

ESF Lord's day service message
5/26/2019

The Way of God's Guidance
Exodus 13:17-22

¹⁷ When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt." ¹⁸ So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt ready for battle.

¹⁹ Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the Israelites swear an oath. He had said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place."

²⁰ After leaving Sukkoth they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. ²¹ By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. ²² Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

We now have GPS (Global Positioning System) technology. It is very convenient system for us to find places and directions. But it can't help us to find directions of our hearts and minds. It can't guide us when we are in the midst of confusion and need guidance. So we need something other than technological GPS. Could there be any other device that guides our hearts and minds? Here in this text, God gives us another GPS - **God's Positioning System**. It is the perfect GPS. If we use this GPS, we will always find the guidance and direction we need. Let's see how God's GPS works and how God teaches us to use it.

God's GPS appeared to the Israelites when they were traveling in the desert at the time of the Exodus. The desert is very hot in the daytime and very cold at night. The desert is a place where there is no shelter, no water and no food. The desert is a place where there is no particular road. The desert is a place where people have to face extremely uncomfortable circumstances every day.

We do not live in an environment like a desert all the time. But some times we may face similar situations. Our lives may be in a very cold and dry place. We may wander without knowing what to do or where to go. Today's word teaches us how God protects us and guides us when we are in such a desert.

Through God's perfect knowledge of us

After God took the Israelites out of Egypt, He guided them through the desert. There were two roads from Egypt to Canaan. One road was a short cut from the north of Egypt to the south of Canaan, perhaps about a week's journey. Another road was much farther through the desert. The first road was faster, easier and a more comfortable road than the second road.

If God had not told them anything about which road they should take, they would have taken the easier road. Or if God had told them to choose among the two roads, they would certainly have chosen the same easier road. But God led them through the second road-the desert. Why? Because God knew the best way for them at that time. See verses 17-18: *"....For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt." So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. "*

They lived as slaves for a long time. They had never been trained to fight in battle. The Philistines against whom they would fight were formidable enemies. They had many well trained soldiers. They had weapons which were far superior to the weapons of the Israelites. So if they faced war against the Philistines too soon, they would be caught up with fear. Then they would give up going into the land of promise and return to the slavery in Egypt.

They were unable to see their weakness. They did not foresee what would happen if they took the shorter and easier way. But God was able to see it. God knew who they were. God knew their weakness. God knew what would happen if they chose the seemingly easier way.

So instead of guiding the Israelites along the shorter, and more comfortable route from Egypt to the land of promise, He led them through the longer and more difficult route.

Although we believe in God, serve Him and obey Him, our lives may remain in a situation like a desert. We may find ourselves in the midst of a desert where we face an extremely uncomfortable and difficult situation. In such a situation, we may get confused. “Why has God allowed this difficulty in my life?”

But in moments like that, we have to trust that God has good reason. God knows our frame of mind and our weaknesses. God knows and sees what we can't know and see. We have to trust that God always leads us through the best path for us.

Usually, we want to take a short cut. We want to take an easy and broad road. But we do not know what really lies ahead on the easy and broad road. However, God knows exactly what will happen in our future. God

knows what will appear in every road we may take in this world. There are many roads which seem good to us, but eventually lead us into harm and destruction. In contrast there are certain roads which seem difficult now, but eventually lead us into security and victory. God leads us through the road which is best for us.

One day Billy and Ruth Graham were driving through a long stretch of road construction. They had numerous slowdowns, detours, and stops along the way. Finally they reached the end of all that difficulty, and smooth pavement stretched out before them. This sign caught Ruth's attention: "End of construction. Thanks for your patience." She commented that those words would be a fitting inscription on her tombstone someday.

As a matter of fact, those words fit all of us as believers, because in this life we are "under construction." When we accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we begin the lifelong process of spiritual growth. The Holy Spirit works in us to remove our selfishness (Philippians 2:4), to renew our thinking (Romans 12:2), and to develop qualities in us that are more and more Christlike (Colossians 3:5-14). Paul described this process as a work of God. He said, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). When His work in us is complete, "we shall be like Him" (1 John 3:2), perfectly conformed to our Savior's likeness.

If God leads you through detours, bumpy roads, difficult paths, be patient with the detours and difficult roads. Keep trusting that He is going to lead you through the best way.

