

MOSES & LEADERSHIP – Personal Renewal

Exodus 33-34

Teaching for Peace Church

March 22, 2009

PURPOSE – to call leaders to times of personal renewal, drawing on God’s character and covenant promises.

MAIN IDEA – As leaders we keep our “saw sharpened” by set times of renewing ourselves in the person and promises of God.

I. INTRODUCTION

Let’s open our Bibles to Exodus 33, continuing our evening series on “Moses & Leadership”.

1. In his best-selling book, “7 Habits of Highly Effective People”, Stephen Covey labels the 7th Habit, “SHARPENING THE SAW”. He begins that chapter with this story:

Suppose you were to come upon someone in the woods working feverishly to saw down a tree. “What are you doing?” you ask.

“Can’t you see?” comes the impatient reply. “I’m sawing down this tree.”

“You look exhausted!” you exclaim. “How long have you been at it?”

“Over 5 hours,” he returns, “and I’m beat! This is hard work.”

“Well, why don’t you take a break for a few minutes and sharpen that saw?” you inquire. “I’m sure it would go a lot faster.”

“I don’t have time to sharpen the saw”, the man says emphatically. “I’m too busy sawing!”

2. Today’s leadership lesson from the life of Moses is about keeping our saw (LIFE) sharp – and taking the time to do it!

It is an ESSENTIAL HABIT in the life of a leader! Why? Take MOSES as an example!

(i) God had given him leadership responsibility – a VISION to move His people toward.

“Leadership is influencing others toward God’s preferred future.” - That preferred future was FREEDOM from slavery in Egypt and a Promised Land for their new home.

(ii) But the task is WEARING!

Challenges mount; Egypt pursues; people are frightened;

God delivers - but then the people are prone to complain.

Exodus 32 – they go further – and outright REBEL against the vision & values that God has given to his people. In that, Moses’ own brother, Aaron, caves into the pressure to return to Egyptian fertility gods = the old ways. That hurts. Leadership is often a very lonely experience.

(iii) Discouragement & fatigue is part & parcel of leadership. And unless you do something about it, you become like that person sawing the tree with a life that is less & less & less effective.

YOU NEED TO BE RENEWED – in hope, strength & effectiveness of life.

3. In that, let’s read what happens in Moses’ life IMMEDIATELY AFTER that deeply discouraging experience of Israel’s “golden calf” rebellion.

Read Ex. 33:1-34:14, 27-35

II. THE ISSUE

1. The opening verses of chapter 33 describe what’s CRITICALLY INVOLVED in personal renewal for the Christian leader.

After the Golden Calf rebellion – its fall-out of judgment & Moses’ pleading for mercy, God says to Moses:

“OK – I will give you the land I’ve promised to Abraham, Isaac & Jacob. I’ll send an angel to help you drive out the enemies. BUT I WILL NOT GO WITH YOU.

... We’re too different! You’re stiff-necked. And I may end up so frustrated with you, that I’ll destroy you.

... So I’ll give you what I’ve promised – but I won’t go with you!”

(i) Now this is an interesting proposition:

Imagine God saying to Peace Church – “I’ll give you what you hope for in your vision / Roadmap for the future ... A full church - Multiethnic ministry / relational connectivity / creative worship / prayer / effective leadership ... BUT ... I won’t be there in the future with you!” HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

A. Or ... I once heard a speaker ask: “Imagine having the blessings of heaven – no more pain in your bones, no more suffering in relationships, no more worries about the economy ... streets of gold, reunited with loved ones – imagine God saying, I’ll give you all this, but I won’t be there.” WOULD THAT HEAVEN DO FOR YOU?

- That’s a valid question because, as a pastor, I’ve heard many people around funeral-times describe the blessing of the Christian who has died ONLY in terms of no more suffering & now being reunited with loved ones ... and nothing about seeing the Savior face to face!

HOW IMPORTANT IS HE HIMSELF IN YOUR VISION OF THE FUTURE?

- Is the joy of heaven, the joy of the Promised Land, the joy of any church or personal future JESUS HIMSELF?

2. Both Moses & Israel at this point in time say, “YES!”

“We don’t care for any future – no matter how good it is – if you are not there with us!”

Verse 4 – When the people heard about that possibility, THEY MOURNED

Verse 15 – Moses said, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.”

(i) They want the presence of the Lord, in Word & Spirit, among them – in POWER – generating the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, community, worship.

They want God enervating their souls – exciting their emotions – convicting their hearts & mind – in self-sacrificial love among them.

3. & THAT’S RENEWAL for the Christian leader – that living presence of God in the HEART & MIND.

