



Sermon Transcript

February 7, 2016

Between A Rock and A Wet Place: When Things Seem Impossible Exodus 14:1-31

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on February 7, 2016 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Rev. Michael Conserva. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286. An

Exodus 14:1-31

¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, ² “Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. ³ For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, ‘They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’ ⁴ And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.” And they did so.

⁵ When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, “What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” ⁶ So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, ⁷ and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. ⁸ And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the people of Israel while the people of Israel were going out defiantly. ⁹ The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

¹⁰ When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD. ¹¹ They said to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” ¹³ And Moses said to the people, “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. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.”

¹⁵ The LORD said to Moses, “Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. ¹⁶ Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷ And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. ¹⁸ And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.”

¹⁹ Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, ²⁰ coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night[a] without one coming near the other all night.

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. ²² And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. ²³ The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.

²⁴ And in the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, ²⁵ clogging[b] their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians."

²⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen." ²⁷ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the LORD threw[c] the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. ²⁸ The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained. ²⁹ But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

³⁰ Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹ Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

Introduction:

Here's a man that Hollywood just can't ignore. Cecil B. DeMille's "The Ten Commandments" still gets high ratings whenever it is shown on TV, and now a new generation has been introduced to Moses through DreamWorks's *The Prince of Egypt*.

What is it about Moses that is so compelling? Moses was, in many ways, like us. He struggled with ambition, fear, compromise, and sin. Having proved to be one of the greatest leaders Israel has ever known, leadership did not come naturally to him. He had to learn how to lead; he had to learn how to serve God. It's amazing the process God

brought him through. He spent his first 40 years in Egypt, nursed by his mother and taught by Egyptian schools. He spent his second 40 years in the desert, nursed by solitude and taught by God. He spent his final 40 years with the Hebrew people in the wilderness, nursed by trials, discouragements, and tests, and taught by the Law, which he received from God's own hand.

I like what Dwight L. Moody said of this great man of faith... "Moses spent forty years thinking he was somebody. He spent his second forty years learning he was a nobody. He spent his third forty years discovering what God can do with a nobody."

Though he accomplished much during his lifetime, he spent 40 years floundering, looking for direction. Moses was, most of all, human—imperfect, insecure at times, and yet, his life shows us what God is capable of doing with someone who is willing to put their faith in him. The lessons we learn from the life of Moses teach us how to live a dynamic Christian life. His life teaches us the value of a dream, the importance of integrity, the power of faith, and the principles of effective leadership.

To day we are going to look closely at the most celebrated story in the life of Moses: the crossing of the Red Sea. Here's the story. Pharaoh had finally given Moses permission to lead the people out of Egypt, but once they started on their journey, Pharaoh changed his mind. He realized he had just lost the services of tens of thousands of slaves. Without that pool of free labor, his own people would have to go to work. So, Pharaoh assembled his army and set out after the Israelites.

The Israelites had come to the bank of the Red Sea and set up camp at a place called Pi Hahiroth. All of a sudden they noticed the army approaching--more than 600 chariots in full pursuit. They began to realize they were facing an impossible situation, with no possible means of escape. In front of them was the Red Sea; behind them was the Egyptian army. They had nowhere to turn. It appeared their only options were to be killed in battle, drown trying to swim across the sea or die running. Seemingly they had painted themselves into a corner and things looked absolutely hopeless and utterly helpless. Here's the thing; they were right where God wanted them to be.

- Exodus 13:18 *"So God led the people around the desert road toward the Red Sea."*

Propositional Statement:

Today we're going to look at how you can deal with situations that seem impossible. Many of you here are facing a Red Sea in your life: things look hopeless and you don't

know what to do. There are 5 spiritual truths in this story that you can hang on to, and I guarantee these 5 principles will get you to the other side of the Red Sea. When faced with an impossible situation, the first thing you need to do is...

