

Red Sea Rule 8:

Trust God to deliver in His own unique way.

Jeremiah 32:27

August 16, 2009

One of my favorite stories about faith comes from the life of the Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah. In chapter 32 of the book of Jeremiah, the prophet finds himself in a hopeless situation. But then God tells Jeremiah to do something. It doesn't make a lot of sense to Jeremiah, but he goes ahead and does it anyway. He obeys God and does what God asks him to do. But then he prays. In his prayer, Jeremiah, in effect, says, "God, why in the world did you want me to do that? It's not going to do any good. There isn't anything that can help this situation. God, I know that you are almighty, but, God, even you can't help in this situation."

Then God speaks to Jeremiah. He says, "I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?" (Jer. 32:27)

I would guess that God wants to ask that same question to many of us here today. "I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is there anything in your life that is too hard for me?"

Some of us are struggling with our jobs. We don't have a job. Or the job that we do have is not paying us enough to cover all the bills. Or maybe we don't like our jobs to the point that we have to force ourselves to get out of bed and go to work every day. Can God do anything in those circumstances? Some of us are feeling tension in homes, and we are wondering. Is there any hope? Is there anything that even God can do in our homes? Some of us just wish we had a real home. We've prayed and longed for a loving family. We're wondering if God even hears our prayers any more. Or maybe it's your health that's got you down. This week you received a bombshell in terms of your health, and you are wondering what God is up to. Is God going to do anything? Can he do anything to help me?

Listen again to what God said to Jeremiah, and what he says to you and me today. "I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is there anything too hard for me?"

This morning we are once again thinking about what it means to trust God in difficult times. This is our eighth study on the subject. We've been using The Red Sea Rules as our guide so that we can understand and learn to practice some important biblical principles about faith. This morning we come to Red Sea Rule #8: *Trust God to deliver in His own unique way.*¹ That was the message that God was sending to Jeremiah centuries ago. "Jeremiah, you trust me. I will deliver you not in the way you imagine but in my own special way."

Trust God to deliver in His own unique way. Let's think about how God delivers his people. Let's reflect this morning on some examples from God's Word and from other Christians' lives. Let these stories sink in and become a part of your thinking. Robert Morgan, the author of The Red Sea Rules, does a good job of outlining three ways that God provides for his people. Let's identify them and then think about each one.

Miraculously

First, God sometimes provides for his people *miraculously*. He performs miracles! He does things that are totally unexpected. Think about the experience of the Israelites when they cross the Red Sea. The wind blows. The waves increase. The waters begin to part. They slowly build into two walls of water with a dry pathway running between them. Moses tells the Israelites to move. So they do. And they escape from Egypt once and for all! It was a miracle!

Does God still do remarkable things for people today? I think of a friend of mine who a few years ago lost his job. He asked me to pray with him that God would provide him with a new position. I agreed to do that, of course. But I also thought to myself that in his field it would

¹ Robert J. Morgan, *The Red Sea Rules* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 79.

probably be a long process and a long wait before he would find another job. He sent out his résumé, made phone calls, and put in applications. It wasn't long before he told me that he had two interviews. Shortly after that, he told me that he had been offered a job, and he had accepted it, and he was moving. I was amazed. It had happened so much faster than I had ever dreamed it could occur. (I had to think back on what I had thought earlier about how long it was going to take, and the only thing that I could say to myself was what Jesus said so often to his disciples: "O you of little faith!")

God does sometimes do things so quickly and in ways that we had never expected that it takes our breath away. God sometimes does provide miraculously.

When I hear a story like that, I usually respond in the same way that many of you are responding right now. "Oh, God, please do that for me! Come on, God. Oh God, if you would only act that way for me right now, I'd never doubt you again. If I could only see something that was so clearly from you, God, I'd be your most devoted follower. Please do a miracle for me!" Have you ever said that to God? So have I.

Let's stop and think about that a little bit. Is that really true? If you and I would experience an outstanding miracle, would we really never doubt again? Think about the Israelites and the Red Sea. God performed the miracle, but the Old Testament book of Exodus tells us that it wasn't long before the Israelites turned away from the living God and worshiped a lifeless idol that they had created with their own hands. Maybe that's why God doesn't perform as many miracles as often as we would like him to.

People often think that the Bible records miracles every other page or so. The truth is that miracles seem to occur in clusters. There are the miracles of the Israelites in escaping from Egypt. Another cluster of miracles occur in the lives of Elijah and Elisha. Then we read in the New Testament about Jesus and his apostles, and we find another cluster of God's mighty and unmistakable acts. There are some other miracles scattered through the Bible, but they are not evenly spaced or predictable. God knows better than we do that miracles are not a cure-all to the problem of sin and rebellion that resides in our hearts.

Miracles don't solve everything. God brought the Israelites through the Red Sea with a miracle, but then to get the rest of the way to the Promised Land they had to trudge for hundreds of miles through a harsh and unforgiving desert. On that walk they encountered lots of trials to their faith. God provided my friend with a job far quicker than I had ever expected, but then he had to sell his house and move. He had to find a new house to buy and had to help his children adjust to a new community and new school. One miracle was followed by a series of trials. That was true for my friend and true for the Israelites. The miracle—as amazing as it was—didn't solve everything. Keep that in mind when you find yourself wishing for a miracle and wondering why God doesn't give you one. Then trust God that he has a reason for not giving you the miracle you've requested. God will still provide for you—in his own unique way.

Providentially

God sometimes provides for his children miraculously. Thank God that he does! But God seems to use miracles sparingly. He usually provides for us in another way—*providentially*.

What does that word mean? What is providence? The word *providence* refers to the way that God weaves together the unremarkable and ordinary events and decisions of life in order to accomplish his specific purposes. He could accomplish his goals with miracles, but he usually works through the daily and unremarkable occurrences of life.