You’ve heard it said, “Peace is not the absence of trouble; it is the presence of the Lord.”

- That’s it!

Who cares how circumstantially “peaceful” life becomes – numbers / money / programs!?!

Peace is GOD AMONG US – in truth, vibrancy of love, joy & guidance.

HE HIMSELF IS OUR PEACE & STRENGTH in personal renewal.

SO HOW IS MOSES RENEWED IN THE LORD?

... in order to carry out his leadership calling?

III. LOCATIONS FOR RENEWAL - TENT

For that, there are 2 locations in this passage I want to draw your attention to – one is the Tent; the other, the Rock. They're CONNECTED. The tent is first – and LEADS to the Rock.

1. After Israel and Moses decide that they are NOT going to move forward without God, Moses pitches a tent (v. 7), outside the camp – and calls it the tent of meeting.

- This is a place & time to be WITH GOD

= A HOLY PLACE – The people stand when Moses enters it. - Joshua, Moses' aid, guards it from possible disruption.

(i) When Moses goes to this tent, he fellowships in the presence of God.

- the "PILLAR OF CLOUD" descends to be with him (like it later would at the tabernacle).

Verse 11 – is a beautiful description of this time & place of renewal – *"The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend."*

- This is a place where Moses would get direction & his batteries recharged!

A. (Verse 11 – repeat) Think about times when you're with a friend.

A friend is someone you can be yourself with. He / she accepts you. A friend listens to you, is interested in you – just for who you are, not what you can do. With a friend, you can let your heart be known.

In that kind of love one is renewed / refocused!

In that kind of space, one's SAW IS SHARPENED!

2. Where's your TENT for personal spiritual renewal?

= a sacred time, and perhaps space, to be with God – as a man speaks with his friend?

I appreciate Rick Warren's call to that Tent. To maintain effective Christian living, he states:

DIVERT DAILY, WITHDRAW WEEKLY, ABANDON ANNUALLY

Jesus Christ said to his disciples in John 15:14-16 – *"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose*

you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”

Jesus invites us to TABERNACLE with God through Him!

(i) DIVERT DAILY – find time & place to be with the Lord – 15 minutes – Read Scripture / pray / sing.

You can do this as a family. Do it alone also. Open your heart to Him in prayer.

(ii) WITHDRAW WEEKLY – last Sunday I preached on Sabbath observance – feasting on God’s Word, God’s people, God’s beauty & provision

(iii) ABANDON ANNUALLY – find a conference to go to, a retreat, a special event - to charge your batteries in Christian living & leadership!

3. In the Tent, here’s how Moses opens up his heart to God: (This is a good example for us.)

V. 12 – *You’ve given me this calling – lead my people – but you haven’t told me whom you will send with me. (I’m not going without You.)*

Moses lets God know His problems & His desire.

V. 13 – *If you’re pleased with me, TEACH ME YOUR WAYS – so I can serve you better ...*

And SO I MAY KNOW YOU AND CONTINUE TO FIND FAVOR WITH YOU.

= You are my life ... Let me know You.

V. 15 – *If your Presence doesn’t go with us, don’t send us from here*

= I love YOU. I don’t want to serve you on Council, at MOPS, KFC, in my family without the joy of your fellowship!

v. 18 – After God promises Moses that He will go with you, Moses prays, *“SHOW ME YOUR GLORY!”* – so that I know for sure you are with me.

(i) In order to be renewed, these are the things that we desire of God in our TENTS OF MEETING:

Let me know you; teach me; go with me; show me your glory

... USE THOSE LINES ...

... cause those prayers lead to the HIGHER LOCATION FOR PERSONAL RENEWAL! – the Rock!

IV. THE ROCK

1. And for us to truly appreciate this location, let me read again what God says about this place – for it’s a place that we want to get to each time we DIVERT / WITHDRAW / ABANDON to be with Him.

Verse 18 – Moses asks God to show him His glory.

Verse 19 - *God responds, “I will cause ALL MY GOODNESS to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence.*

(i) Now if someone were to ask you, “Where in this world can I see the ALL the goodness of God?” ... YOU KNOW THE ANSWER! ...

... THE CROSS – What goodness is known there! Amen?

The glory of God, above all places in history, is revealed at that Cross!

A. The revelation of God that Moses receives is a SIGN OF THAT PLACE

2. For the Lord asks Moses to stand on a Rock. The New Coivenant writers taught us that Jesus is that Rock travelling with Israel through the wilderness (1 Cor. 10).

