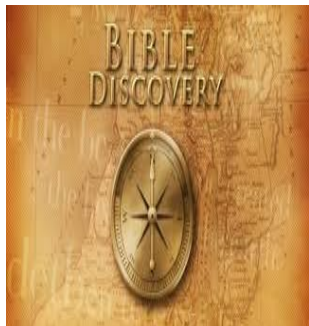


January 24, 2016

Exodus 3:1-12

Handling Obstacles God's Way



As we began the New Year perhaps you heard it starts with a clean slate and having heard that, you thought “*if only*”! If only last year’s mistakes didn’t exist once I flipped the calendar. If only my troubles and problems disappeared. If only I didn’t have so many obstacles in my way I could really accomplish something great.

Well, put yourself in the shoes of Moses. No longer was this the Moses who walked the halls of Pharaoh’s courts, no longer was this the self-righteous man who had slain the guard who’d been beating an Israelite slave in anger. Moses had taken up caring for the sheep of his father-in-law and had settled to a fairly routine life in the desert. Forgotten were the drills in battle, the academic studies, and the dialogue before the royals of Egypt.

It was this Moses – timid, shy, uncertain, and reluctant – who received the call from God to go and set his people free. It’s this Moses who teaches us how to handle the obstacles we face God’s way. Or more accurately it’s the lessons God gives to Moses which we can use to prepare in handling our own obstacles.

The occasion during which Moses meets God on Mt Horeb and receives his commission to go is lengthy and I think Garrison is quite glad I didn’t have him read the whole story today. I encourage you to read the story which began with Exodus 2:23 through 4:26 on your own to capture the magnificence of God’s encouragement and commitment to his people. We remember Moses as a great Patriarch, a great leader, as God’s amazing servant – and he certainly was but there was a time in the beginning when he too had obstacles to overcome. Before Moses could stand before the throng of Israel and before he carried the Ten Commandments down to the camp and even before he extended his rod out at the Red Sea, Moses began by standing at the age of 80 before a burning bush in the desert.

1) **Noticing God’s presence**

First we learn from Moses’ encounter with the burning bush that he recognized it represented the presence of God. Think about it. While Moses was tasked with tending sheep, God called him to another task. That’s worth noting as we sometimes think we’re called to serve God only when all the conditions are right – the stars are aligned and life’s sorted out. Yet here all sense of routine suddenly yields to the appearance of the angel of the Lord. The Lord appeared to Moses as a flame of fire. He could’ve set the whole Sinai valley ablaze but God only did what was necessary to draw Moses to him. Miracles aren’t circus side shows intended to entertain; they simply accredit the Word of God confirming and alerting us to His divine presence. Using the despised burning bush in the desert was God’s medium for revelation and he waited for Moses’ response. When Moses went over to see the unusual sight, God knew he had Moses’ attention. Noticing God’s presence is always the first step in handling obstacles in our life God’s way. That’s because until God has our attention we can’t respond to his direction. That’s why God sent his Son Jesus so that HIS kingdom would be revealed.

**Worship is
anything and
everything we do
out of our religious
adoration and
devotion to God.**

2) **Acknowledging God’s holiness**

It’s not enough to simply acknowledge God is present. We can do that with any god – even the demons acknowledge God - but with ***THE*** God it’s essential we recognize we’re meeting with a God who is holy. By holy I mean He’s separate – separate from our humanness, separate from our sin, separate from our finite being. Theologian R. C. Sproul wrote, “When the Bible calls God holy it means primarily that God is... separate. He’s so far above and beyond us that He seems almost totally foreign to us. To be holy is to be ‘other’, to be different

in a special way.” God’s holiness then brings us to a state of worship. Worship is anything and everything we do out of our religious adoration and devotion to God. Although some would make it ritualistic, I believe our worship must come from the heart and be *our* experience of God’s presence. It then becomes our response to God. Notice here in Exodus 3 that there are three factors which take place in Moses’ encounter and subsequent worship of God.