Think about the story of Esther that we find in the Old Testament. The book of Esther is unique in the Bible because there is no mention of God at all. The word *God* does not even occur in Esther. God is nowhere to be found! Oh, but read the book of Esther. Read it and marvel at the way that God weaves events together in such a way that Esther finds herself in a position to save the Jewish people from destruction. God is nowhere to be seen, but he is

constantly at work behind the scenes. That's providence. God provides for his people providentially. His work is not obvious until it's over.

Several years ago some Communist officials in Vietnam learned that there had been an outbreak of religion up in the highlands. So they sent some "teachers" up there to conduct a six-hour "re-education campaign" for the villagers. At the end of the session, one of the officials walked up to a blackboard and wrote two headings: "Against Christ" and "For Christ." Then he told the villagers to come up and sign their names in the appropriate column. Everybody just sat there not daring to move.

Finally, an elderly woman stood up and walked to the blackboard. She turned around and faced the villagers. She said, "For the last twenty years I have followed Marxism. I have followed the party line and served as your leader. But a few months ago I came to realize that Jesus Christ offers a better way." Then she turned around and signed her name as one who was "For Christ." The whole village followed one-by-one and signed their names under hers.²

Think about all the little things that God weaved together to have that happen. A woman comes to Christ in the highlands of Vietnam. She happens to be the Communist party leader there. It just happens that after her conversion the officials learn about this flare-up of religion in the area. They come to her village. The challenge is issued. Like Esther she takes her stand. She declares her faith, and that leads to the whole village to take a stand for Jesus too. A whole series of events flow together to accomplish God's purpose.

That's providence. It's the way that God usually seems to work. But please remember one important thing about providence. Just as we need to remember that miracles don't solve everything, we also need to remember that we can't read God's providence in advance. We usually try to. I know that I do. I look at all that is happening, and then I try to guess at how God is going to weave it all together. Have you ever done that? You pray about something real hard, and then you start looking for God's answer. Then a few things take place that make you think you know what God is going to do. Sometimes he does, but in my experience most of the time he doesn't. I think that I know what God is going to do, and then he does something far different. It reminds me of the description of God that we find in Ephesians 3:20. God is the one "who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine."

If you are a child of God through Jesus Christ, your heavenly Father is providentially at work in your life. But don't try to outguess him. I know that it is natural to do that, but it doesn't really get you anyplace. Instead of trying to figure out what God is doing, just keep doing day-by-day what he wants you to do, and he'll let you see what he's up to in due time. He doesn't ask you to predict. He asks you to trust. *Trust God to deliver in His own unique way.*

Mysteriously

Sometimes God delivers miraculously. More often he delivers providentially. Then there are those times when he delivers *mysteriously*. God delivers us in ways that we cannot understand. Sometimes we cannot even guess what God could possibly be doing. It appears to us that God has walked off and abandoned us.

God often delivers us not *from* our suffering but *through* our suffering. That's hard to grasp. It's hard for us to get a hold of it with our minds, and it's even harder for us to practice it in our lives.

Yet all of us who are Christians know that the Bible teaches this. We know that because the clearest example of God's mysterious provision stands right at the heart of our faith. Jesus dies on the cross. His death for our sins is God's greatest act of deliverance. But the people who were there and who saw it didn't understand it at all! It wasn't that they were more dense than we would have been if we had been in Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified. God was doing something that no human being could have understood at the time.

² Steve Halliday, *No Night Too Dark* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1992), 40-41.

In those situations God asks us to trust him. *Trust God to deliver in His own unique way*—even when his way is so mysterious.

A woman in our church told me a story from her childhood. Her mother was a single mom. Her mom had two children—this woman and her brother. One day they ran out of food. There was no food in the house. For three days there was no food in the house! This woman's mother prayed, and God did provide—but not in the way she had asked. For the next three days all three of them were sick with the flu. They didn't want anything to eat for those three days! After the three days were over and they had recovered from the flu, someone brought them the food they needed. Try to figure that one out! God provides, but he often provides mysteriously.

There's a man in the Old Testament who provides us with an example of trusting God when God acts mysteriously. His name is Habakkuk. He was one of the prophets. If you've never read the book of Habakkuk in the Old Testament, you should. It's only three chapters long. The book starts with Habakkuk looking at the society that he lives in and observing all the political and economic and religious corruption taking place in ancient Judah. He asks God why he doesn't do something about all that evil. God answers him. God tells Habakkuk that he's going to send judgment on that evil society. In fact, he's going to bring the Babylonian army to Jerusalem, and they are going to conquer the city and force all the people into exile! That's a little more drastic than what Habakkuk had in mind. In fact, God's solution bothers Habakkuk more than the original problem. So God goes on to explain to Habakkuk that he will also eventually send judgment on the Babylonians too. But that doesn't really help much. Things are going to get a lot worse for Habakkuk before they even start to get better.

At the end of Habakkuk we find the prophet's conclusion. Intellectually he still doesn't have it figured out, but he has come to a place where he's willing to leave it in the hands of God. Habakkuk gives us one of the strongest statements about faith in the entire Bible.

I heard and my heart pounded,
my lips quivered at the sound;
decay crept into my bones,
and my legs trembled.
Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity
to come on the nation invading us.
Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.

The Sovereign LORD is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights. (Hab. 3:16-19)

Conclusion

That's Red Sea Rule #8. *Trust God to deliver in His own unique way.* God does provide for his people. He will provide for you in the circumstances that you are in right now. He will! He may deliver miraculously. He may deliver providentially. He may choose to deliver you mysteriously. But he will deliver and provide. And he asks you to trust him. *Trust God to deliver in His own unique way.*