

Sunday 7th June 2015 AM Moses crunches the hurdles! - Exodus 4v18-7v7

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Purpose: To realise that alongside receiving the CALL and the CALLING comes TRAINING and TESTING.

Here in this message we see the TESTING side in 2 classic aspects: 1) Adherence to His Word 2) Acceptance of His Hardship

INTRODUCTION

- He is one of the most recognized sports personalities of the past 100 years
- He was voted "Sportsman of the Century" by Sports Illustrated
- "Sports Personality of the Century" by the BBC
- at the age of 22 he shot to world fame after an amazing upset achieved against Sonny Liston

Q. Who is he? Well I'll let the following clip enlighten you!!

*** **PLAY VIDEO CLIP OF MUHAMMED ALI** ***

Well from Mohammed Ali to Moses Son of Amram might sound like something of a large hop.

BUT Moses here has received his marching orders by God and, having failed once, I can imagine that Moses is probably pretty excited that he has another chance.

He is probably pretty excited also that after all this time (and at this stage he is 80 years of age) that there is a life's work still for Moses to fulfil.

So all-in-all, Moses is pretty buoyed up at this point.

To put this in the words of Captain James T Kirk of the Starship Enterprise - he is about to:

"Boldly go where no man has been before!"

His marching orders - Exodus 3 verse 15-18

The marching orders are those detailed at Exodus 3 from Verse 15 through to 20 let me read those to you:

" 15 God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.

16 "Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob— appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. 17 And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.'

18 "The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God.' 19 But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. 20 So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go."

Now - the form they take is a very simple one:

- 2 neatly pre-formatted speeches - one for delivery to the elders of Israel and the other for the king of Egypt
- and 2 helpfully predicted responses - the elders will give Moses a thumbs up and the Pharaoh a thumbs down, one will be a roaring success and the other will go down like a lead balloon!

Let's follow the story

So let's follow the story - and **what happens before he even reaches Egypt is remarkably instructive.**

Q. What do I mean?

Well - we see that **Moses has an initial success followed closely by an almost catastrophic failure:**

- **FIRST** - he goes to **Jethro**, his **father-in-law** and tells him that he is going to go back to Egypt and see if any of his folks are still alive.

It is interesting that he doesn't seem to mention anything about his real purposes.

Well this meets with very easy success & Jethro gives him the green light, Ex 4v19 saying "Go, and I wish you well."

- **NOW** - he sets out on the road to Egypt and while there are at a lodging place (Exodus 4 verse 24) the LORD gets close to taking Moses out.

Q. Now what's this all about? Well, Moses has treated something as trivial, which as far as God is concerned, is anything but trivial. He has forgotten, or decided not to - circumcise his son (we will assume this is Eliezer the youngest one).

Zipporah - his Midianite wife is the one to step in just in the nick of time and quickly perform the circumcision that Moses should have done. It is interesting to see that this is now the second time in Moses life that he has been saved by a foreign woman. First time it was Pharaoh's daughter who plucked him out of the Nile and felt compassion for him. Now it is a Midianite.

Q. Why was this small thing a big thing?

And Q. Why should Moses have know better?

Well if you were to go back to Genesis 17 - that is where God gives this practice of circumcising the males to Abraham as a sign of the covenant that God is Himself establishing with Abraham - and in Genesis 17 and Verse 14 we read: "...My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

We cannot play fast and loose with God's commands because very important things are being signified and entered into.

OK - let's get to Egypt

OK - let's get to Egypt and see what unfolds.

The last 3 verses of chapter 4:

(Exodus 4 verses 29-31) " Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites, and Aaron told them everything the Lord had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, and they believed. And when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped."

Job done!! (Well at least the first half)

- And Moses was feeling pretty good! Pretty darn good!!
- He was "riding high" and no doubt enjoying the sweet taste of success

Now for **PART 2** and for the King of Egypt and I'll **summarise the events by "top-and-tailing"** **Chapter five**.

The **opening 2 verses** read like this:

(Exodus 5 verses 1-2) "Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.' " Pharaoh said, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go.'"

