

Entangled in the Lord

By Paris Reidhead*

Our Text is found in Exodus, Chapter 14, and verse 3. Exodus 14:3:

“For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in.”

The earlier reading acquainted you with the fact that finally God’s persuasive powers influenced Pharaoh. The last plague was the death of the first born, which included Pharaoh’s son. This was sufficient that the Counsellors, the Cabinet, the People rose up and demanded the release of Israel, and sent them away with arms which they had never as slaves possessed before, for they went away harnessed, that is, armed, and sent them away with wealth which they had never possessed before: With the Egyptians pressing upon them gold, jewels, silver, precious stones, fabrics; everything that would ultimately be necessary for the complete erection of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness was pressed upon the Israelites by the Egyptians whom they had served.

They were going, according to the Word, three days’ journey into the Wilderness in order that they should sacrifice and worship. And they have gone, not by way of the Philistines, said the Lord, “Lest they become discouraged by war” (Exo. 13:17). And so they went in another direction, almost southeast, to Ethan. And there they could have gone to the East by North, around the upper end of the Red Sea into the desert where it would have been difficult for Pharaoh’s chariots to have pursued them through the soft sand. But they chose to the contrary, by the explicit direction of the Lord, to turn and go south which meant that the mountains were on the West, hills and marsh in front of them, and the Red Sea on the east. Now God sent them in this direction. Apparently they had been followed by the spies and observers of Pharaoh, for when the word came back to Pharaoh, he said, They have been misguided, the whole enterprise was undertaken by folly on their part, and folly on ours. We never should have let them go. We will never get as efficient and cheap help again, and so we shall pursue them and either destroy them or bring them back again to the brick kilns. And so Pharaoh was able to muster a considerable following, 600 chariots, though they took no foot soldiers apparently, and set off in hot pursuit after the Israelites. Now this is where our Text comes. Pharaoh’s statement: “They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in.”

But I would like to make certain observations regarding Pharaoh’s attitude and his purpose. You remember that he had decided that it was wise to let them go. May I observe from this that the wicked cannot be saved by fiery judgments. I have heard it said in recent years that possibly if we were to have an atomic war the people would repent. This is folly. I am not aged but I have lived through a depression the like of which history does not record, and through the Second World War, and the Korean War, and the present hostilities and we find that, instead of any of these events having the effect of making people pious and penitent, they have made them prosperous and drunken. They have not had the effect that would have been suspected. And those who had “fox hole religion,” when the planes were aimed at their little place of hiding, have subsequently come back and found that God was not nearly as important as He seemed to be when there was a knife across their throat. And we see it here, way back here, terror is soon forgotten. For what could have been of greater terrifying effect than the ten plagues which had fallen upon the Egyptians. They did that which was right. They let the Israelites go. They paid them a portion of their wages, but may I call to your attention that justice which is done through fear is soon regretted. And should some moral response be elicited in your heart because you are afraid of being caught then that which has been done by you does not have any moral significance. If the reason why people cease what they are doing is simply because of the consequences that they fear for doing it, their actions are in self-interest and utterly void of any moral quality.

Now we realize that fear is a wholesome handmaid of the grace of God and has a salutary ministry in awakening one to danger. But if the response is one that is primarily motivated by fear, as soon as the emotion of fear is dispelled by some other emotion the actions taken will be regretted and will be abandoned. And this is we find clearly illustrated in Pharaoh’s case. Of course we recognize that there seems to be at the time a valid reasoning for abandoning these good resolutions. One of the things we pointed out is the basic principle of understanding all actions by men and women is that everything they do seems reasonable when it is done. It does not make any difference how brutal or cruel, or wrong it may be, but while it is being done it seems

right; it seems right, and wise, and proper in the eyes of those that are doing it. And it is grounded on the view of a present expediency. "In the light of..." is the attitude of the individual. In the light of, it is right for me to do this which otherwise with other people in other situations might be wrong. Everything that is ever done by an intelligent being is done on rational grounds. And so, as it seemed rational in the light of the threat and danger that was implicit in God's anger to let the Israelites go, it now seems rational and right and proper to abandon that good intention and resolution since the danger is over, and the problem has been removed, it now seems right, and proper, and wise and good for Pharaoh to abandon this, and to pursue the people. It was made by impulse, I would say, rather than by principle. And any action which is made on impulse rather than principle is very likely to be abandoned and usually is wrong. It is imperative, therefore, if an individual wants to live a life that is morally acceptable to God, and ethically right in His eyes, that the actions must be motivated and governed by principle, and not simply by the peculiar circumstances at the moment.