Main Point 1: Recognize God's Purpose

The events in your life do not happen by accident; God is in control of everything. He had a purpose for bringing the Israelites to the Red Sea; he has a purpose for the Red Sea you face, too. He wants to accomplish 2 things: he wants to make known his glory to others (v. 4) and he wants to teach you to trust him more (v. 31). The Bible says...(v. 4) *But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.*

You know how this story ends. I don't think I'm giving away any surprises when I tell you that eventually the waters of the Red Sea part and the Israelites walk through to safety. That was God's plan all along, because as a result of this experience, the Bible says... (v. 31) *And when the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.*

This Red Sea you're facing serves a purpose. God can use it to glorify himself and to strengthen the bond between you and him. You can come through this ordeal with faith stronger than you've ever had before. This is God's purpose in your life.

Illustration: In January 2013 I went to the hospital for a simple knee replacement. Well it didn't work out that way. After three revisions, two major staph infections and three different knee replacements, eight surgeries later spanning over 3 plus years I remember all too well the complete and utter despair, despondency and depression I felt. The feelings of absolute hopelessness and helplessness that made me feel like I was lost out at sea. Psalm 119:71 says, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted: that I might learn thy statutes." That is a tough verse to swallow, but one that too often rings true. It was also the late great C.S. Lewis who said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pain. Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world." When you are facing an impossible situation it's not always easy to remember, and have a sense on your heart, that the Lord knows our every need. It comes easily to our hearts, like it says in Isaiah 49, to think the Lord has forgotten about us and you begin to question, Why?. You see, I was asking the wrong question. I kept asking the why? Question. Wrong question. The question we need to ask ourselves when we are facing impossible situations is the What? And How? Questions. What is it you want me to do? How do you want me to respond? What are you trying to teach me?

Two things happened as a result...

1.) It soon became obvious that we had survived only by the power of God. 2.) I learned that no matter what happens, God will see me through. Since then, there have been times when it seems like I am back on the banks of the Red Sea again. When that happens, I know from the start that I haven't been abandoned. I recognize God's purpose in the situation. As you face the Red Sea, remember that God has a purpose for you: to glorify himself and to teach you to trust him more. Secondly, as you face the Red Sea we need to...

Main Point 2: Retain God's Perspective

When the Israelites looked up and saw the Egyptian army approaching in the distance, do you know what their immediate response was? They panicked. The Bible says...(vs. 10-11) *They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?"*

It is amazing that this was their attitude, considering how they had witnessed the power of God in Egypt. But they had already forgotten that and now they were convinced that this was the end. They went to say... (v 12) *"It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"*

I suppose they're right. It would be better to be a slave in Egypt than to die in the desert, but God didn't intend for them to do either. He had plans for them, plans greater than they could imagine. Of course, they weren't going to die in the desert. The Egyptians didn't intend to kill them; they intended to take them back to Egypt and make them work. And you get the impression from reading this story that if Moses held a vote, the majority would have chosen to go back to Egypt right then.

This shows our tendency to lose God's perspective on a situation. Too often, when we're confronted with an impossible situation, rather than meet it head on, we take the easy way out. We say, "We don't want to face the Red Sea, and we don't want to face Pharaoh's army, so let's just go back to Egypt and resume our lives as slaves." God doesn't want that. He doesn't want you to settle for second best. He doesn't want you to run from the crisis, he wants you to meet it head on with courage and the conviction of faith that he will see you through.

"When Hemmed In On All Sides, The Only Place To Look Is Up." Swindoll

Illustration: Remember the movie *October Sky*? Homer Hickham was a young kid growing up in a West Virginia coal mining town in 1957. In those days, in that town, young men didn't have many options. If they didn't get to a college on a football scholarship, they ended up working in the coal mines for the rest of their life. Unfortunately, Homer was hopelessly non-athletic, but he loved science.

Homer had a passion for building rockets. He and some friends began conducting experiments, trying to develop rockets that would fly. As the experiments became successful, the boys began to believe in the possibility of winning the state science fair--which could lead to college scholarships and a ticket out of a life of coal mining. Homer's dream fell apart when his father was injured in a serious mining accident. Homer had no choice but to quit school and go to work. It's what his father expected him to do, it's what the principal of the school expected him to do, it's what most people in his life expected him to do: forget the dream, take the easy way out, go to work in the mines.