The **end-section** concludes:

(Exodus 5 verses 15-21) "Then the Israelite foremen went and appealed to Pharaoh: "Why have you treated your servants this way? Your servants are given no straw, yet we are told, 'Make bricks!' Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people."

Pharaoh said, "Lazy, that's what you are—lazy! That is why you keep saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.' Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks."

The Israelite foremen realized they were in trouble when they were told, "You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day." When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, and they said, "May the Lord look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us."

A sense of "Déjà vu" & flashback

I wonder whether at this point, in the midst of the undoubted confusion that must have been in Moses' mind - whether he was thinking back to 40 years earlier when he really thought the Israelites would appreciate what he did for them and yet they didn't and now there is this sudden sense of "**Déjà vu**" all over again.

Q. Surely it can't be that Moses is still not ready?

Well whatever the case Moses is now back to square one - in fact he is back some long distance away from where he began - a case of one step forward and 50 steps back!!

Q. I wonder what you would do after such a knock-back?

Q. What does Moses do? Well he does the right thing, the only thing - he gets alone with God.

Moses goes back to God/gets alone with God

Let me ask you:

Q. Is that what you do when you are utterly bemused by events that God has somehow let come into your life?

Q. How do you react when nothing really seems to be going your way
when the blessings of God seem to be nothing more than theory?

Perhaps it would be helpful to remember what the Psalm writer says in:

Psalm 55 verse 22 "**Cast your cares** on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall."

Now Moses' version of "**casting his cares**" is at one level **a model** AND at another is ***not* a model**:

- **on the MINUS SIDE** - Moses comes to God with a **very accusing tone**:

"O LORD, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all."

And the problem here is that he has lost sight of God and of what God has already spoken.

He is looking at himself - the fact that he is "persona non-grata" with everybody around AND the fact that the circumstances look particularly bleak.

- **on the PLUS SIDE** - Moses does **pour out his soul to the Lord**:

This is what we should always do. Whilst we keep our eyes on the Lord, we also tell him everything that is troubling our minds. We tell him everything that we can't understand and simply put it down at God's throne. This is, of course, quite different from having a rant.

To pour out our souls and to have a rant at God - these are clearly not the same thing.

Taking a rain check at this point - at Chapter 6

Now what I want to do for a moment as we are poised right at the end of chapter 5 and the opening verse of chapter 6 is to **TAKE A BIT OF RAIN CHECK**.

I want us to **stand back a bit and try and get the bigger picture here**.

It's **a bit like having one of those brain storming sessions** when something doesn't seem to be working and you have to try and **sketch out everything you do know and then work your way towards that which is perplexing**.

Q. So what do we know - thus far?

- Well - we know that Moses has heard the CALL of God - it was there at the burning bush and it was a very transformative experience
- BUT - we also know that Moses had more than just an experience - he gained a commission - he had a CALLING to **go with the CALL**

Moses was to be the MEANS whereby God would unveil the active concern that God had for his suffering people - he would be the one to take his people Israel out of the land of slavery and into a land flowing with milk and honey.

Ok, so far so good - BUT: Q. What else do we know?

- Well - what I want to suggest is that although Moses has had:
 - 40 years of training under his parents and then in the most elite Egyptian university
 - AND 40 years of training in the back side of the deserts of Midian

His training is *NOT* absolutely *NOT* over and done with because NOW it needs to be put to the test.

So the principle that I want to add into our thinking at this point is that we have BOTH:

- a CALL & a CALLING

And as well as that we have BOTH:

- TRAINING & TESTING

Now we've talked about the TRAINING that Moses had before - but let me repeat that:

- he had 2 sets of training - in his youngest and most formative years he grew up under the tutelage of his parents Amram and Jochebed and here he learns the CONTENT of this faith AND most crucially he gains the CONVICTION of his faith.
- the other set of training was when he was growing up as a good Egyptian in the palace and this was essentially more CONTENT that was being given to him.