And there is another reason why it seemed wise to Pharaoh to abandon his good purpose of letting Israel go. He had made the vow to himself because of self-interest, rather than to God. And since he had made a covenant with himself, it was a simple matter to break it. Had he made the covenant with God then there would have been reason for him to respect it. But most of the resolutions which are made in danger and under the pressure of fear are made with the individual, though ostensibly toward the Lord. The man whose plane is on fire and falling cries out and said, Oh God, if you will let me get down safely I'll go to church, this one is presumably making a covenant with God, but actually he is simply turning over a new leaf of resolution in his own mind. When the plane is safely down, then since he made it with himself in respect to his own previous attitude on the basis of his danger he feels justified in changing it and saying, "Well Church isn't as important as it seemed as when the plane was falling."

Now God knows character. God knows Pharaoh's heart. God hear his words as Moses did. God had insight Moses did not have, and God knew his heart, and God knows the heart of every one of us, and everyone that breathes the breath of life. He knows exactly why we do what we do. And our lesson from this experience of Pharaoh is that God's has purposely allowed Israel, (rather than allowed, directed Israel) to turn aside from that which was logical and reasonable and seemed to be the most profitable course to something which was irrational and foolish and could apparently only end in tragedy. Now He did it for a very real purpose: to reveal Pharaoh's heart. And often times God allows circumstances to come into our lives which are permitted and designed of Him to reveal to us and others who may be involved the nature of our relationship to it.

For instance, in the case of Peter. You recall that Peter, with protest and vigor, had said, "Lord, if everyone forsakes you I will stand with you" (Mat. 26:35). And the Lord allowed Peter, (more than allowed) in His foreknowledge had permitted to come to pass a series of circumstances where he could say, Peter, something is going to happen. I know it is going to happen. I could forbid it from happening. But in order that you can discover your heart, Peter, you are going to be taken into circumstances, and you will react this way. Now the reason why Peter was tempted by the little girl and the others was not coincidence – that she should have seen him back there. When that little girl in one of the meetings had seen Simon Peter, she had fixed his visage in her mind and recognized him there at the fire by Sovereign appointment, so that in this situation Peter could discover his heart. And the Lord Jesus did something else. He not only arranged for the situation, but he also exposed Himself to this betrayal by Peter and denial by Peter. He said, Peter's heart is so hard, and I love him so much, that the only way I can help Peter is to let Peter break himself upon Me. And in the action that Peter had toward Christ he saw his heart, and he never could have seen it any other way. Now this is for good or for ill. In Pharaoh's case, it revealed the evil of his heart, and in Peter's case it revealed the deceitfulness of his heart, but the evidence of the genuineness of repentance is seen in that he went out weeping bitterly.

Now God had a purpose in revealing Pharaoh's heart to him. It was one of two things. *To bring him to repentance*. Whenever God allows any circumstance to come into your life which reveals your present state, it is for a purpose, one of two purposes. Either it is to bring you to repentance and faith wherein you appropriate grace from God, or *it is to ripen you for judgment*. One of two things. In this case it was to ripen Pharaoh for judgment. Pharaoh's attitude was there. Pharaoh's attitude had not changed. God was angry with his attitude. But Pharaoh's last action had been an attitude of obedience to the will of God, letting Israel go, but his basic attitude had not changed. So God set up circumstances in which Pharaoh would be allowed to express his real attitude, and in the expression of this real attitude, not accompanied by repentance, Pharaoh exposed himself

to the wrath of God and the judgment of God. He had to be ripened for judgment. Now the action was there. The attitude was there, before the action. But the action unrepented of put the person, Pharaoh in this case, in the place of God's hand being released.

This is the purpose of preaching. All preaching is the same. This is one of the Sovereign circumstances. God has ordained that the preaching of the truth shall have one of two effects. It shall be a savor of life unto life. It shall be a savor of death unto death. There is danger in preaching, and there is great danger in truth, because truth not appropriated, truth not obeyed, has the effect of exposing one to the judgment of God. Truth never can be lightly dealt with. It always has the effect of preparing one for blessing or for judgment. And this is what you must see in every circumstance. How frequently God in His sovereignty permits us to be brought into circumstances in which He makes it possible for us to see what was otherwise covered. For instance, He knows our hearts. He knows that we love the truth of the Cross, and our union with Christ in death. But it is so easy for one to become complacent and say the cross has done its work. How I praise the Lord for this truth. What He does in Sovereign grace is to allow pressure to be put on us from an unexpected direction which reveals to us whether or not the Cross has worked there. Now one can turn away and say, Well this isn't... We're not playing cricket, God— or circumstances, and turn on the circumstances in self-defense, yet at the same time holding allegiance to the truth. But if that is done it carries with it the inevitable consequence of the chastening of the Lord. And so every circumstance into which you are called, you are permitted to go, whether it be physical financial or social is intended of God to reveal you to yourself. (He knew it. He does not need the circumstance to know what is there), to reveal you to yourself in order that you can take the appropriate action, and should your heart be hardened and there be a refusal to take the appropriate action, then we see that it has the effect of being a savor of death to death instead of life to life.

