

The LORD's Servant

Exodus 17:1-16

Back when I was in Bible College when I was in my second year I decided to change from a 4 year degree to a three year degree.

The reason I did that was because it became clear to me that I would have to go to seminary to earn a Master's degree and a three year degree would get me into Seminary just the same as a four year degree, so I thought I would save an extra year.

The one problem was by making the change I was going to miss out on taking Greek and Hebrew and I would have to take some courses that I really wasn't interested in.

So I made an appointment with the Dean and tried to talk my way into the courses that I wanted.

At first he just said no, but after several minutes of pleading my case he granted my request.

There was a lot of memorization in those classes.

In some ways it was like going back to kindergarten.

We had to learn the alphabet, letter combinations, and syllables.

Once we had those down we could begin learning vocabulary.

We learned hundreds of words in each course, and by the end of my second semester of Greek I was able to translate a good amount of the New Testament without looking up any words.

I came to find out over the years though that retaining the use of a language, for me, takes practice.

I spent nearly a decade as an electrician and when I finally started pastoring full time I found I had to go back and relearn everything I had been taught at school and I'm still working on it.

There are some words that stuck with me though. Words like ἀγαπέ, or ἐκκλησία

One of my favourites that I've never forgotten is the Greek word δούλος.

It means servant/slave. It is a word the apostle Paul often uses to refer to himself.

It is a word that indicates that we belong to Jesus, it is a word that reminds me in a powerful way that as Christians we are to desire God's will rather than our own.

The Hebrew word for servant is עֶבֶד

[Many times in the Bible Moses is referred to as God's servant or the Lord calls him His servant. Back when God first calls Moses into His service Moses is reluctant to say the least. He knew it was going to be a challenge and so far in the book of Exodus that has proved to be true. We have seen a number of ups and downs as the Lord uses Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. In our text this morning **Exodus 17:1-16** we read of a challenge, a blessing, and a

necessity in being a servant of the Lord. Belonging to Jesus means being a servant of the Lord so these are some important lessons for us as believers. First we learn that...]

Point #1 – People often oppose servants of the Lord.

Since human beings are selfish by nature they will tend to resist God’s direction when they think or feel it is not in their best interest. That tends to create conflict with those seeking to serve God.

From very early in the book of Exodus we learn that God has chosen Moses to serve Him by leading the people of Israel.

On more than one occasion we have seen that when the people are unhappy with the way things are going they take it out on Moses.

That is what we find here in **Verses 1-2.**

Again the people find themselves in an extreme situation without any water. Some commentators believe Rephidim is a place where water was often present, but in this case it was dry.

Imagine travelling a long distance telling yourself, if we can just make it there we’ll be o.k. only to arrive and discover that what you need is not there.

How would you feel? What would you be thinking about the person leading the way?

If we found ourselves in a similar situation I’m guessing we would be quite unhappy.

That is certainly the situation here as we are told the people “quarreled with Moses”.

They are putting the blame for their situation on him.

Desperate for water they say, “Give us water to drink” which is a command rather than a question.

Clearly they are upset with Moses, but we must ask, “Why did Moses lead them here?”

Look again in the middle of verse 1.

They go from “*place to place as the LORD commanded*”.

Moses isn’t traipsing them through the desert however he feels like it, he is leading them where God tells them to go (pillar cloud/fire).

He tries to tell them that in the second half of **verse 2b.**

It is like he is saying, “Your problem isn’t with me it is with the LORD and you are putting Him to the test.”

That they are questioning God’s quality and worth even though He has proven it time and time again.

His warning is ignored in verse 3.

Their physical need (which is significant) makes them unable to see anything good about being where they are and they blame Moses for leading them there.

[Have you ever heard the expression “Don’t shoot the messenger”? Before there was TV, radio, telephones, or newspapers a person would be sent from place to place to tell people about important news. If the people didn’t like the message they would sometimes take out their frustration on the one delivering the news. That was a risk of being that kind of servant.]

Did Moses think up the idea for the people to leave Egypt? No, that was God.

Did Moses come up with the idea to go to a place with no water? No, that was God.

That is a good reminder for us, because if we serve the Lord Jesus, if we communicate His commands to people there are going to be times when people are going to be unhappy with us.

Now we need to be careful here and I think that is particularly true for me as a pastor.

We must be careful to never twist the Word of God and use it as a means of gaining power and control for ourselves.

Instead we are called to strive to understand the Word of God rightly according to the meaning that the LORD desires and if people get angry at us for that so be it.

[I can tell you of story after story where I have said and done things that make people really unhappy with me. I can say with a clear conscience that every single time I have sought to make those decisions based upon authority of Scripture. I can also say that those situations are never fun. Moses is in a difficult spot here and he takes his problems to the Lord and the Lord graciously replies and shows us a blessing in being the Lord’s servant, the blessing is that...]

Point #2 – God always stands with His servants.

There are a couple of million desperate people expressing their anger towards Moses which seems like a really bad situation, but he is reminded that he is not alone.

Moses brings the situation to the LORD in verse 4.

What could Moses do with all of these people?

Could he provide them with water on his own?

He needs God to do something and so he cries out to Him.

The answer comes in **Verses 5-7.**

Again I am astounded by God’s graciousness here.

If I am reading the context right here then the miracle of the water from the Rock is at least the second miracle they would have witnessed that day.

In order to provide food for all the people the Lord causes frost like flakes called Manna to appear on the desert floor every day.

They must collect it before it melts in the heat of the day which means the people ‘quarrelling’ with Moses have been personally witnessing at least one miracle per day (sometimes more) for at least several days if not weeks and likely that very morning.

Still they pick a fight with God’s servant.

Thankfully Moses is not left to himself.

Do you see there in verse 5, he is told to “Walk ahead of the people” he is separated from them.