But the truth is that our learning is **3D, it is 3 DIMENSIONAL** and that missing, and most vital of stages, is that of **CHARACTER and this is precisely where TESTING comes in.**

And this morning we are going to dig out **2 absolutely classic TESTS** that God **constantly** AND **customarily** uses with his people to hone and to develop their CHARACTERS.

Remember it this way:

- God first takes us to the **CLASSROOM** where he teaches of the **CONTENT of our faith**

This is the easiest & quickest part

- God then takes us to the **FOUNDRY** where he puts deep impressions, spiritual dents (if you like) through "**helpful hammer blows**" - *not* of affliction *but* of inspiration.

These deep impressions form the **CONVICTIONS of our faith** that will be **the functional rudder for our lives.**

(If you want a ready example of this look no further than Moses: early on he gained the indelible CONVICTION that he was first and foremost a Hebrew and *not* an Egyptian - and it was this CONVICTION that drove him to leave the palace at age 40 and align himself with his own people).

- Last of all, and ongoing through the rest of our lives, God takes us into the **WORKSHOP** - and this is where we get our hands dirty, this is where we have to get to actual work carrying out his projects, bringing into reality those things that he gives us in blueprint form.

This place is the TESTING GROUND for all the TRAINING that has gone into us.

It is in attempting the work of God that God works in us to mould and shape us progressively into the likeness of Christ. This is where our **CHARACTER** is formed, so very necessary if we are to be at all usable in His service.

Now just to be clear - I am **not** saying that once you've had time in the classroom learning your faith and once you've had time in the foundry gaining the convictions of your faith - that is the end of it and the rest of your life you are out in the workshop of life having your character moulded and developed.

Clearly you should be always learning and deepening your convictions BUT some of the most serious and most key work that God IS interested in and that we sometimes forget about takes place in the WORKSHOP where we are carrying on in real-time actual commissions that God Himself has put in our hands to do.

So then let's see the two TESTS that are very important that we get under our belts, whether sooner or later - but either way around God will keep bringing us back to them - Q. Why? Well simply because they are, in God's economy, INDISPENSABLE.

TEST #1 - (is what I'll title) "Attention to His Word"

Now if you want to have a NT reference to this test and to see its CENTRALITY - then look no further than the book we are studying at Housegroup on Wednesday evenings and 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 13 where we read:

"And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe."

This is one of the things that really thrilled the apostle Paul about these believers at Thessalonica - it was their high view of Scripture - their strong "Attention to the Word of God".

Q. Now what about Moses?

Q. How high a view of Scripture did Moses have at this point?

Circumcision - The Zipporah episode

We'll recall that earlier episode where Zipporah has to spring into action to avoid a complete catastrophe regarding the circumcision (or lack of circumcision) of presumably their second son Eliezer.

There is **no** mention in the passage that Zipporah has to circumcise BOTH of Moses' sons (Gershom as well as Eliezer) so I think that this tells us that Moses is **not** without any knowledge of circumcision - there is little doubt that as a baby he would have been circumcised by his parents Amram and Jochebed and that he followed this through with his first.

So evidently Moses operated on an ON-OFF basis with regard to God's word.

And the particular word which Moses sometimes did and sometimes did **not** do - was actually a part of the Word of God that was UTTERLY VITAL - it was not just any old part of Scripture.

OK - Q. What other occasions afford us a view of how Moses does or does not - pass this "Word of God adherence TEST"?

The speech to Pharaoh episode

We'll remember that God gave Moses a speech for the Israelite elders and he also gave instructions about what to do and say with regard to the king of Egypt.

Alec Motyer, the OT scholar writes in his commentary about this part - he says:

"Plainly, from his whole approach to Pharaoh, bouncing into his royal presence, chapter 5 verse 1, he too had not listened with close attention to what the LORD had said..."

He goes on to give a list of areas where he deviated from what God had said:

- **FIRST** - it appears he took the wrong delegation - he was supposed to take the elders of Israel with him, but apparently just he and Aaron go
- **SECOND** - it seems that they initially improvise and then when they get a complete kick-back from the king, only then do they say what they are told to say from the outset.
- **THIRD** - even when they do deliver the words that they are supposed to (that is the words from chapter 3 and verse 18) - Moses adds in at the end "or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword".

