

## Coronavirus and Scapegoats Devotion

Stress creates emotional reactivity! Emotional reactivity often invites bad behavior. In the nation of Israel it was recognized that a price needed to be paid to make up for bad behavior, amends or restitution.

In our world people feel bad because life is hard or harder than it was. No bread; Less money; Disease; and for some the loss of a loved one or even your own life! So how do we cope with this stress and loss? When the nation of Israel escaped Egyptian slavery they immediately journeyed out into the wilderness where they had a series of trials. Israel was tested by God and flunked all the tests, but Moses their leader passed 9 of the 10 tests.

Tests or trials in scripture develop character, but who wants character or the suffering that is involved with tests. We want empathy, not lessons! However, trials are a pathway to the next level and with it the next blessings. This is true in sports or academics. To get to the next grade you have to pass the one you are in. To get to the next athletic level, conference, regionals, or nationals, you have to win, overcome or endure to win. In Psalm 105:19 it says, "Until the time came to fulfill his dreams, the Lord tested Joseph's character." Joseph's trials were hard. Being sold into slavery, seduced by his master's wife and then unjustly accused of rape, and sent to prison. Wow! He suffered before he was rewarded.

Israel is tested in the wilderness (Exodus 17:1-8) in Massah, which means test and Meribah which means arguing. When they were tested they scapegoated on Moses. They got angry and became argumentative, blaming Moses for their troubles. They were like the woman in the grocery store! It was the cashier's fault that she could not get what she wanted! Moses says to them, "Why are you complaining against me? And why are you testing the Lord? Why would Moses ask this question? Didn't Moses lead them into the wilderness?"

Moses was asking them, "Do you believe in God?" Do you know Him to be sovereign? Do you see Him behind the circumstances? Do you see how you are really testing God, when He is testing you by fighting your circumstances and insisting to get your way rather than turning to Him and seeking Him and submitting to His will?

When I was a young pastor my oldest wanted me to give her a cookie before dinner and I refused to give it to her. She was a good-natured child, but no, was a fighting word! I was teaching on this passage in Exodus that week. My daughter begins to argue with me about my decision to not give her a cookie. "You don't love me," she says with all the passion of a 3 year old. Right then I could see myself and my congregation questioning God. If He is there, why is He so distant? If He is good, why doesn't He answer my prayers-the way I want them answered? Why am I or others suffering? Oh my God, my daughter is testing me just like Israel was testing and arguing with God.

I'm not sure we can be very critical of Israel because all of us struggle with coming to terms with the way things are and especially during hard times. No one wants to see someone suffer and die, especially when disease is such an ugly reality, like we have today. When someone suggests that we need to turn to God, that just makes people angry that an all-powerful God would allow this ugliness to even happen. What if God is the source of all goodness and life and Israel did not know that, and they used themselves to measure all goodness and life? What if God uses trials to draw us to Himself and we just don't get it? Or even like it. But all good has its roots in a relationship with a good God and separation

leads to death and decay? There is a story of a man walking along a cliff and he slips and falls, and as he goes over the edge he sees a rope and grabs it. As he is hanging there, he begins to call out for help. Finally, he gets an answer, "This is God. Let go of the rope." He thinks for a minute and then replies, "Is there anyone else up there?" Surrender and submission are hardly attractive in this age of freedom; autonomy and individualism. What right does this God have to impose His will on us? Maybe knowing God and His ways are the most important lessons we can learn.

The Israelites had to learn that they were not the center of the universe and that their will was not the most important thing in their own world. They had to learn to seek God and His will in difficult situations, to value Him above their own comfort. That was the lesson to be learned in trials. C S Lewis says, "There are two types of people: those who say, 'Thy will be done' and those to whom God says, 'All right have it your way.'" Eat the cookie but it is not good for you! Most well-adjusted people know that trying to control something beyond your control is unhealthy for you. They have learned not to fight life when acceptance and surrender is the wisest path to serenity. I have a sign hung over my desk that says, "There are two essential truths: There is a God, and you are not Him."

What can we do against an invisible virus, except social-distancing? What can we do about an economic down turn that hurt especially the poor, except to be compassionate? Are we learning from this trial and passing our tests?

## **BIBLE STUDY**

1. Read Exodus 17:1-7

What is a test of faith? Are we still being tested in our faith?

2. What did the Israelites lack in this Wilderness of Sin experience? How did that affect them emotionally and relationally?
3. How did Moses feel in this situation and how was his response different than the people of Israel's?
4. How did God deliver Moses and Israel from their trial?
5. How does a lack of faith relate to flunking a test from God? What was different in Moses's faith from Israel's faith?
6. Could this apply to the Coronavirus and why?