Homer's dad was a miner and loved being a miner, but Homer had different interests. He wanted to design rockets, but this dream seemed to be hopelessly out of reach. He found himself facing a decision: he could either remain a "slave" in a dying coal mining community, or he could look at life from a different perspective, that he was destined for greatness. Homer made his choice. As soon as his father recovered from his injury, he quit the mines and went back to school.

He entered and won the state science fair, then took his exhibit to the world's fair in Indianapolis and won again. He was offered a full college scholarship. Today, Homer is a retired NASA engineer. There was a time when things seemed hopeless, and he was tempted to "go back to Egypt," but he learned to look at life from another perspective.

The Red Sea you are facing is not the impasse that you think it is. It may be tempting to take the easy way out, to settle for second best, but God has a better idea. He wants you to look at the big picture; he wants you to look at life from his perspective. He will get you through any impossible situation. Thirdly, as you face the Red Sea, you need to....

Main Point 3: Rely on God's Promise

I once heard a motivational speaker ask an audience, "If your success was guaranteed, wouldn't you be willing to endure just about anything? If you had an iron-clad contract stating that if you dig ditches in the rain every day for 6 months you will have complete financial freedom--wouldn't you be willing to dig ditches?" The answer was obvious. Of course you would.

We can endure just about anything if we know the outcome. However, one of the most difficult aspects of facing a Red Sea is dealing with feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. When you're facing an impossible situation, when it looks like everything is falling apart, like there is no chance things will work out the way they should.

When you're facing a Red Sea you've got to rely on God's promise. What is his promise? Moses spoke to the people...(v. 13-14) *"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."* God promises us two things.

- ***He promises the problem will be completely eradicated.*** The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. We have a tendency to put a band-aid on our problems, to sweep them under the rug, to get them out of the way for a few days. God promises to remove it once and for all. Also...
- ***He promises to fight for you.*** Without his help the Israelites didn't have a chance, and neither do we. We need him in the battle. He promised to be there for us, to fight on our side.

To get to other side of the Red Sea you have to learn to rely on his promise. What does it mean to rely? Once again, let's look at verses 13 and 14. Relying on God's promises involves 3 things.

1.) *Fear not.* The words "Fear Not" appear in the Bible more than 50 times. This means that you can choose to not be afraid. Of course, no one ever chooses to be afraid. Fear just pounces on you. But when it pounces, you can choose to reject it.

2.) *Stand firm.* Don't compromise your integrity. Don't give up. Don't run. Don't hide. Stand and face the situation.

3) *Be still.* Of course, "be still" doesn't mean "do nothing." Moses is not talking about your body; he's talking about your heart. Being still involves blocking out all distractions and placing your focus on the promises of God, or even better, focusing on God himself. Remember this: **The Peace Of God Can't Hit A Moving Target.** If you want to be filled with God's peace, your heart will have to become still long enough to receive it.

As you face the Red Sea in your life, with the enemy closing in from behind, rely on God's promise to see you through. Also, you need to...

Main Point 4: Rest In God's Protection

When the Israelites first began their journey they were led by a cloud by day and a fire by night. When they arrived at the bank of the Red Sea, and Pharaoh's army began closing in, the cloud moved behind the Israelite camp, between the Israelites and the Egyptians. The Bible says...(v 20) *Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.*

God had not yet performed the miracle that would deliver the Hebrew people; that would come later. Until then, they could rest in God's protection. There is an interesting verse here. It says...(v. 19) *Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them.*

The angel withdrew. How do you think the Israelites reacted when they saw the cloud begin to float away? Undoubtedly, like you and I are prone to do, they thought, "There it goes. We're sunk. God is leaving us now and we're on our own." It may have appeared that way at first, but the cloud moved behind them and protected them during the night.

