beach. And since the Egyptians would have followed through that canyon, the Israelites would be trapped. The Egyptians have swords, spears and chariots, and they are famous for their ability to kill. To the minds of the Israelites, it's only a matter of hours before they swoop down on Israel and slaughter everyone in sight.

THERE'S NO WAY OUT!

At this point Moses turns to the people and he says: "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent." Exodus 14:13-14

Fear Not?
Stand Firm?
Be Silent?

You know, when your back is up against the wall and you've run out of options, that's a lot easier said than done. When faced with situations we can't control, we do become afraid. We get anxious and nervous. We want to change something, fix something. We want to be anywhere other than where we are.

You ever been there?
(PAUSE)
Me too!

I read the most intriguing thing a couple days ago on Facebook. It said:
"Not once does the Bible say
'Worry about it.'
'Stress Over It'
Or 'Figure It Out'
But over and over it clearly says:
'Trust God.'"

But why shouldn't I worry?
Why shouldn't I be anxious?
I mean – I'm in a terrible place... and I don't think I'll EVER get out of my problem!
I've got a REASON to be anxious.
What's wrong with that?

Well first, what's wrong with that is you can't change anything... by worrying!
Jesus said: "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" Matthew 6:27
Worrying doesn't FIX anything.
It just robs you of time, and peace, and strength.
It makes you weak and vulnerable... and prone to things you ought not to do.

ILLUS: Years ago, before I became a preacher, I was a quality control inspector for a fiberglass plant in a small town in northern Indiana. Part of my job was to make sure that tubs of fibermat we bought from another plant had a high enough percentage of fiberglass in it.
The way we did that was by cutting a square of the mat and weighing it. Then we'd put the mat into something that looked like a KFC bucket with mesh at the bottom, and we'd soak the mat in a container of acetone.
You know what acetone is?
That's right, it's the same stuff women use to take the fingernail polish off their nails.

Well, the acetone would eat away at the plastic and leave nothing but wet fiberglass. When the fiberglass dried, we'd weigh it and then compute the percentage of fiber that there was in the whole tub.

Now, we in QC had a shortcut to helping the fiberglass to dry quicker.
We used a hair dryer.

So, I'm back in the mix department – all by myself – blow-drying this KFC bucket filled with acetone soaked fiberglass.

Now, there's a little known fact about acetone – it has a low "flashpoint". That means it doesn't take much to set it on fire... which is what it did. Here I am working on a makeshift table with a cardboard bucket that is now on fire, and to say the least, I panicked. In my panic, I knocked the bucket over, and it began to roll around on the table. To make matters worse... about 3 feet to my left was a 55 gallon bucket 2/3s full of use acetone. And worse still, I'm back in the mix department... that's where they kept all the chemicals.

Now, the town where the plant was, wasn't that big a town, but had those chemicals caught fire... there'd been a whole lot less of that town to talk about. The entire plant I worked in would have blown up. And, odds are, they never would have found me again.

Now, I'm convinced, God got hold of me at that point, and settled me down. I'm convinced He took hold of my fear and helped me to back away from the table, take a deep breath, and grasp that bucket and put out the flames.
The crisis was averted... and I never told anyone what had happened that day.

I panicked and all it served to do was make my situation worse.

2ndly, worrying blinds us to the one Person who can fix the problem...or at least help us thru it. Perhaps the most powerful passage in Scripture says it this way:

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For THOU ART WITH ME." Psalm 23:4

The valley of the shadow of death (pause).

That's pretty much where Israel found itself at the Red Sea.

It was a very REAL place of death

And you know what God's answer was for them:

"I am with you!"

One of my favorite passages about this is in Philippians 4:5-6

"...The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Why shouldn't I be anxious about anything?

Because "the Lord is near!"

ILLUS: About 10 years ago, I read the most interesting article in Time Magazine. It was about people who struggle with insomnia and getting to sleep at night. The writer noted: "Getting a prescription might not be the best idea, though says Gregg Jacobs, an insomnia expert with the Sleep Disorders Center...

It isn't that Ambien doesn't work (a pill designed to help people sleep). But in a study

published last week in the Archives of Internal Medicine, Jacobs and his colleagues show that another treatment, called cognitive behavior therapy, or CBT, works better. Jacobs said 'Drugs like Ambien get you to sleep but they don't get at stress and anxiety, which are often the underlying cause of insomnia.' Once you're off the drug, insomnia usually returns with a vengeance."
(Time Magazine, Oct. 11, 2004 by Michael D. Lemonick)

I noticed two things in that article:

- 1) Stress and anxiety are often the underlying cause of insomnia.
- 2) According to the experts, the best cure for chronic insomnia was "cognitive behavior therapy".