And of course with Pharaoh, this being written as an ensample for us, or as an example for us, yet as a teacher, he is a teacher to instruct the people of the danger of turning back from the right. And we see that subsequently Israel is going to be brought into the same judgment, into which Pharaoh had come. Wherein at Kadesh-Barnea they refused themselves through unbelief to go in, they doomed themselves to wander in the wilderness. And consequently when with the gain saying of Korah, Israel rises up against Moses and Aaron who have been appointed of the Lord, they are sentenced to death and God visits them speedily, executing the sentence by the Angel of His Presence bringing the plague upon them. It is thus that this first even when Pharaoh changed his word and vow was to be the constant monitor to Israel, teaching that whenever they made a commitment to the Lord it was God's intention that it should be obeyed, and they should walk in the light of it. Now these are certain considerations and observations that I see from this matter of Pharaoh.

But to the particular application of the text, I would like to have you see why it was that Pharaoh suggested that turning to the South they would become entangled in the land, and draw from this, again, observations as to the kind of thing which could entangle you, and the kind of thing wherein the present Pharaoh, Satan, would seek your destruction. Now remember, Pharaoh was a liar. Pharaoh was a liar. He was the representative, and the type of Satan, who is a liar and the father of lies, and yet as Pharaoh said, They are entangled in the land, so it is possible for individuals to become entangled after they have experienced the Blood over the door post, speaking of remission of sins through the shedding of Blood, and a going out of Egypt, (speaking of the world,) it is possible for a Christian, young or old, to become entangled. And I believe that if we mention some of the dangers in the wilderness we will see whether or not we have become entangled.

One of the first things that a professed babe in Christ finds is that after he in his personal meeting with the Lord has been born of God, he still remains part of a *social group*. He has family and he has friends. Whereas he would like to stay entirely with this new company of believers that he has found, the people of the Way of Christ, he nevertheless finds he must return to father and to mother, to brothers and to sisters, and in this return from that point of encounter with Christ there are temptations. And I can hear Satan saying something like this, Well I have no great fear of his repentance and faith because I have my team all set to protect my interests in him. So mother begins to scoff and to mock. Father begins to criticize in sarcasm, and deride. Brothers begin to fight, and sisters to pick, and then friends. Oh there is now a reserve called in in the attack, for friends come, the friends that he has made in the past: You have lost your mind, fanatic on religion. And so these are the cohorts of the enemy who are there at the very outset of anyone's profession of faith in Christ, (unless one is happily born in a Christian home,) that are going to do everything that they possibly can to destroy and entangle this one. Their purpose is to do it. Oh

how many there are, especially often with foreign students coming from other countries here, and coming to know the Lord Jesus here alone where they have this isolation in the presence of God and those who know and love the Lord Jesus. But they must go back home to families and friends, and there the pressure rises. Our Lord Jesus of course has spoken to them, saying, "If any man hate not his father and his mother, brethren and his sister, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luk. 14:26). But we must recognize that this is one of the entanglements to which one who leaves Egypt is prone to come. And then there is the dealing with society in its general sense. To some of you this may not seem to be significant, but I have friends as perhaps many of you do that have had to pay a tremendous price. Being born into a level or strata of society which some of us will never touch, they have found that there is a leverage and pressure exerted upon them that is indescribable, to be excluded from homes where one has been welcome, and from fellowship where they have been invited, to be taken completely out of the paths of communication that they have known, to be laughed at and to be mocked.

I think of one woman, a dear godly woman who had, served as the wife of one of our, Alliance pastors down in Augusta, Georgia, for many years. She had been one of the young socialites of Atlanta, Georgia, but when she met the Lord Jesus Christ there was a bitter vitriolic and ceaseless antagonism to this woman. Doors were closed. She was publicly insulted and rejected, and yet she went on with all the poise and grace, and spiritual love and fruit of Christ, to live her life, and then finally down in a little cottage in Sebring, Florida, living out the remainder of her days graciously to the glory of Christ. And yet she paid a price that you think often is associated only from those that have come from other countries. Everyone in her family were Protestant, and everyone in her family were church members. Why then the price? Because she had broken step with the parade and the march, and she was prepared to stand unqualifiedly for the Lord, and they sought to entangle her in the land, but at great price she escaped.

