

Sermon for Sunday, February 29, 1976, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"WHEN GOD IS BEHIND YOU--AND PUSHES!"

Exodus 14:10-31

Text: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward.'" --Exodus 14:15

Last Sunday I preached a sermon entitled, "The Christian and the Tea Bag." I was saying that a Christian is something like a tea bag--he isn't much good until he has been through a little hot water. And hot water is coming to all of us! Because man is sinful, because he is broken and lives in a broken world, bad things happen to him. God doesn't will these things, but he permits them to happen to us. We call that the permissive decree of God. So, often, when bad things, terrible things, dreadful things, sorrowful things happen to us it is not God's will for us. Instead it is the consequence of sin in human life and God permits these things to happen to us. However, there are three things we can learn from the bad things that happen to us. First, God brings good out of them if we love him. And that's wonderful to know. It is wonderful to know that when life is doing its worst to me, if I love God he will bring good out of it. Second, we discover that these dreadful things cannot separate us from the love of God--not disaster, not pain, nor sorrow, not even death can tear us out of God's hands. And then, third, we learned that because those two things are true, we can praise God. We can give thanks in all circumstances because good comes out of evil and nothing separates us from God.

However, it may be that I gave a wrong impression in that sermon. Perhaps by implication I inferred that when things are bad, when life seems to have gone wrong, that God didn't have anything to do with it. But suppose that you find yourself in the most difficult, the most unpleasant, the most trying, the most unhappy of circumstances and it is God's will for you--what then? We have to ask the question, "Can God's will for me ever be hard and demanding?" And of course the answer is, "Yes, indeed!" You see, the fact is, you may discover that in some of life's most difficult situations God is behind you--and pushes! Sometimes it might be that the hot water you find yourself in is God's will for you.

Our scripture this morning is a case in point. Here are the Israelites on the banks of the Red Sea. They are surrounded by the wilderness desert and they can flee neither to the right nor the left. In front of them is the impassable sea and behind them are the dust clouds marking the approach of Pharaoh's chariots, bent on their destruction. They were in hot water right up to their ears! And believe me, they couldn't believe all this trouble was God's will for them. 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?" Yet, the fact is, where they were and what was happening was precisely God's will for them.

Do you know what an adversative conjunction is? Well, a conjunction is a little word that ties two thoughts together. It becomes an adversative conjunction when the second thought is going to be set in opposition to the first. For example, do you remember the story of Joseph? His brothers sold him into slavery, but later on he rises to power in Egypt. At the end he is reconciled to his brothers and saves the entire family from famine. Joseph says to his brothers, "You meant it for evil against me..." and then he uses the adversative conjunction, setting an opposite thought against this one--"you meant it for evil against me, but God meant it for good."

There are a lot of adversative conjunctions in the Bible. Do you remember the story of King David? David loved the Lord and when he moved the wilderness tabernacle to Jerusalem, he wanted to build a temple to house the Ark of the Covenant. This is what he says, however, "...as for me, I had in mine heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God. But God (yes, the adversative conjunction) said unto me, thou shalt not build a house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war." David had it in his heart to build a temple to the Lord, but God did not permit it.

Now, the reason I have gone to the trouble to explain an adversative conjunction to you is because of our scripture this morning. When the Pharaoh finally let the Israelites go, the normal course of travel would have been along the seacoast through the land of Philistia. That was the way the highway ran. Travel would have been easy. Yet the Bible says, "God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines although that was near." And then comes the adversative conjunction, "But God led the people round by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea." (Exodus 13:17-18) And the point of the whole thing is this: When the Israelites stood on the banks of the Red Sea with no place to go and the Pharaoh's troops were closing in, they were there precisely because that is where God had put them. They were, indeed, in hot water right up to their ears--and that's exactly where God meant for them to be!

Are you where you are this morning because God wants you there? That's the first thing I want to say this morning: Sometimes we are where we are because that is where God wants us. It may not always be pleasant or happy, it may not be easy or ideal, but at the same time it may be exactly where God wants you.

Isn't it a fact that we may complain against God's will for us? There is no doubt that the Israelites were where God wanted them because the Bible tells us that. Yet, even though they were in God's will, they complained bitterly. As a matter of fact they complained, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?" Does that sound like people excited about doing the Lord's will? And out there in the desert when the water ran short, we read, "And the people murmured against Moses..." (15:24) Soon after that the food got short and we read, "The whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness..." (16:2) Later on they got thirsty again and we read, "...and the people murmured against Moses, and said 'Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?'" (17:3) Well, how about you? Your circumstances may not be ideal; you may be complaining bitterly about your circumstances. But the real question is this: Are you where God wants you to be? Are you doing what God wants you to do? You see, you may feel your back is against the Red Sea and the Pharaoh's chariots are coming, but you may also be exactly where God wants you.