- i. **When conditions for meeting God are met** – Moses is told to prepare himself for meeting God by removing his sandals which was to teach we must not rashly intrude upon God but enter reverently with awe and respect. Not only is God holy (and we’re not) but his presence instills a holiness in anywhere He is. The ordinary becomes ‘holy ground’ and subsequently set apart for God’s distinct use.
- ii. **Moses hid his face in reverent fear** – Moses’ fitting response to recognition of God’s presence was reverent fear. All throughout the OT we find those who meet with God sensing their own unworthiness. How do we approach the living God, the creator of the universe? Yes, we have Jesus revealed as the Son of God and are invited to come openly to Him and we thankfully do, but do we honour Him with our respect and reverent fear?
- iii. **Only then God reveals Himself** – Without preparation, without reverence and acknowledgement we miss out on God! Only after Moses rightfully prepared to face the LORD did God reveal Himself and explain in detail not only who He is but details to the commission He had for Moses.

3) Discovering God’s Plan

I’ve spent considerable time laying out a foundation for coming before God without emphasis on the handling of obstacles in our lives. I do that because in our modern era I believe we’ve lost focus on reverent fear and true worship for our Heavenly Father. We’re out of step with God’s plan for our interaction with Him. Somewhere along the way, Jesus has become ‘our buddy’; no longer our ‘LORD’, our Saviour, and our God. If we’re to discover the process of handling obstacles God’s way, we must first return to the awe and majesty of who He is and get down on our spiritual knees and turn from our wicked ways so that indeed, as He promises, He will hear us. When we do I think we’ll discover a very different perspective to handling our problems.

Who am I?

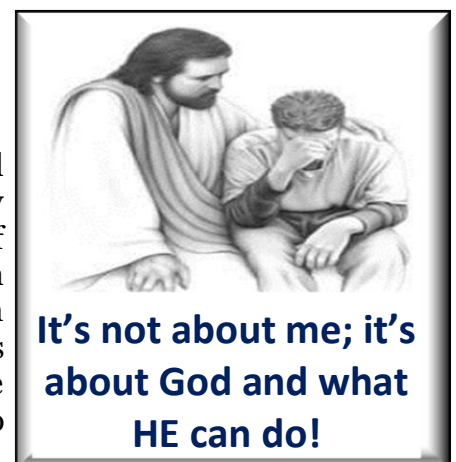
Look at verse 11 – this question by Moses must also be ours. “Who am I that I should go?” Who am I that the King would bleed and die for? Who am I that He would pray not my will, Thine Lord? The gospel group, Casting Crowns asks this question as they sing,

***Who am I, that the Lord of all the earth
Would care to know my name,
Would care to feel my hurt?
Who am I that the Bright and Morning Star
Would choose to light the way.
For my ever wandering heart?***

The chorus gives us their response...

***“Not because of who I am but because of what You've done.
Not because of what I've done but because of who You are.”***

Two things come to mind. First is when God comes to us we lose all sense of our accomplishment and ability. The encounter with God by Moses reflects the change that came over him. Gone by forty years of sobering reflection was the self-styled Israelite deliverer who had slain the Egyptian. Now timid, unsure of himself, Moses shrank back from any self-assertiveness. Secondly like Moses, when we fail to accept God’s decision to use us and the subsequent message that we are able, we doubt God. We’re saying God you can do most things – but this is too big for even you! Instead we need to turn it around and acknowledge it’s



not about me, it's about God and what HE can do! Do you see God's response to Moses? He tells him even as He tells us: *"I will be with you!"*

Steps toward Understanding

As we consider what it means to acknowledge it's all about God in the handling of obstacles God's way we could read the subsequent dialogue between Moses and God which encompasses the bulk of the verses in the remainder of chapter 3 and chapter 4 as God answers Moses' inadequate objections to His plan. Life brings a series of problem-solving opportunities. The obstacles you face will either defeat you or develop you - depending on how you respond to them. Moses went through a process that is common to many of us.



