

Israel's Need - and God's Mercy

by James Smith

The sermon highlights the necessity of God's guidance in our spiritual journey, paralleling it with Israel's exodus from Egypt and their reliance on divine mercy.

Scripture: Exodus 13:21, Deuteronomy 31:8, Psalm 32:8, Psalm 48:14, Psalm 73:24, Psalm 139:9, Proverbs 3:5, Isaiah 30:21, Philippians 1:6

Topics: "Spiritual Guidance", "Eternal Rest"

Description

James Smith preaches about the journey of life from this fleeting world to the eternal world, drawing parallels between the Israelites' journey from Egypt to the promised land and our journey from earth to Heaven. He emphasizes the need for a guide in our spiritual journey, highlighting the long and trying path, numerous foes, dangers, and unbelieving hearts we face. Smith points to God as our ultimate guide, who adapts to our circumstances, provides for our needs, and leads us through every trial until we reach our eternal rest.

Transcript

Life is but a journey -- a journey from the present fleeting world, to the eternal world.

"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. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people." Exodus 13:21-22

If the books of Moses were now for the first time put into our hands, with what deep interest would we read them, and what a powerful impression would their contents make upon our minds. To sit down and read, how God fitted up the world for our reception, how he created our first parents, how they fell by sin, and how graciously God opened a door of hope before them. To go through the history of the long-lived ante-diluvians, the history of the patriarchs, and, above all, God's wonderful dealings with his people. Surely we would be absorbed in the subject, and filled with admiration at the book.

But we have been familiar with these things from our childhood, and therefore they have lost the charm of novelty. Still we cannot read these books carefully and with prayer, especially when we bear in mind that the past was typical of the present -- without interest, instruction, and profit.

Israel had been brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand; they were about to cross the sea, enter the wilderness, and travel to the promised land. Moses was their leader -- but they needed one wiser, more patient, and more powerful than Moses.

Just so with ourselves; the Lord has brought us out of the Egypt of our natural state; we have crossed the sea, which forever forbids our return to it; we are strangers and pilgrims on earth; and are traveling to a country which the Lord has promised to give us for an inheritance. There is, therefore, a similarity between Israel's circumstances -- and our own; and we will keep this in view while we meditate on this portion of the Lord's Word. Here we see --

First -- Israel's Need . They needed a GUIDE.

They had a long journey before them, which would take them forty years.

They had to travel by a strange path , on which they had never trodden before.

Numerous foes would endeavor to obstruct their progress.

Many dangers lined the way. And they had mistrustful and deceiving hearts.

Fellow-Christians -- is it not even so with us? We are going on a journey to a country of which the Lord our God has told us.

The journey is long and trying. It takes some twenty, some forty, and some sixty years to travel from earth to Heaven.

It is a strange path. A path which no one knows -- a path we have never trodden before. A path which by nature we could never find, and from which we are prone to turn aside.

We are surrounded by numerous foes , visible and invisible:

The WORLD frowning as a determined persecutor, or fawning as a base deceiver -- is our foe. Now by its sneers, sarcasms, or sword; and then by its gilded vanities, flesh-pleasing baits, and blandishments -- it endeavors to turn us aside from the right ways of the Lord.

SATAN and his hosts -- crafty, cunning, cruel, united, persevering and determined -- set themselves to terrify and drive us back, or to allure us from the way.

And worst of all, in our own natures, we have a determined foe who is . . .

ever present,

ever vigilant,

ever powerful.

Yes, the FLESH lusts against the Spirit. We find a law in our members warring against the law of our minds.

The world, the flesh, and the devil all combine to . . .

oppose our progress,

hinder us in our march, and,
if possible, to destroy us in the wilderness!

Then there are so many dangers :

the towering rocks of presumption,

the quagmires of doubt and fear,

the pitfalls of error,

the ravines of willful sin,

the fiery-flying serpent of temptation,

the scorpion of indulged lust,

the sunshine -- and the shade;

the barren sands -- and the verdant valleys;

the granite rocks -- and the flowing streams

-- all of them have dangers concealed in them! Nor can we be trusted alone for one moment -- if we are to be safe. Worst of all, there are our distrustful and deceitful hearts!

Overcoming faith is impossible without the constant renewings of the Holy Spirit. We doubt the promise -- and distrust the promiser. Sometimes we question whether we have ever left Egypt -- and at other times we are ready to conclude, that for our sin, he has brought us out to slay us in the wilderness. This distrusting God is the sin that does so easily beset us.

With so long a journey, so strange a path, such numerous foes, so many dangers, and such unbelieving hearts -- can we ever reach the promised land? Can we? Not if left to ourselves. Not if led only by Moses. Not if we have merely an angel for our guide. We must have a guide . . .

who well knows the road;

who can conquer our many foes;

who can lead us safely through all our dangers;

who can bear with our stubborn hearts and lives!

We need a guide . . .

whose wisdom is perfect,

whose power is almighty,

whose care is constant,

whose patience is immutable, and

whose mercy endures forever!

And we have such a guide, for the Most High God, who rules over the kingdoms of men has said to us, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you shall go! I will guide you with My eye!" (Psalm 32:8) And so sweetly has he assured us of his love, won our confidence, and revealed his character and qualifications, that we have right heartily said, "You shall guide me with your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory!" Israel's God was Israel's guide; and this God is our God forever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death, through death, and beyond it. "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." This leads us to notice --

Secondly -- The Lord's Mercy . God provided just what the Israelites in needed in the wilderness -- a guide to lead them by day and night. He went just before them: thus pointing out the road, clearing it of insurmountable difficulties, and conducting them in it.

This is just what our good and gracious God does for us! He is really present with us -- though unseen by us. He is never far from any one of us. He marks out our road, He removes every real impediment out of our way, and conducts us step by step in the path to the promised land!

