

Moses' Weariness

September 27, 2020

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Each of this morning's passages come up every year in differing combinations. All Three are questions of Authority, as are many issues in our lives today. Authority represents being entrusted with decisions. Responsibility means obligation to complete the details of a job. According to this principle there must be connection between authority and responsibility. And in the Scriptures, that authority and responsibility come from God. Those who are in authority, are as God's representatives in this place. But as we begin I want to ask whether you perceive these to be passages about Judgment or about Grace?

There is something innate in us as Human Creatures, that we pay greater attention to Judgment than Praise. We look for rebuke, we seek out what is wrong, as if knowing we deserve to be told we are wrong. According to Child Psychologists, for every time we are told we are wrong, we need to hear repeated affirmation and praise, just for balance. Let me say that again, we need to hear the word "YES" three, five, ten times just for it to register in balance to every NO.

When Moses hears the people complaining about wanting a drink of Water, he does not hear concern that "There is No Water in the Desert!" he does not hear question of "the Existence of God", Moses does not even hear that they are finding fault with both the Leadership of "Religion and Government." In his Weariness, Moses takes this complaint personal "They are ready to stone ME!" This is the very human problem of authority, rather than understanding "I am God's human representative, only a conduit for God's use" we take matters personally as indictment of us and of our leadership, as if God does not exist.

What I hear in this Exodus passage is a demonstration of God's Grace. First subtly, God reminds Moses: Remember when you stood before the Burning Bush, God told you to throw your staff upon the ground and when you did your Staff miraculously became a Serpent? Second, when Pharaoh had you backed up to the Red Sea, God told you to raise your staff and miraculously the Red Sea PARTED? Now, strike the rock with the staff and God will provide for the people water from rock. Immediately, Exodus records the people of God were attacked by the Amalekites, and God instructed Moses to hold the staff above his head. When Moses held up the staff, the Israelites prevailed, but when Moses tired and the Staff slipped the Amalekites prevailed. At which point there is a lovely wordplay, because while Moses was tiring of upholding the Staff, Moses' Staff that is Arron and Hur slide a stone under him as a seat, and Moses' Staff hold up Moses' Arms holding up the Staff. I believe that wordplay was intended to call our attention to two related matters. First, as continued in Exodus 18, where Moses' father-in-law Jethro describes "Moses, you will wear-out yourself and the people by your attempting to do everything yourself, you need to delegate being Judge to a leader in each of the Tribes." Moses had to learn to delegate authority and responsibility to act for him, as he was acting for God, instead of doing everything by himself. Second, the image of Moses lifting up the Staff, thousands of years later, is the very image of Jesus upon the cross atoning for our sins; except that Moses was holding up the staff, and in crucifixion Jesus was lifted up being suffocated by his own body hanging from the cross. Moses had to learn to delegate authority to act for him, when he was acting for God... Throughout human history that is what we have looked to our

leaders to do. You have taken an Oath and been given the authority as a representative of Almighty God not to JUDGE, not to have your WILL, but simply for you to ACT RESPONSIBLY WITH the GRACE of GOD.

And yet, a few chapters later, the people again complain about Wanting a Drink, so at that time, knowing how, Moses took it upon himself to strike the rock, without consulting God, which becomes the reason Moses was unable to ever enter the Promised Land. Like the Old Children's Games "Mother, May I" or "Simon Says" while God provides affirmation to Moses, that Moses possesses the power, and possesses the staff to miraculously control Nature, still personal power and possession are not the same as being given responsibility; and acting without God, is not an authority that Moses can take upon himself.

As our Call to Worship today, the trap the Pharisees and Chief Priests put to Jesus is a judgment of authority. If Jesus claims he is acting of his own authority, or even the authority of God, they believed they could arrest him for Blasphemy: claiming to be God. Jesus answers their question with his own Question of authority: Was John the Baptist sent from God, or from the people? The challengers know that if they respond "From God" Jesus will have trapped them, who will respond then "Why did you not defend him?" If they respond "From the people" the people will revolt, because the people believe John was a martyr sent from God. So they try to evade the question all together by saying "We do not know." Which permits Jesus to evade their question and convict them with a Parable. I hope obviously, the Child who responds "NO" but goes ahead and does what the father asks, REPRESENTS the Prostitutes, Tax Collectors and Sinners; while the child who promised "I WILL" but does not go as directed by the Father, here represents the Pharisees and Chief Priests. By which they convict themselves of Hypocrisy.

One of my professors for Doctoral study at Columbia was a Theologian named Douglas John Hall (when you become really famous like Ruth Bader Ginsburg, you are allowed to use all three names). Douglas John Hall describes that reading the New Testament two things jump out at you. First that the Church is God's Chosen instrument for bringing salvation, extending mission throughout the world. Second, that something terribly wrong happened in the Church, which is reflected here at Philippi (and most pastors and churches can identify with things having gone wrong). As to what was wrong at the church at Philippi, scholars often name two specific women who had a falling out and were bickering, whom Paul NAMES! Who and even what they were arguing about does not matter to us, so much as what this passage names: "Make my joy complete by having the Same Mind, the same Love, being of One Accord and one mind." Paul is crying out for unity.

Far TOO Often in our world today, we claim responsibility as if giving us authority, power, and prestige. The Apostle Paul describes adopting the Same MIND that was in Christ Jesus, who although he was in the form of God, never claimed EQUALITY with God as something to be grasped or exploited. Instead, he emptied himself, taking on the form of a SERVANT, a SLAVE, being in human form, he humbled himself to be obedient to God even to the point of death on the cross. Our function is not to be PERFECT, we are not to be IMPERSONATORS for God or Jesus Christ. We are instead to be follow Christ's example, to be IMITATORS not IMPERSONATORS, we are to be honest with ourselves. We are to recognize, God is doing something unique and wonderful through each of our lives. God is not calling us to conform to the world, but to transform our little piece of life, through humility.

There are times in life that are OVERWHELMING. This week we are matching the year with the MOST 100 degree days and the second least quantity of rain ever in our history. Do we run around like Chicken Little, or do we offer a cup of cold water to a stranger. Something AMAZINGLY INSIGNIFICANT happened last week. For the second week in a row a group of 50-60 gathered beneath the Solar Carport on Sunday Morning. We commented about how many persons we did not know were out walking in the Church

Parking Lot, one woman who made at least 7 laps around the circumference. As one man went by, one in our company called out, would you like a cup of coffee and a cookie? The man came over and joined in conversation. Afterwards, he shared with me, that he had been a church-goer all his life, but church was always about Dogma and believing what you were told. He was in awe, that here was a church BEING Church, sharing in fellowship in the world, reaching out to neighbors.