Hearing – God presents the proposal which is that Moses will go back to Egypt and tell the Pharaoh to set God's people free. God has heard their cry and is prepared to take the action necessary to deliver them. Moses hears but Moses also doubts.



Clarifying – Just like us, Moses wasn't ready to accept off the cuff what God was proposing. Moses saw all the flaws in the great plan. What if the Israelites challenged him? What if they didn't believe Moses was sent from God? What if Pharaoh said no? Of course, also like us, Moses found reason to doubt. Suddenly Moses realized his inability to eloquently speak saying *"I am slow of speech and tongue"*. And ultimately our wild card is used as Moses puts it to the Lord, *"Why can you not just find someone else?"* When the tough obstacles of life surround us and even threaten our peaceful state, we're quick to suggest someone else should handle it. What we consider as clarifying the issue is simply raising excuses, excuses, excuses!



Accepting - Unfortunately, most of us fail to see how God wants to use obstacles for good in our lives. We react foolishly and resent it when problems arise rather than pausing to consider what benefit they might bring. We fail to look for where the Lord is going to take us. We remain centred on ourselves rather than seeing how these obstacles will be worked out by God and for His glory. Moses' groundless oppositions against God's use of him are the same groundless oppositions we bring when we decline to follow God and be used by Him in handling obstacles that come against us. Like Moses we fail to enter God into the equation and come up short. But also like with Moses, God patiently guides us and uses us despite our reluctance.

4) Implementing God's direction

I hope you've seen the common thread woven throughout our study today as we discover it's not about the obstacles; it's about God's presence and His commitment to His people and to leading them the way they should go. One final argument might come to mind – if we're honest and that's "why does God allow problems to become obstacles we have to overcome in the first place?" Well quickly let me suggest there are several good reasons for the problems God allows in our lives. In fact Pastor Rick Warren shares five reflections of why God gives us obstacles to contend with in our lives. Let me share them in part with you...

1. God uses problems to **DIRECT** us - Sometimes God lights a fire under us to point us in a new direction and motivate us to change. Is God trying to get your attention? As Solomon suggests, *"Sometimes it takes a painful situation to make us change our ways."* [Proverbs 20:30]
2. God uses problems to **INSPECT** us - People are like teabags if you want to know what's inside them, just drop them into hot water! Has God ever tested your faith with an obstacle in your life? What do such obstacles reveal about you?
3. God uses problems to **CORRECT** us - Some lessons we learn only through pain and failure. Sometimes we only learn the value of something - health, money, a relationship - by losing it. *"It was the best thing that could have happened to me, for it taught me to pay attention to your laws."* [Psalm 119:71-72 LB]



4. God uses problems to **PROTECT** us – An obstacle can be a blessing in disguise if it prevents you from being harmed by something more serious. Think of the many different obstacles which prevented people from arriving on time for work at the towers in New York city on September 11th 2001. We remember Joseph's confirmation, "*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.*" [Genesis 50:20]
5. God uses problems to **PERFECT** us. - Obstacles, when responded to correctly, are character builders. God's far more interested in your character than your comfort. Your relationship to God and your character are the only two things you're going to take with you into eternity!

Even when you do not recognize it or understand it God's calling each of us to find our purpose in Him. God never gives you an obstacle too big to handle because ***He doesn't give it to you to handle alone.*** Just as Moses was sent to Egypt with God's wonderful pronouncement ringing in his ears, "***I WILL BE WITH YOU***", so too we have God's assurance that He is with us always, He will never leave us. We've God's promise "*They will be a people blessed by the Lord...before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear them.*" [Isaiah 65:23-24] So isn't it much easier and profitable when you cooperate with Him, take Him at His Word and discover the joy and delight in handling obstacles God's way?

Won't you consider letting God lead you so that you can handle obstacles which come into your life, following God's way? Give us a call and discuss this further.

Blessings,

Pastor Dave