Through God's presence

When the people were in the desert, they might have doubted God's presence. "Where is God? If He is with us and guiding us why has He put us in this terrible place?"

In the desert, God appeared to them through a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud. The pillars of fire and cloud were "theophany"- "God's appearance in a visible form." God proved that He was still there with them. He proved that He was still guiding them in the desert. In this form, God lighted Israel's path, protected them from their enemies, and guided their movements. With His presence through the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud, God assured them that He would never leave them nor forsake them. Deut. 31:6 says, "*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.*"

When we face desert like circumstances and doubt God's presence in our lives, God may use some visible signs to assure us that He is still with us. Then what could be the visible signs of God's guidance?

God's Word can be a visible sign of His presence. As the Israelites looked to the pillars of cloud and fire, we can look to God's Word day and night to know He is with us, helping us on our journey. "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path*" (Psalm 119:10). If you are in trouble and you can't handle it, look to God's word in the Scripture and try to find out how to overcome the trouble. If you do not know what to do in a difficult situation, read the Scripture to find out what to do.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit can also be visible signs of God's guidance. We can see God's presence in the visible gifts of the Holy Spirit such as healing, speaking in tongues, power to control oneself, courage to tell

good news to other people, peace in the midst of turmoil, changes in the hearts of people. If you see any of these spiritual gifts, believe that you are following guidance of God. Be confident that the Spirit of God is guiding you. Keep using the gift to serve the Lord.

But, the perfect visible sign of God's guidance in our lives today is Jesus. Jesus is the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire today. Jesus is the manifestation of the eternal Word, which became flesh, and made his dwelling among us (John 1:14). *"No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the father's side, has made him known"* (John 1:18).

When we confess our faith in Him, He brings peace to our hearts. When we call His name, the Devil is afraid of us. We can overcome the Devil's temptation when we hold on to His name. Jesus is the perfect visible sign of God's presence.

So when we are in a desert, we have to fix our eyes upon Him. *"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,...."* (Heb 12:2).

Through constant dependence on God

Why did God not give them a complete roadmap for their journey in the desert instead of giving them a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud? Why did God use a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud on which the people should rely upon for their direction every day? A full roadmap would have been more convenient. If they had a roadmap, they could use it without worrying about a new schedule every day. But God did not give them a full road map. God made them follow the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud day by day.

Why did God lead them that way? Because God wanted them to depend upon Him day by day and moment by moment. God told them clearly about the final destiny they would reach- the land of promise, Canaan. But before they reached there, they should follow God's guidance day by day and learn to have intimate fellowship with God every day.

God does not give us one big roadmap of our lives. He does not say to us "Here is the roadmap of your entire life. Just follow it" No, He does not guide us like that. Why? Because, God wants to have fellowship with us day by day. If we have a clear roadmap for our whole lives, we will not depend upon God every day. We may forget to have intimate fellowship with God every day. We may forget how fragile and weak we are, and may become proud of ourselves. Eventually we may fall into the way of destruction.

That is why God leads us to depend upon Him day by day. We know the final destiny where we are going to. We know that there will be final victory in God. We know that death is not the end of everything. We know that there is life after death in Jesus.

But before we reach that moment, we are going to face some situations that are like a desert. We have to face our limit. We have to understand that we can depend only on God. We have to realize that without depending upon God, we will be lost. And we have to depend upon Him moment by moment, day by day.

A man was flying a plane to his parents' home far away from where he lived. After several hours of flying he finally got above the area of his parents' home. He was preparing to land. But suddenly he lost control of the plane. He tried to do everything to regain the control but the plane did not respond. At that moment there was nothing he could do. At that

moment he had nothing to depend upon. For a short moment he earnestly prayed upon God for help. Soon after the plane crashed into a huge tree nearby his parents' home. The tree was the tree he planted when he was a young boy and lived with his parents. It grew a lot and became so big that it was able to prevent the plane from crashing to the ground. God used the tree to rescue the man's life that day.

God may use many different situations and paths to guide you. No matter what circumstances you are facing today, you must never forget that God is with you and can guide you to the right way and best way. Just depend upon Him moment by moment and day by day.