That is an important picture to have in our minds because when it says in verse 2 that the Israelites ‘quarreled’ with Moses it implies a lawsuit.

The people want Moses put on trial for leading them to this place.

And who is there to defend Moses?

Look again at the beginning of **verse 6** (This is God speaking to Moses).

The word ‘stand’ there means to take a stand in defense of someone or something.

In other words, God is going to plead Moses’ case for him and once again show that he is the LORD’s servant.

That is what happens. Moses takes the staff that struck the Nile and he strikes a rock and at God’s command enough water flowed from the rock for everyone to satisfy their thirst.

Rocks don’t do that, especially rocks in the desert (just try it sometime).

There is nothing inherently powerful about the staff. It is the regular old staff that Moses used for years as a shepherd in Midian.

By itself it was just a hunk of wood.

Moses has no power in himself.

Why does this happen? It happens because God is standing there on Moses’ behalf.

[This happens time and again in the Bible. In the New Testament one of my favourites is in Acts chapter 23. The Apostle Paul had just been beaten by an angry mob in the temple courts, dragged off to jail, and a group of about forty men were about to take an oath to kill him. In the middle of all that it says that Jesus came and stood near Paul saying, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”]

You’re not alone Moses, you’re not alone Paul, you’re not alone dear faithful Christian.
Almighty God is with you.

That is saying something more than God is present.

God is omnipresent which means He is present everywhere at all times.

When God stands with Moses here He is present and acting on his behalf.

That is the promise of God’s Word for every single Christian.

If we confess our sins, seek with your heart to turn from them, and believe that Jesus died and rose again to make us right with God then we have and eternal advocate in God the Son.

NIV Romans 8:34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also **interceding** for us.

NIV Hebrews 7:24 but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

[Is it any wonder that we call the message of Christ the gospel which means good news? Yes it is true that if you stand upon God’s word people may be upset with you from time to time, even people who should know better, but never forget that God stands with His people. That leads us to one more lesson from our text this morning. The Israelites once again find themselves in need of rescue. As they are camping at Rephidim they are attacked and as the battle unfolds we learn about a necessity in being a servant of the Lord which is...]

Point #3 – God’s servants prevail by depending on Him.

Whether by performing miracles or working through everyday circumstances, God’s people most desperately need the LORD to act on their behalf.

Through the hardships that Israel has experienced so far, they are delivered through God doing the impossible things that we call miracles.

The last time an army approached, God parted the waters of the sea and allowed His people to cross on dry ground and then collapsed the water on their enemy completely destroying them.

This time it's different (**Verse 8-9**).

The Amalekites are named after Amalek, the son of Eliphaz, the son of Esau who was the brother of Jacob (who had his name changed to Israel by the LORD).

Some commentators think that the Amalekites would have been aware of God's promises to Israel and they attack here because they don't want the Israelites to go into the Promised Land.

They are doing more here than fighting with Israel they are declaring war on God.

That being the case then we must see all of the Israelites here as taking on the role of God's servants because instead of wiping out the Amalekites by miraculous means Joshua is told to lead men into battle.

Moses, however, does not strap on a sword and go out to fight instead he does this (10-16).

Verses 15-16 make it clear that the Amalekites have made themselves God's enemies and it will lead to their destruction.

As you trace through Israel's history in 1&2 Samuel down to the book of Esther you see that this most often happens as it does here through warfare.

How this particular battle progresses tells us something very important about how God's people are victorious.

Even though Moses uses no weapon directly against the enemy he is the most significant person in determining the outcome of the battle.

On top of the hill he raises his arms with his staff in his hands.

Why do that? Carl Keil points out that hands raised like this is a common posture of prayer.

It is a recognition that if the Israelites are to win the day then God needs to make it happen.

There is a problem though, Moses gets tired.

If you want to give this a try take a hockey stick and hold it up over your head sometime as see how long you can do it for.

After a while Moses has to lower his arms and when he does the battle turns and the Amalekites start to win.

When he raises his arms again the Israelites begin to win.

Moses' brother Aaron and a man named Hur grab a stone for Moses to sit on and they hold up his arms.

It is only when Moses takes a position of dependence upon the LORD that the battle is won.

Keil puts it like this, "And from this Israel was to learn the lesson, that in all its conflicts with the ungodly powers of the world, strength for victory could only be procured through the incessant lifting up of its hands in prayer."

[A few years ago I helped my dad install some solar panels at his house. Solar panels are pretty amazing. They are made of a whole bunch of silicon wafers and as sunlight hits those wafers it causes electrons to flow and if you put enough of them together you can generate a usable amount of electricity. When the sun goes down, though they don't produce any electricity at all.]

Just like a solar panel depends on light to make electricity, a Christian must depend on God.

On this side of the cross we do not wage war with weapons like swords or guns.

On this side of the cross we wage war with the preaching of the gospel.

Our need for God, however, is the same and the people of Israel on this battlefield.

Our enemies are not *“flesh and blood”* according to Ephesians 6:12 *“but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*

Whether it is crossing the sea on dry ground, or winning a battle with sword in hand, or seeing someone come to Christ through the ministry of the church we need God.

Are you a servant of Christ this morning?

If you are don't be surprised when people oppose you and remember that in as much as you are genuinely faithful to the word of God it is not really you they are opposing but the LORD Himself.

Are you a servant of Christ this morning?

If you are then be encouraged that come what may whether you live or die, whether you are free or in prison, or anything else, Jesus will stand with you for your ultimate and eternal good.

Are you a servant of Christ this morning?

Then always keep at the forefront of your mind your need of God.

Jesus said, NIV John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

It's not easy to serve the LORD, but it is the best thing we could ever do with our lives, and best of all if we depend on fully on Christ He will never fail us.