

FORWARD WITH CHRIST

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto Me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." Exodus 14:15.

This simple command takes us to an important hour in Israel's history. Hitherto Israel had been in a place of servitude in Egypt. Henceforth Israel was to move forward to a place of national existence and independence. The children of Israel were not to remain the slaves of Pharaoh, but henceforth to be the servants of God. God called them to go forth and realize His plans.

I. An Exciting Story.

Pharaoh had announced his ultimatum: "I will not let Israel go." The people were not very anxious to go. It was only through the persistent urging of Moses that they were rekindled in hope and held to a purpose. Under the scourge of God, the crown prince suffered the stroke of death. Broken in spirit, Pharaoh granted the children of Israel a leave of absence, and they started on their flight from Egypt. The possibility of their deliverance from the unspeakable bondage of Egypt did something tremendous for their faith. In the exciting story of their journey, I want us to note:

1. Their danger.

After they had journeyed for some time, they encamped near the shore of the Red Sea in order that they might get some rest from the toil and excitement through which they had just passed. Through the gloaming came sounds which drove terror into their very souls. They were appalled by the word that Pharaoh was marching after them with his entire army. Pharaoh and the Egyptians were in hot pursuit of their former slaves. On each side of them were huge rocks and rugged mountains. Before them spread the rolling waters of the angry and impassable sea. They were utterly surrounded by difficulties.

2. Their dilemma.

What could they do? They knew not which way to turn. The swiftly approaching enemy increased their terror. The armies were pressing on behind them, and they had no means of defense. To stand still meant capture and captivity. To go back meant more slavery. To go forward meant the Red Sea and apparent death by drowning. It was a terrible moment. They were greatly excited and wanted to do various things.

3. Their deliverer.

"Man's extremity was God's opportunity." Finally, Moses got them all in order and did what they had not thought of doing, namely, appealing to God for help. Even though it was a seeming impossibility for them to be delivered, God intervened and through Moses spoke the words of our text, which assigned to them a seemingly impossible task.

4. Their duty.

God told them to "Go forward." The path of God's command led straight into the sea. To human sight it was the path of folly. In human judgment it could only lead to failure. How could they go through the sea? Man could give but one answer: "Impossible." And yet, God's command said, "Forward." It meant forward to difficulty, to the impossible and into the sea. God's ways are not man's ways. God's commands are not man's commands. And God's commands are not impossible.

5. Their determination.

In spite of the fact that it looked like an utter impossibility for them to do as they had been commanded, it was about the only thing they could do. They immediately determined that they would do as they had been commanded, regardless of the results. So, they proceeded to go forward. As they started into the waters of the Red Sea, God miraculously parted the liquid and enabled them to walk through on dry ground. "By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned." Hebrews 11:29.

Two sets of men moved forward that day into the sea—the one to deliverance, the other to defeat. The one moved forward by faith, the other by sight. The one moved by faith and found a closed way opened, the other moved by sight and found an open way closed.

6. Their delight.

They were delighted beyond expression when they reached the other side of the sea and realized that they were safe and their enemies had been destroyed. The Song of Moses was expressive of their delight. However, when Moses sang of the Red Sea experience in the words, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exodus 15:11) he was not singing of the doings of men, but of the wonders of God. Difficulty and danger were turned to deliverance by the faith of man and the grace of God.

It was forward to a future for a new nation. The Red Sea was the dividing line between a past of slavery and a future of opportunity. God's command called Israel to be a new nation. For centuries the literature of the nations thrilled with the story of the Red Sea experience.

It was forward to a future for a new people. The Red Sea experience gave the children of Israel the opportunity of being a new people. The old taskmasters were dead. The old captivity was ended. Henceforth they were freed to function as men instead of slaves.

It was forward to a future of a new service. When they went forward at the Red Sea, they started on a new service of faith. There is compensation in the close places of life if they bring us to hear God's Word and to trust His promises.

II. An Excellent Slogan.

Our text expresses God's will for Israel of the long ago. It also expresses His will for us today. "Go forward," "Forward march," "Forward with Christ." "Forward" is God's constant injunction to His own. "Go forward" is the Christian's watchword. The command of Christ to His church is always, "Forward march! Advance along the whole line!" The law of the Christian life is advance. The Captain of our salvation never orders a retreat. The Lord never brings His people or church into positions from which retreat is necessary, or in which advance is impossible. We may bring ourselves into such positions, but our Lord never leads us into them. There is not a single instance in the Bible where, while His guidance was being followed, retreat had to be made.

In proportion as we surrender ourselves to His guidance, we may depend on being conducted forward. Why should the Christian not go forward? Everything in nature and history does. Every species of knowledge moves forward; invention following invention, discovery following discovery, one man of genius eclipsing another, to be in his turn outshone. Christian living should be marked by a constant forward march. The advance is to be maintained in spite of all real or fancied obstacles. You say, there are so many conflicts. Yes, but for what did you enlist? Was it never to obey any marching orders? Did you expect to spend your life in pleasant places only? Did you expect to be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease?

What are some of the things in which we, as Christians, need to go forward? We should go forward in faith, in knowledge, in fellowship with Christ, in holy living, in doing good to others, in labors for the advancement of the Lord's work and in the missionary enterprise. It is very important that we go forward. We cannot stand still. We will either go forward or go backward. Let us ever heed our marching orders: "Go forward."