

January 5, 2019

Great Themes of Scripture "Exodus: the Journey of Faith"

Exodus 15:1-3

Exodus 32:1-8

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Over the last ten years, we have tried to deal with the Bible as a whole in two ways. First, we had a once a month Bible study of a book of the Bible, which took us five years to complete. Then we did a yearlong sermon series, which examined the Essential 100 scriptures in the Bible which some feel all of us need to know. This time around we are taking 11 Sundays to examine the great themes of the Old and New Testaments. Given that goal, we should be done by the end of March.

We begin our great themes of scripture series in the book of Exodus because it speaks of the journey that every person makes when she or he sets out to follow God. Israel is humanity personified, and so what happened to Israel is what happens to everyone who sets out on the journey of faith.

In the book of Exodus, Egypt is the place of slavery and the Promised Land is the place of freedom. The journey from Egypt to the Promised Land – through the Red Sea to Sinai and the desert – is a saga, which symbolizes our own struggle from slavery to freedom, once we have chosen to follow the Lord. The story of Israel symbolically describes the experience of our own liberation by God.

All of us, need liberation throughout our lives. Given the way life is, we can get entangled in people, places and things that restrain, bind us and even impede us from moving forward, and being all who we can be. When we are enslaved we are nothing more than a slave, that's it, that's all she wrote. In contrast, when we are freed, we have the opportunity to embark on a fabulous and marvelous journey, which leads to wholeness and fullness of life.

Let me say a word here, about the most famous part of the book of Exodus, the parting of the Red Sea (most likely the Reed Sea which was mistranslated and possibly written in error). There we see the way part and the path made possible by God for the people of Israel. There was a made a way where there was no way.

Did you know there are two stories of the parting of water. The first one is when the people of Israel leave Egypt and the second crossing is when the people of Israel go into Canaan (the Promised Land). We have talked about this before, the Bible never puts in a detail and expected us to see it as fluff. Rather, all details are always meat or should I say soy. Take for example, the two crossing. In the first crossing they stand on the shore and wait for the way to part before they move a muscle. In the second crossing God tells them to enter the water and then the waters will part.

The journey of faith includes both kinds of crossings, no? Sometimes it is appropriate to wait for God to clear the way. And yet, there are times when we must move forward into the thick of it before the path will emerge before us.

How do we know when to act and when to wait? Both will become clear to you as long as you seek to follow the Lord (do what you know God has commanded you to do – often, we don't need to pray "what should I do" when we know what to do. As long as you follow the Lord, and are sensitive to the leading of the Spirit you will know when to get in the water whether it be knee deep or whether you need to stick your neck out because you must enter when and where it is chest high.

The journey of faith includes needing to take risks sometimes. In other words, entering the water before the promise is fulfilled. The good news is that every time you put your toes in the water before the water parts there is a promise that will be fulfilled once you get through the crossing. Sometimes we have to get our feet wet first before the promise comes to be. Yet, be it will!

Notice God does not just free us from, but also free us to. Liberation is only a part of the story, for the end of the story is the Land of Promise.

God liberated enslaved Israel by parting the Red Sea. Some would think that was the end of the faith journey. Yet, the journey of faith had just begun. The journey of faith always has with it both risk and action. Once they walked through the parted water and then put their foot on the shore they needed faith for they knew not what was to become of them.

God chose to work with Israel day by day instead of giving an all at once five-year plan. God saw the journey they and we are to be as not a journey of knowledge and upfront information, but rather a day-by-day journey of faith.

The Israelites so wanted certainty in the desert. So, they got “manna” (some type of sustenance and nourishment) that fell from heaven every day, and when they tried to store it up so they would have certainty about tomorrow it rotted and molded. And so, they were delivered lessons in trusting God for the “what” and “where” step by step.

Given God’s method, frustrations arose, and some began to doubt the whole trust God plan as a future strategy. So they decided it might be best to return to the past. They wanted to get out of the desert. Yes, they wanted to go back to Egypt.

Have we been there, done that! We romanticize our past life as filled with lollipops and unicorn. Yet, the real truth is it was filled with blood, sweat and tears, and the ones we fool ourselves by seeing them as unicorns leave piles of dung for us to step in. Let’s not fool ourselves Egypt wasn’t all that great, it had its horrible consequences, namely, they lost our freedom and became slaves.

In the desert we learn to surrender to God completely, and in so doing we find that God sustains us, God feeds us, God gives us life, and fills our hearts with love. In the journey of faith we discover that the desert is not all desert; it included manna (sustenance and nourishment) and the

pillar of fire and the cloud (guidance and assurance). And thus, when we least expect it, we find an oasis.

As they move about in the desert, God realizes they need a blueprint on how to be in relationship with God and one another. This relational and ethical guide is called the 10 Commandments. It is important to observe and then incorporate the ideas placed there by the Ten Commandments - that being in relationship with God has its implications. In other words, it is not just about you and God, it is also about you and others. To be on the journey of faith as opposed to just having the ticket to heaven, means living in right relationship with God, and all others. They are not just 10 things to be put in public places, but rather are to be contained in our hearts and lived out in our lives.

I would be amiss, if I did not give a little time to what happened from the time Moses went up the mountain to meet with God and get the Ten Commandment to when Moses came down from the mountain and encountered the people. The people got distracted at best and wildly obstinate at worst while Moses was not visible. Moses was not even down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments, when the people break Rule #1 and all we can remember is Moses broke the Ten Commandment. If we do not have God first then the rest of the other 9 become restrictive at best and limiting at worst, rather than wise and essential.

Next week, we will enter the Promised Land with Joshua and learn what themes God would have us see and incorporate into our lives. Stay tuned.