The second point I want to emphasize is this: If you are where you are because that's where God wants you, it means God has a plan for you. Wasn't that the case with the Israelites? They couldn't see it then, but for centuries afterwards they looked back on that moment as one of the most significant in their history. God was in the process of creating a nation for himself. When he first sent Moses to them, he had said, "...I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob..." (Exodus 6:7,8) They had forgotten that promise, but God had remembered. And that day when they stood on the banks of the Red Sea, God had a plan for them.

In my own life I can remember as clearly as though it were yesterday when God called me into the ministry. Over the years of my ministry, things have not always been easy. There have been times of frustration and hurt and disappointment. Yet, I have always known beyond a shadow of a doubt that I was where God meant for me to be and I have always believed he had a plan for my life. Sometimes I have not been able to see his will nor understand it. Often, it is not until looking back that I could see how God had been working in my life. Yet, my life--my ministry--has had meaning for me because I believed I was in God's will and he had a plan for my life.

What is God's plan for your life? Are you doing what God wants you to do? For you young people--are the things you are doing God's will for you? Are the ways you conduct yourself what God wants you to do? And what about your careers? Are you planning the things that God wants for you? Are you in his will for your life? And you businessmen, you housewives, you professional people--what is God's will for your life? God has a plan for all of us and each must ask himself if he is following God's plan for his life.

The third thing I want to say this morning is this: If we are in God's will and if he has a plan for our lives, then we can trust him no matter what is happening to us. Do you remember how the Bible tells of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane? He was in hot water, all right. He knew that the soldiers of the High Priest were on their way after him at that very moment. He knew what lay before him--the suffering, the awful agony, the dread pain of being whipped, of being spat upon and ridiculed, of at last being nailed to the cross. No one would want to go through all of that. There in the Garden he prayed, "Father, let this cup pass from me." Yet, he knew he was in God's will, he knew God had a plan; he dared to trust God no matter what the effort and sacrifice, no matter what the cost. So, he prayed, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done."

Are you trusting God this morning? I have a dear friend who went through the most major of surgery about a year ago. I know there were times when the pain was almost unbearable and surely there were times when he wished that God would let him die. Yet, he looks back on those times and he says, "I don't know why God let me live, but I know he has a plan for me." Well, that's what we are talking about--having faith, or trust--that whatever you may be called upon to bear, that God is working out his plan in your life.

And isn't it true also for us as a congregation? Why is Central where it is today? Is it not because it was in God's will that we be here? And if that is God's will for us, does he not have a plan for us? God's plan for us may demand sacrifice and commitment, it may demand doing our very best with what God has given us, but if we trust that we are in God's will and that he has a plan for this congregation we can make whatever sacrifice is required of us--not because we like it, but because--like Jesus--we must.

When the Israelites stood on the banks of the Red Sea, it was God's will that they be there and he had a plan for them. Because that was so, God said to Moses, "Tell the people of Israel to go forward..." And when God got behind them and pushed they did go forward. As they did, the waters divided before them and they passed through on the dry ground.

Are you having a hard time? Are the difficulties you face too great? Is the suffering you have too much? Well, as you face them--trusting God--you will discover an amazing thing. Like the Red Sea, those troubles will divide before you and you will pass through them.

Sometimes the troubles are the consequence of sin. But that's alright. It is alright because if we love God he will bring good out of it. Those troubles can't separate us from God, and therefore we can give thanks in all circumstances. On the other hand, when we are in God's will, when he has a plan for us, still troubles may come our way. But when they do, if we move forward in trust, God divides the waters before us.

So, it works out this way: no matter what the source of our troubles are we can trust God, even if he has to get behind us and push.

The third thing I want to say this morning is this: I love to think of the way God has a plan for our lives. When we are in God's will, when he has a plan for us, still troubles may come our way. But when they do, if we move forward in trust, God divides the waters before us. So, it works out this way: no matter what the source of our troubles are we can trust God, even if he has to get behind us and push.

Are you trusting God this morning? I have a teen friend who went through the most major of surgery about a year ago. I know there were times when the pain was almost unbearable and surely there were times when he wished that God would let him die. Yet, he looks back on those times and he says, "I don't know why I let me live, but I must have had a plan for me." Well, that's what we are talking about--trusting God, or trusting that whatever you may be called upon to face, that God is working out his plan in your life.

And that's the reason for us as a congregation. We're here because we are here. It is not because it was in God's will that we be here. And that's the reason we are here. It is not because it was in God's will that we be here. And that's the reason we are here. It is not because it was in God's will that we be here. And that's the reason we are here.

Then the Israelites stood on the banks of the Red Sea and they said to Moses, "Tell the people of Israel to go forward." And what God did was to divide the waters and they passed through on the dry ground.