"IF THE LORD IS TO GET THE GLORY, HE MUST DO THE FIGHTING."
Swindoll

As you face any impossible situation in your life there is something you need to keep in mind. No matter how bad things seem, things are not as bad as they could be, and the reason they're not as bad as they could be is because God is preventing things from getting that bad. The phrase, "Things could be worse" is usually the set-up for a joke. But I'm not joking when I say that if you look at your situation with the eyes of faith you will see how God has kept his hand on you, in spite of the difficulties. He's protecting you now until the day that he parts your Red Sea.

Main Point 5: Reach for God's Power

This is what God said to Moses...(v. 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.*

God wants to deliver you from the impossible situation you face. He wants to part the Red Sea for you. For it to happen, you have to stretch...you have to reach for God's power.

This staff that Moses carried symbolized God's power in his life. When God first called Moses, he told Moses to throw down the staff and the staff became a snake. He told

Moses to pick it up and it became a rod again. Moses and Aaron each used their staff to bring plagues upon Egypt. The staff was waved over the Nile and the Nile turned to blood. The staff was stretched over the streams and the plague of frogs was sent. The staff was struck on the ground and a plague of gnats swarmed the land. The staff was stretched to the sky and hail was rained upon Egypt. And on and on. The staff wasn't magic, but it symbolized the power of God. God was saying to Moses, "You hold my power in your hand. If you're willing to reach, you will again witness a miracle."

God's power is available to you, too. If you're willing to stretch, you will experience a miracle. Getting to the other side of the Red Sea requires you to reach. To move in faith like you never have before, to trust God more than you ever have before, to take a bolder step than you've ever taken before. I don't know what seemingly impossible situation you face today, but I know this: if you reach for God's power, he will supply it. He will get you through to the other side of sea.

Conclusion:

Are you facing the Red Sea? Are there situations in your life that seem impossible? Remember: it only seems impossible to you. God has a plan. It may be something different than you ever could have imagined, but he has a plan. He will get you to the other side. And when he does you can be sure that others will see his glory in your life and your relationship with him will be stronger than ever before. You're not on your own. You don't have to fight the army and you don't have to conquer the sea in your own strength. You only have to reach for God's power.

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Sermon Title: When Things Seem Impossible

Sermon Text: Exodus 14:1-31

Sermon Date: February 2, 2016

COMMUNITY GROUPS



Getting To Know Me Questions

1. Have you ever been on a long trip? What were some of the practical things that you had to do in order to plan for the trip?
2. Describe a time where you were unsure of God's direction in your life. What did you do?
3. Share your "take away" from the sermon this past Sunday?



Diving Into The Word

4. Read Exodus 14:1-31. Have someone or several people read the passage. Close your bibles or shut off the app on your phone or tablet and recall the major events in the passage. What is one thing this story teaches us about the nature or character of God?
5. In Exodus 14:4, 31; Why does God allow us to face Red Sea experiences (Impossible Situations)? What are His purposes? What is He trying to teach us? How does this inform your theology of suffering?
6. Have you ever lost your perspective when facing an Impossible Situation? Be vulnerable and transparent and share a Red Sea experience from your own life. What did it do to your faith, both positively and negatively, and why?
7. Exodus 14:11-12; Based upon this story, why is it important to maintain our perspective when we face difficult circumstances?
8. Read Exodus 14:13-14; God says, 'Do not be afraid, Stand Firm, Be Still.' It is important to rely upon God's promises in Impossible Situation. Why is it important not to be Afraid? How does fear affect our faith? How do we Stand Firm and Be Still as believers? Be specific. Give illustrations from your own life.
9. What are some contrasts between Exodus 14:19-20 with 24-25 as it relates to resting in God's protection? How does knowing that God is protecting us affect our faith?
10. Exodus 16, 26-27; What does Moses' Staff represent? Like Moses, we hold the Power of God in our hands. In other words, how do we access God's power in our lives?



Taking It Home

11. Are you currently facing a Red Sea? Are there situations in your life that seem impossible? Please share and pray for one another.
12. What did you learn from this story and what are some things you can do when facing a Red Sea experience?