You know what "Cognitive behavior therapy" is?

It's when they help you to think differently ("cognitive" refers to how a person thinks).

But centuries before these experts came up with cognitive behavior therapy... God already had prescribed that very thing for His people.

(Spoken with a calm soft voice)

The Lord is near.

He'll leave you nor forsake you.

Yea, though you walk thru the valley of the shadow of death you won't have to be anxious or fearful... because He's right there with you.

That's why there's beauty in the promise of Psalms 127:2

"In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves."

All we need to do is realize that He IS there... and He's not going anywhere.

So first, worry doesn't fix anything.

2nd, it blinds you to the one who can fix what's wrong... or at least see you thru it.

3rd, fear is often based on wanting what I WANT.

The Israelites wanted out of Egypt. And they had good reason to want that. It had been a place of slavery and heartache and despair. And so, God sent them a deliverer (Moses) who led them out of their slavery.

They've seen the power of God in the plagues God brought upon the Egyptians

They've seen the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire that has led them as they left that land.

And they have seen various acts of God to provide for their needs.

But now they've come to the edge of the Red Sea, the army of Egypt is nearly upon them... and they're having 2nd thoughts. They're beginning to think, begin back in Egypt wasn't such a bad thing after all.

"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?" Exodus 14:11

And that becomes a repeated theme for them as they wander in the desert. When they don't get what they want, when they want it and how they want it, they begin to pine for the "Good times" back in Egypt.

"If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." Exodus 16:3

And so God gave them manna... and then they end up saying:

"If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost— also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!" Numbers 11:4-6

Then, when they reach the Promised Land, and they hear about the giants that are in the land, and they cry out: "Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" Numbers 14:3

Every time life gets tough, these folks repeat the same refrain:

I want to go back to how things were.

I want to go back to the good old days.

I WANT TO GO BACK TO EGYPT!

They're never happy, because they want what they want, when they want it.

And as a result they're seemingly always anxious, and fearful and afraid.

The only way for a Christian to deal with fear is to begin to think like Jesus did.

When He was on the cross He said: "Not my will... but yours be done."

Learn to say: God I want what You want, because if I got what I wanted, I might end up realizing don't really want what I thought I wanted... and then I'll end up being really unhappy.

So God... give me what YOU want in my life.

Then stand still.

Wait upon the Lord.

And watch and see what He does.

Moses tells the Israelites: "The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still." Exodus 14:14

One last observation: when Israel stood at the edge of the Red Sea I don't think they realized that Cecil B. DeMille would be doing a movie about their life experiences. They had no idea how powerful their story would be... when God got done with it.

Years ago, I stumbled upon this verse from the book of Joshua:

Just before Joshua led the people into the Promised Land he sent two spies to look the land

over... and especially give him a report on Jericho.

But as they were looking through Jericho they were discovered and ended up hiding on the roof a woman's house. After they're safe she tells them this odd thing:

"I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed.

When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you."

Joshua 2:9-12

Do you hear what she's saying?

She was saying: We heard about your crossing of the Red Sea, and what you've done since then and Jericho is terrified because of you and because of what God has done for you!

THIS IS 40 YEARS LATER! And the story was still known and the citizens of Jericho were in a terror because they knew it would only be a matter of time before Israel and their God came knocking at their door.

The story of the crossing of the Red Sea spoke to them 40 years after the event.

And that story has continued to speak to God's people down through the centuries.

The mess in which Israel found itself that day at the Red Sea became their message.

Their test became their testimony.

Their trial became their triumph.

And because of the power of God, they who had been victims in Egypt, received the victory over their enemies.

That truth caused someone to put this on Facebook:

Only God could turn

A MESS into a MESSage.

A TEST into a TESTimony.

A TRIal into a TRIumph.

A VICTim into a VICTory.

The thing that made the difference for Israel was not their strength or their numbers or their military might. In fact, Israel did nothing to destroy Egypt... except to follow their God.

CLOSE: I want to close with this story of how Israel's trial at the Red Sea had that same effect on one woman. She was a missionary to China, but she'd been forced to flee her mission area in WWII when the Japanese army invaded that part of China.

She, however, could not leave the people she loved to suffer, and especially the many orphans. With only one assistant to help her, she led more than 100 children over the mountains to reach freedom.

At one point in their flight over the mountains she grappled with despair. It seemed there

was no hope that they'd ever get away no hope of ever reaching safety.

After one particularly sleepless night, a 14 year old girl in the group came up to her and took her hand. The girl reminded the missionary of their much loved story of Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea.

"But I am not Moses," the missionary cried in desperation.

"Of course you aren't," the girl said, "but Jehovah is still God!"

(From the book "The Hidden Price of Greatness")