

# MOVING FORWARD

## Exodus 14v15

Sally was taking an afternoon nap before a New Year's Eve party. When she woke she confided to Max, her husband, *"I just dreamed that you gave me a diamond ring for a New Year's present. What do you think it all means?"* *"Aha, you'll know tonight"* answered Max with a big grin. At midnight, as the New Year was chiming, Max kissed Sally and handed over a small package. Delighted and excited she opened it quickly. There in her hand rested - a book entitled 'The meaning of dreams.'

As this New Year begins many people feel like Sally. Their dreams have turned out to be – just that, dreams. Most of the news at the moment is very depressing. This week the Halifax announced that the value of your house slumped by a record 16.2% in 2008. Forecasts for 2009 are very gloomy. People are hunkering down to withstand the storm. Not a time for forging ahead or taking risks and fresh initiatives, you might think. Perhaps a time for pulling back, drawing the curtains, hiding under the duvet!

But as I asked God what message He wanted me to bring today, Exodus 14v15 kept bugging me. **Tell the people to move forward.** (GNB) What might this mean? The context of Exodus 14v15 is the Israelites escaping from Egypt where they have been slaves. Moses is their leader. God has sent plagues and the angel of Death and Pharaoh has agreed to let them go. But now Pharaoh has changed his mind and is pursuing them with his army in chariots. Read Exodus 14v5-15. The Israelites were faced with the sea! Cries of alarm went up; the people began to turn on Moses. So you thought you had problems! Moses tries to reassure them but God interrupts and says: **Tell the people to move forward.** Yes, into the sea! *"Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground."*

### Four observations

1. We can seriously consider moving forward even when the way ahead looks hopeless because we have a mighty God. So much hangs on *who* is calling you to go forward! In my postcard collection I have one of a series based on 1<sup>st</sup> World War recruitment posters. It shows an officer on horseback, sword drawn charging into battle and the word *"Forward!"*. It was appealing to British men's patriotic duty to enlist. And they did, with smiles on their faces, little knowing they walking into a massacre. But when God says "Forward" it is very different. He has gone before us! That is what the incarnation was about. He went to the cross! Yes, there are big challenges facing us – personally, in our families, nationally, internationally. And I can understand the despondency of those who have no faith. But we have a mighty God!

2. Sometimes moving forward is the only viable option. In fact at times God seems to put us in a position where we have little choice but to trust Him and move on. Does that ring a bell for any of you? In Exodus 14 God led the Israelites into this cul-de-sac – probably for this purpose - so that the people

had no other choice but to trust Him. The only other choices were to go back into slavery or be slaughtered. Not a great set of options.

3. God is looking for leaders who are prepared to move forward; leaders at every level. When leaders go forward in faith others will follow. Your influence with others will be in proportion to your willingness to obey God yourself. So leaders need to be able to hear God's voice - to recognise when it *is* His voice and they need to allow God to stop them in their tracks – to interrupt them!

4. Words can sometimes be a substitute for going forward. Yes, there is a time for praying mighty prayers of faith – but this was a time to move forward. And yes, there is a time for preaching stirring messages and listening to stirring messages - but here God was looking for some physical steps of faith. There is a time to detach ourselves from comforting words and move forward.

## We all need to move forward

Personally: I know the talk at this time of year is of resolutions. But what we need more than anything in 2009 is for every one of us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 3v18) This touches every other aspect of your life. Think about your life in these 4 areas: character, knowledge, serving and skills. Ask yourself: How can I move forward in godly character? How can I move forward in my knowledge of Biblical truth? How can I move forward in serving others / developing some new skill?

And for those who are married or have young families – give priority to your marriage and to your parenting. The first months of the year are known to be particularly challenging for families. Some pundits are saying that the family is going to be a much bigger priority for many people this year. One of them is Richard Watson who advises big companies on future trends. Commenting on the present world economic upheaval he says, *“Personally, I don't think that what's going on is all bad because it reminds us that actions have consequences. Things had swung too far and have been brought back again.”* Then he adds: *“To get through this mess, we will have to stick together, and that means a new emphasis on the wellbeing of the family, the team, neighbours, the community, the common good and looking after each other rather than being a selfish individual.”*

As a people together: There are also some big challenges before us in our mission in this county. But we have a mighty God. Our calling in the County needs faith-filled pioneers; men and women with a moving-forward mentality. I believe this *is* a time for fresh initiatives for us as church.

Miracles happen when you move forward in impossible circumstances. A.W. Tozer said, *“God is looking for people through whom He can do the impossible – what a pity that we plan only the things we can do by ourselves.”* The miracle resulting from Exodus 14v15 became one of the mountain peaks of Israel's history. It was the theme of many songs. Will that be so for you, for us as we move forward this year?

**John Wilthew. January 2009.**

# MOVING FORWARD

**TEXT: Exodus 14v15.** (Good News Bible)

*The Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out for help? **Tell the people to move forward.**"* (Good News Bible)

## MESSAGE SUMMARY:

As the New Year begins most people are hunkering down to withstand the storm. Not a time for forging ahead or taking fresh initiatives you might think. But here is a text which encourages us to move forward, whatever the challenges and obstacles facing us. Read Exodus 14v5-15.

### **Some observation coming out of verse 15**

1. We can seriously consider moving forward, even when the way ahead looks hopeless, because we have a mighty God.
2. Sometimes moving forward is the only viable option. God wants us to trust Him.
3. God is looking for leaders who are prepared to move forward; leaders at every level.
4. Words can sometimes be a substitute for going forward.

### **We all need to move forward in 2009**

#### **Personally – as individuals and families**

- Grow in the grace & knowledge of Jesus (2 Peter 3v18) This affects everything else I your life.
- How can you move forward in godly character / knowledge of Biblical truth / serving others / some new skill?
- Family life: giving top priority to your marriage and to young children.

#### **Together - as a people**

- Big challenges but we have a big God
- God wants pioneers with a 'moving-forward' mentality.
- This year we will be taking some fresh initiatives as a church e. in AIn Valley, through cell groups, with City Church and developing a partnership with the team in Norfolk.

*"God is looking for people through whom He can do the impossible – what a pity that we plan only the things we can do by ourselves."* (A.W. Tozer)

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. John made four observations on verse 15. Any others you want to make?
2. What big challenges do you face, personally, at this time?
3. Why does it make such a difference to know God when times are tough?
4. What have been the biggest moves forward you have made over the years?
5. In what personal ways would you like to move forward in 2009?
6. What fresh initiatives can you make to move forward as a group this year?