Then of course the babe in Christ has new matters that he must face. *He has got to go back to his employer, to his factory.* There may have been policies that he pursued as an employer, or as an employee, that now as a Christian he cannot follow. And so there is an economic loss, reprisals brought upon him because of his faith, and oh how Pharaoh would say, They'll be entangled in the land. They can't give up money. They can't give up power. They can't give up influence. I'll get them there. Oh they have repented, yes. They have left Egypt, but they are not out yet. And we'll entangle them in their business. We'll entangle them with their fellow employees. They'll put the pressure on him. And then perhaps the person has restitution to make. And God has dealt with them about that.

I think of Nate Scharf, loved by many of this congregation, who has spoken to us on occasion, whose business had been lived in the current ethics of the day. And when the Lord Jesus Christ began to deal with him in Sovereign grace, Nate had to spend thousands of dollars paying back the money that he had just by the slick practices which were approved, and were done, but yet the Spirit of God would not allow them. He would not tolerate them. And so Nate had to fly to Buffalo, and to Rochester, and to New York, and come into the offices and sit down with someone, and take a checkbook and write out a check. And sometimes they lost their minds. But you know what happened more often than not? They would sit there and listen as Nate told about the invading Christ that had come into his heart, and then they would start to weep, and they would say, Nate, well if it is costing you this much, it must be real, but I never could become a Christian because it would cost me everything I've got. And yet many of those same men said, I want to talk to you any time you come to New York. And when he comes now, he still makes his way to offices in the garment district where some of these men welcome him because when he left Egypt he did not become entangled in the land. He went all the way.

And then of course there are some Christians coming out of Egypt that become entangled in *doctrinal difficulties*. They go here, and they find one doctrinal emphasis, and they go here, and there is another doctrinal emphasis, and here, and still a third. They find that good men disagree over great truths, and first thing you know the enemy says, Well, they have left Egypt well enough, but I'll get them entangled in doctrinal controversy. But oh how marvelous it is that he is wrong. He is wrong. And you need not become entangled there, because we preach not doctrine. We preach Christ. And it is the Lord Jesus to whom you cleave, and it is Christ that comes into your heart. Doctrinal difficulties testify primarily that mortal men view celestial and divine truth from different points of view, and are not to enlist your loyalty, but rather that you are to come to Him, and to submit to Him, and love Him, and serve Him, and let Him through the Word as you go on in the walk teach you. Do not let yourself become entangled in the land.

And then of course there are others that in addition to doctrinal difficulties find early after they become Christians that someone starts throwing up hard texts to them. They begin of course with the first one, "Where did Cain get his wife?" And then they start right on down through the Bible with all the hackneyed problem texts they can find, and try to weave a web around the feet of the child of God in which he will become entangled and discouraged. But that one who has seen the Lord Jesus can walk over the problem texts the same way that Israel went through the Red Sea on dry ground if they will just keep their eye on Him, and not allow the web that is woven for them by the half taught and the ignorant to become a snare to their feet.

But of course one of the most difficult things the babe in Christ has to face as he leaves the land is the fact that there are those *that name the Name of Christ that do not give evidence of the grace of God*. And coming against them, instead of finding the fruit of the Spirit and the grapes of his delights and character, they find bitterness and wrath and strife. And this of course is the quicksand that will most quickly entangle. And how imperative it is that if you have any years of testimony behind you, you should remember that your face reflects your heart, and your words reflect your attitude, and whereas it might be that there should be some justification for the things you say and do and are, nevertheless there are those who, viewing you, see you as the quicksand and the mire, and you gravely discourage them and entangle them in the land. And how imperative it is, therefore, that we should recognize that this is one of the things that Satan is using wherever he can.

Oh how often it is that we have had someone come and say, "You know, so and so has accused me of such and such." And I have had to say this, "Well is it true?" "No it isn't true. That's the worst of it." "Well," I said, "if it is true confess it and accept it from whatever source it comes. But if it isn't true, give no thought to it. Let not your heart be for a moment dismayed or disturbed because the accusation is simply one of Pharaoh's lariats that is thrown with the hope that it could entangle you in the land. If there is truth accept it. If there is not truth, don't fight it, don't try to correct it, because the moment that you cut this lariat out of his hand another one will come in the other hand. You can't do anything about it."

But oh how often babes in Christ, and older ones as well, will become entangled in the land by *criticism and false accusations*.