Naturally we do not know the path; and when we do, our nature always dislikes it. Left to ourselves, we would choose the short-cut, the smooth path, and well-frequented road. But He leads us in a zig-zag way, by a rough and uneven road -- where there are but few fellow-travelers. His choice is best. The way He points out is the only right one. It is to humble us, and test us, and show what is in our hearts. It is that we may walk by faith -- and not by sight. It is to teach us our need of Himself -- and to lead us to cleave to Him.

He came behind them. When the Egyptians drew near, the pillar of fire moved, and fell down as a fiery partition, as an impassable barrier between the two companies.

The Lord went before them, and the God of Israel was their reward.

Just so, our wise and watchful guide becomes our SHIELD -- he interposes between us and danger. Often, very often, would the Egyptians have come upon us from behind, and injured, if not destroyed us -- but our God was there, he protected and preserved us. We shall never know until we get to glory -- how often and in how many ways, the Lord has interposed for us and preserved us!

He adapted himself to all their circumstances.

By day , when the sun was pouring down its streams of glaring light and scorching heat -- it was a cooling and refreshing cloud , spreading like a large umbrella over the entire company.

By night , when the cold dews were falling, and the chilling winds were blowing -- it was a warming cheerful fire. It was shade or light; shadow or warmth -- just as they needed. And, oh, beloved, how has our God adapted himself to all our circumstances these many years in the wilderness!

He has warmed us with his love -- and cooled us with his mercy.

He has sheltered us with his broad hand -- and cheered us with his loving Word.

In looking back , we can see that we have had the cloud by day -- and the fire by night. He has fully provided for them that they might journey by day and night. If they had to strike their tents and pack up for a march at noon-day -- the cloud shadowed them; and if they had to prepare for a removal at midnight -- the fire gave them light to work by. If they traveled on scorching sands, and under a burning sky -- they were sheltered; and if they journeyed under the gloom of midnight -- they were illumined and cheered.

Blessed be God for the provision he has made for us, for we have found his grace sufficient for us, and his strength perfected in our weakness. Our shoes have been iron and brass; and as our day -- so has our strength been. We have gone by day and night. Ah, some of us have traveled much by night! But we have ever found the truth of the testimony, "Unto the upright -- there arises light in darkness ."

He continued his kindness to them unto the end. "Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people." The symbol of the divine presence continued with them until Moses died. When Joshua became leader, the ark opened the way through the Jordan, and conducted them into the promised land.

Just so, God's providence will care for us, comfort us, lead us, and supply us -- until we come to the Jordan. And then Jesus, the Captain of our salvation, Jesus, the ark of the everlasting covenant -- will lead us across the river, make the way plain and easy, and introduce us to the promised land.

He who began with us, will go on with us -- nor will he leave us nor forsake us until he has done all that he has spoken to us of. Every jot and tittle of his Word must be fulfilled, for the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake; because it has pleased the Lord to make them his people. We are confident of this very thing -- that he who has begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ!

Beloved, are you traveling from Egypt to Canaan -- from earth to Heaven? If so, you need a guide. No creature will be found sufficient. It must be the Lord himself.

He guides all his people by his providence , for his eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in behalf of all those who hearts are perfect towards him.

He guides them by his grace . His Word is our directory -- the map of our journey. On that he shines by his Holy Spirit, and in us he works by the same divine agent. He convinces, he inclines, he leads, he sustains, and at length introduces us to the eternal rest prepared for the people of God.

If God is your guide -- he will adapt his manifestation to your circumstances. There will be no visible cloud or fire -- but he will make your way plain before your face. He will not guide you as a horse or mule -- with bit and bridle; but as a rational being -- as a beloved child. He will take you by the hand, gradually and graciously clear your way, and comfort and encourage you as you go on.

Under his guidance you will make progress both by day and night.

In prosperity and adversity,

in joy and sorrow,

in light and darkness,

in summer and winter,

you will still make way to the promised land.

The true Christian can travel by day or night . He is not dependent on circumstances . He often rises beyond the region of second causes . He make progress -- because the Lord is with him.

If God begins to lead you, he will go through the whole journey with you. He will not leave you in the middle. He will not forsake you toward the end.

Aged pilgrim, cheer up! The Lord who led you when young, who guided you in life's meridian -- will not leave you now.

"Even down to old age all his people shall prove,

His sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love!

And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,

Like lambs they shall still in his bosom be borne!"

Young Christian, take courage. You have a long journey, it may be, before you. You have to cross a waste-howling wilderness. You will have to contend with Og, king of Bashan, and Sihon, king of the Amorites. The Amalekites may come out against you. Moab may hire soothsayers against you. But fear not -- press on. Keep your eye on the cloud by day, and expect the fire at night. He who has mercy on you, will lead you, even by the springs of water will he guide you. You may at times be brought to a stand-still, and wonder which is the right path, when you come where two ways meet; but even then, you shall hear a voice behind you , saying, "This is the way -- walk in it!"

Doubts may beset you,

fears may assault you,

Satan and the world may conspire against you

-- but your God will guide you!

He will support, supply, and defend you; and make all his goodness pass before you!

"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. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people." Exodus 13:21-22

When Israel was from Egypt freed,

The Lord who brought them out,

Helped them in every time of need,

But led them round about.

They often murmured by the way,

Because they judged by sight;

But were at length constrained to say,
The Lord had led them right!
By fire and cloud their way was shown,
Across the pathless sands;
And Amelek was overthrown,
By Moses' lifted hands.
The way was right, their hearts to prove,
To make God's glory known,
And show his wisdom, power, and love,
Engaged to save his own!
Just so the true believer's path
Through many dangers lies;
Though dark to sense, 'tis right to faith,
And leads us to the skies!

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