

I was studying our first lesson for today, wondering if you have ever been where the Israelites were. The Israelites had the sea in front of them and the enemy army behind them, coming to get them.

Of course you have! But we have a different description of this place, don't we? We call this spot being “between a rock and a hard place.” Or maybe we call this place, “Between the devil and the deep blue sea.” Whatever we call this place, though, we don't want to be here. This is a BAD place, a scary place. Which is better: Death by drowning or death by spear? Which would YOU choose?

I don't like either choice. But I know this place, with a bad outcome bearing down on me and no way out. And I'll bet YOU know this place, also. The very last thing you are going to want to hear from me today is that our attitude in this place is important, our attitude is critical. But that's my point, so listen to see if you can follow me to that conclusion: When we are between a rock and a hard place, our perspective really counts.



Attitude matters!

So here goes.

People describe this place to me, all the time. Here's a few descriptions I have heard lately, none by people from this church. But see if you think they qualify as being between the sea and an enemy army:

- Addition, liver disease
- Cancer, metastacized
- Depression, thinking about ending it all
- No job, about to become homeless

I could go on and on, but you get the idea.

How did the Israelites get to this place of danger? Our lesson says that God led them there. WHAT? Surely this can't be right? Can it? Less than a day's march out of Egypt, following God's guidance, and here come the Egyptians, wanting their slaves back. Or wanting their gold and silver back. Or wanting vengeance. Or both.

But did you notice what happened here on the banks of the water? God led the Israelites to the water, pushed his own people to the water's edge, then he placed himself between the people and the oncoming army. All night long, God protected his people.

---

Here's the first place where attitude matters. Do you say, “God wasn't protecting his people at the water's edge. It was night. Of course, the army didn't attack at night. The Egyptians were waiting for morning, to attack in the light.” Or do you say, “Thank you, God, for saving us this night from the Egyptian army. Come day, we know you will save us again.”

I truly believe that God wants to hear the answer to this question. What is our prayer in these times of crisis? Where do we put our faith? In the night? In the might of the Egyptians? Or in the will and wisdom of God?

Do we believe that we are at the water's edge because God led us here, or not? Do we believe that there is a Promised Land awaiting us on the other side, or not?

I wonder if the Israelites even knew that God had their backs? I wonder if the Israelites praised God for bringing them to the water's edge? I figured they murmured. We are murmuring people. This was early in the Israelites' wilderness travels. They hadn't yet learned to trust God. And we, all of us, are short-sighted people. We see what's near at hand, but miss the big picture. We see the enemy coming right for us, but we don't even notice that God is right here with us, protecting us, and that God WILL prevail.

But something has to die for a new reality to be born.

At creation, God breathed order and the waters of chaos receded. What died THAT day was the void. At least it got shoved back out of the way enough for creation to occur. And the VOID has been pursuing us ever since. Wanting its territory back, wanting to drag us down into nothingness with it, but God himself is here, sheltering and protecting us and sustaining all his creation.

So on THAT day, God breathed again at the edge of the Red Sea, and the waters parted. A new reality came into being. Again. “All” we have to do is open our eyes and see the Lord at work around us. All we have to do is to thank God for our salvation. Can we perceive this from the edge of the brink? If so, then we can let our fear die in the water of chaos as we run through to the other side, to the land that God has promised us, to the Land that Christ Jesus has prepared for us and gone ahead of us to occupy.



What’s that? You think this story is a metaphor? If so, this story is a really good metaphor. And you are in excellent company. Someone (I’ll tell you who in a minute, if you don’t guess for yourself first) thinks that what needs to die in the water are the evils of our day:

- Greed and war
- “High places where [people] are willing to sacrifice truth on the altars of their self-interest,” and
- Imperialistic nations trampling other nations with the iron feet of oppression

The someone who preached THIS sermon, in 1954, then went on the preach about having a DREAM... Yes, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., thought that our first lesson today was a metaphor.

But maybe, like me, you don’t think this story is only a metaphor. Maybe you think this even actually happened. I do. And Timmy does.

“Who’s Timmy?” you ask. There’s a story that we preachers love to tell about Timmy. He was a young boy playing in the park. Every so often he would pump his fist in the air and shout for joy. And a woman walking by asked him what he was so happy about.

“I learned in Temple,” Timmy told her, “that God saved the Israelites at the Red Sea. And that makes me very happy.”

This troubled the woman greatly so she explained to the boy that she had heard on National Public Radio that the region had been under a severe drought at the time and the Red Sea was probably only 11 inches deep. She didn’t want the boy to go through life expecting miraculous interventions from a God she didn’t think exists.

Timmy’s joy did fade. For a few minutes. Then he was even more joyous than before. “Didn’t you hear me,” the woman asked.

“Sure,” Timmy told her. “But then I realized that God had drowned the Egyptians in only 11 inches of water.”

Perspective really does matter. Not because with a so-called “good” perspective God saves us and a “bad” one God doesn’t. But rather because when we are following God, we get to where we get because the Lord has brought us here. And, whether we can perceive this or not, God is right here with us, no matter the outcome. And the land that God has promised us awaits us, when we are the Lord’s people and do as the Lord commands. Win, lose, or draw. Living or dying, we are the Lord’s. But attitude matters in between.

---