So here in this first interview with Pharaoh - Moses really doesn't adhere to God's word very well.

He falls into the two classic mistakes that go back to the garden of Eden and that first encounter with the evil one in Genesis 3:

- **Mistake #1** - is **to subtract from** what it does say
- **AND Mistake #2** - is **to add to** what it does not

Then we show ourselves to not pass this FIRST VITAL TEST - Moses, at this point in his life is sitting way too loose to God's declared word and he will have to learn to tighten up his act in this regard if he is to know usefulness and blessing at God's hand.

If you don't think this is a particularly vital TEST to pass - well just consider that Moses himself didn't quite ever completely pass this TEST and it DID COST HIM DEARLY - remember how later on when Moses was leading the people of God in the wilderness how he was told to speak to the rock and he struck it instead (just as he had been told to do the first time). Well it was this that prevented him entering the promised land!!

Now I did say there were two PRIMARY or CLASSIC TESTS and the 2nd one is also evidenced by our Thessalonian friends:

Let me once again read the bit I read before and then read the following verse as well - 1 Thessalonians 2 verses 13&14:

"And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: **You SUFFERED from your own countrymen the same things those churches SUFFERED from the Jews,...**"

So TEST #2 takes us on from "Attention to His WORD" to:

TEST #2 "Acceptance of His Hardship"

I say "**HIS HARDSHIP**" because I don't mean just general hardship - because this hardship and suffering comes about because we align ourselves with His, with God's cause.

Q. Now what about Moses - how does he do here (in this hardship test)?

Well we can see this there in the closing verses of chapter 5:

Exodus 5 verse 19-23 "The Israelite foremen realized they were in trouble when they were told, "You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day." When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, and they said, "May the Lord look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us."

Moses returned to the Lord and said, "O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all."

Evidently Moses sees this hardship that has come down on his head as somehow strange and something foreign. As far as Moses is concerned, this simply should not happen.

The time I thought the computer had made a mistake!!

It reminds me of an event that took place back in early 1983. I can still remember where I was sitting as a trainee computer programmer and I remember that I was convinced (absolutely persuaded in my own mind) that the computer - the big mainframe (warehouse sized computer) had malfunctioned - that my programme that I had written was correct and that the computer had got it wrong.

How little I knew - computers don't make mistakes, it is the programmes we write to run on the computers that have errors in them.

And Moses was convinced that there had to be a mistake.

Now Moses was not the only person or people in history that have had the same reaction when it comes to the **HARDSHIP TEST**.

Let me read some words from the NT letter of 1 Peter:

1 Peter 4 verse 12 " Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, **as though something strange were happening to you.**"

Should have known better

Of course Moses should have known better if he had listened better to what God had originally said to him:

- He was told that **the elders of the Israelites** would listen and respond positively and receptively
- **BUT** that **the king of Egypt** would reject his approach and would need to be compelled by God's mighty hand

Moses' failure of this test gives way to a wonderful teaching session (and we might come back to this another time) because God's response to Moses moaning, groaning and complaining is met with God saying that this will be His **NOW MOMENT** and he goes on to give him some of the most precious teaching in the opening 8 verses of chapter 6.

CONCLUSION

Maybe this morning you're feeling in "NOT TOO BAD SHAPE". Sure you might not be as "super-confident" as a Muhammed Ali, but nevertheless - put a bible in your hand and you're not too bad. You see over the years you have tucked under your belt quite a bit of bible learning.

And just as many have had the CALL but have lost sight of the CALLING - you too have the TRAINING, but have lost sight of the TESTING.

You are rather blissfully unaware of the two very primary tests that God habitually uses:

- that test of ATTENTION to His Word
- that test of ACCEPTANCE of His Hardship

Well let's pray that you will know these tests

Let's pray that you will pass these tests - and that there won't in their place be tears ahead! In Jesus name - AMEN.