And then of course there is this. Sometimes people think that if they accept Christ they are going to live on in bliss, without any difficulty or problem, and they discover that sickness comes. Sometimes they find financial reverses. Sometimes they get into persecution. And there are times when, instead of having peace of mind, as they were told they would get, they find great temptation. They find great battles being fought. And sometimes they come to frustrations by discovering that they are torn between what they are and what they want. And so in these painful experiences in these special trials there is a temptation to become entangled in the land. But what is the answer? We have His Word. There was the Word with them. There was the Logos. We have the living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, and our hearts rest in His Word. Moses said, "The Lord will fight for you," and we find Paul saying, "There is no temptation, no testing overtaken you but such as is common to man, and He will with the temptation make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it" (Exo. 14:14; I Cor. 10:13). Satan is a liar as Pharaoh was. His accusations, his attempts, his efforts, all have the effect of failure if you will allow yourself to be crowded to Christ rather than separated from Him. You see when anything comes into your life; it comes as a wedge on the part of the enemy. He sends it in to split you off from the Lord you love. But if you can remember that when they cut the wedge out they left the clamp, and every wedge that has ever been made left a clamp. Just get into the clamp, and the harder the circumstances pound, the closer they will press you to Christ. Nothing can separate us from the love of God if we won't allow it to. Your attitude will determine. Had Israel turned and fled, they would have been destroyed. But standing still to find the mind and will of God, Pharaoh says, Now what are you going to do, Israel? God brought plagues and He delivered you, but now what are you going to do? What is your plan? What is your scheme? How are you going to get out? Everything you hoped for is gone. Everything you worked for, gone. You have been brought to wit's end corner, the Red Sea is on the left hand, the mountains are all around you, and the army is in pursuit behind you, what are you going to do? And the child of God says, I don't know. I don't know what I am going to do. But thank God, I don't need to know, because there is One who gave me a Word, and in His Word I stand, and by His Word I live. He said that He would never leave me nor forsake me. "Fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be of not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee. Yea, I will help thee. Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My Righteousness. Behold all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded. They shall be as nothing. They that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them and shall not find them, even them that contended with

thee, They that war with thee shall be as nothing and as a thing of naught, for I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear thou not. I will help thee” (Isa. 41:10-13).

So Israel, with mountains on the right, and the Sea on the left, surrounded and besought, has only one thing to do, stay close to the wounded side of the Son of God. Worship Him. Praise Him. Adore Him. Trust in Him. And wait until His Word says, Go forward, and not to move until it does, for He will make a way. The Lord knows the way through the wilderness, and all I have to do is to follow. The little children sing it, but they often won’t understand it until they get older. God wants this victory today to prepare you for tomorrow, and God wanted deliverance from Pharaoh’s army to judge Pharaoh and prepare His people for the path that lay ahead. And so He brought them to wit’s end corner, to the place of helplessness where they could stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.

And God is going to do that with you, and with me, for He wants us to learn to walk by faith. Shall we bow in prayer.

With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, look to your own heart, your own life. Meditate upon what you have heard. Have these lessons we learned from Pharaoh something to teach you? Have you, dear heart, become entangled in the land? Have you backslidden? Has something gotten around your feet? Have you stumbled? You are there, you are vulnerable? Oh why don’t you today just return to the Lord in brokenness, in confession, asking pardon and forgiveness? God knows your heart. Dear discouraged Christian, circumstances have begun to pile up on you, the Red Sea on the left, and the mountains on the right, and Pharaoh’s army behind, where will I go? The Lord Jesus said, “Go ye therefore,” and “I am with you always” (Mat. 28:19-20). “The Lord is my Shepherd. Thou leadest me in the paths of righteousness for His Name’s sake. Yea, though He lead me through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil” (Psa. 23). Do you know Him? Well then let the circumstances just crowd you to Christ, and stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.

Our Heavenly Father, we are such a needy people and we live in such an angry world. The world hates Christ and Christians. And Thou hast said, They that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. And Thou has said, Be not surprised. If they have done it to the Master, they will do it to the servant. Thou hast said, Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and speak all manner of evil against you falsely for my Name’s sake. Grant, our Father, that we shall realize that Thou hast permitted these circumstances to crowd us to Christ, to press us to Him. And so this morning may we just kiss the hands that are raised above us and know that they are Thy ministers to put us down here between them between the mountain and the sea that we can see Thy deliverance. Bring us to that place of rest, surrender, abandonment and faith. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Let us stand for the Benediction. There is only one Benediction that is appropriate for this message. And “now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior be glory, and honor, dominion and majesty, now and forever. Amen” (Jud. 1:24-25).

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, October 29, 1961 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.