But when God passes by, that Rock will be CLEFT – split / cleaved – there’ll be a crack in it – wherein Moses can be kept SAFE from God’s passing glory – and see enough of God’s glory, His back, to know that His presence is indeed with him!

Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee (know that one?)

Let the water and the blood, from thy wounded side which flowed,

Be of sin the double cure, save from wrath and make me pure.

Augustus Toplady – understood that this is a sign of the meaning of the Cross

Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling;

Naked, come to thee for dress, helpless, look to thee for grace;

... Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee.

3. When you seek spiritual renewal, diverting / withdrawing / abandoning to your TENT, the ultimate place god takes you to infuse SPIRITUAL ENERGY within – the evidence of His presence with you – is THE CLEFT ROCK / the CROSS OF CHRIST!

In that CLEFT, these are the words Moses hears. They are the Words of God in the Cross of Christ. They are the words we want to receive in Spirit & Truth in our times of renewal:

Verse 6 – And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, *“The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.”*

(i) Those words – when we truly hear them in our hearts – bring renewal:

A. “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate & gracious God”

- The teeth of our saw get dull and we become hard-hearted toward others
- Why give them time? They’ll never change!

Renewal comes when we meet the God of COMPASSION & GRACE – at the Cross.

B. “Slow to anger, abounding in love & faithfulness”

- We get impatient, discouraged, angry

God comes at the Cross – slow to anger, abounding in faithfulness

C. “Forgiving wickedness, rebellion & sin”

- We get bitter, spiteful

God comes at the Cross – bringing forgiveness – *“Forgive us our sins, as we forgive others.”* – When those words hit us personally, spiritually, deeply ... they bring renewal.

D. “Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished”

- We get tired & burned-out – thinking, “What does it matter?”

God comes at the Cross to remind us that it does matter. The message of Jesus must go forth, lest the guilty receive eternal punishment. **SO WE ARE RENEWED!**

MOSES’ RENEWAL COMES IN THE CLEFT OF THE ROCK

- So does ours. That’s the place God leads us to from our tents.
There we meet God in grace & truth.

V. SIGNS OF RENEWAL

Moses shows this FRUIT of personal renewal. These are ways you know that you’ve truly been renewed; and the spiritual teeth of your saw are sharpened:

1. Verse 8 – Humility & Worship – *“Moses bowed to the ground at once & worshiped.”*

(i) Renewal comes in humility.

- With burn-out comes pride & condescension toward others
= “Look at all I do ... and you don’t!”
- With renewal comes humility = “Thank you Lord for the privilege & opportunity of being a leader in Your cause.”

(ii) Renewal comes in worship – It’s about you, Lord ... “it’s all about you!” (not me!)

2. In renewal we are REFRESHED IN OUR COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD! (Verses 9-10)

(i) God has great promises for you, Christian leader – v. 10 – *Before your people I will do WONDERS never before done ... the people who live among you will see how AWESOME is the work that I, the Lord, will do for you.*

- This is a covenant promise for US!

(ii) The covenant too comes with its RESPONSIBILITIES – that is why Moses takes the fresh tablets of stone up to this place of renewal.

- On those stones God carves His laws, our responsibility – and blessing to obey!

When you are renewed in the covenant, you are refreshed spiritually.

3. Third, in Moses’ renewal his face becomes RADIANT!

So radiant – v. 30 – that the community of Israel was afraid of him – so Moses remained veiled among them!

Who is a radiant Christian you know?

Radiant Christians serve the Lord with JOY, HOPE, LOVE, FREEDOM!

VI. CONCLUSION

1. Are you a radiant Christian?

Are you taking enough time to tent with the Lord, finding your way to the Cross and its renewing power?

Are you a radiant Christian LEADER?

Do others - your children, students, group members – know from you that serving God is a JOY! Can they sense the glow of the Spirit in your presence with them?

Are you keeping your saw sharp?

2. If not, think of the great promise described in 2 Corinthians 3.

In that chapter, Paul writes, *“Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil (referring to Moses’ veil) is taken away.*

His point is that sometimes the Laws of God VEIL Christ Jesus. They can get in the way of seeing Him – because we get so caught up in obedience & duty, that we forget LOVE.

But when someone turns to the Lord, that veil is removed. When Christ HIMSELF is seen in the glory of grace & truth, it is like Moses with God.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect (behold) the Lord’s glory are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (16-18)

BEHOLDING CHRIST – the Christ of the Cross – transforms us from “glory to glory”.

3. Needed personal renewal comes – when we enter the Tent to be with God – and are led to the Cleft of the Rock – to behold the glory of Christ:

“The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate & gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.”

AMEN