

With God It Is
Exodus 19:2-8
06-18-2023

When I was younger man, I always felt I could complete anything I started. Whether it was an art project for school, shoveling multiple feet of snow off the driveway, or mowing the lawn that had gone unattended for a couple of weeks; I knew I could do it, with time and hard work.

Later that became 2 weeklong back packing trips through the mountains for more than 60 miles, my Eagle Scout Project, and then Basic and AIT training in the Army.

Then it was college, Seminary, Chaplain's Officer Basic Course, and now having served you all for 15 years straight, the longest I have ever done any job anywhere in my life.

But now in my Mid Fifties I know that is not necessarily going to be the case anymore. I don't think I will have any problem serving here till I retire, but I have given up my dreams of hiking the Appalachian trail, or the Pacific coast trail. I no longer see myself doing a trek through the Congo or canoeing the Boundary Waters of Minnesota.

And I came to that realization last week. You see Marcy was gone and I worked out, at the gym, as a guest on her black card membership. So, I had to get a workout in just running my old route in the City of Eustis Streets, rather than on the tread mill at Planet Fitness.

And I realized that running in 90-degree weather with 100% humidity for 3 miles is a lot harder than running in an air-conditioned gym with a little fan on your treadmill to keep you cool while you run.

But I still had my youthful determination that anything I start I will complete. So even though I was about ready to pass out at mile 2, I kept going to near complete heat exhaustion to get my 3 miles in.

I made it, but my brain, my lungs, my muscles, and my back all tortured me with screaming pain and dehydration that I simply could not satisfy over the next 10 to 12 hours, until after church on Saturday when I collapsed and drank more water continuously than I had in a long time.

That was when I truly admitted to myself, maybe, just maybe, you in and of yourself should not assume you can complete anything you start. As Clint Eastwood Said in the role of his

Character Inspector Harry Callahan in the famous gritty crime movie *Magnum Force*, “A Man’s got to know his limitations.”

Now, I think that is the norm, nothing we don’t all know in our latter years. We all know when it’s time to move on, time to sit down knowing we left it all on the court, time to disengage from the wrestling contest and feats of strength, after all, the trips to the chiropractor might take weeks and even months to correct the overexertion this time.

This is what makes today’s Old Testament lesson more fascinating to me than almost any other in all of Scripture. Moses is an Old Man, accomplishing that which no Old Man should be expected too.

All the obvious comparisons aside today, I think we all know we should not expect old men to do what young men can do.

I have watched, coached, and comforted many an old man in the ministry from the transition from vivacity to lethargy; and what I mean by that is when the eyes grow dim and further accomplishment is bleak, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, that’s when Pastors are at their best to give you a sense of purpose that’s worth even more, because now you depend on God like never before.

And this all boils down to the curious use of the name Jacob and Israel in the same sentence in verse three of today’s OT lesson.

This really jumped out at me in translation this week. Why is God using the old name of Israel, Jacob?

I always thought once God gave you a new name, well...that was your name? Not that there are a ton of examples of this, but Saul became Paul! Simon Peter would be only Peter, Moses changes Hosea to Joshua being the meaning of Hosea is salvation. And Joshua means Yahweh saves. (Numbers 13:16) And of course, Jacob is and will forever be Israel the namesake of nation forever!

So, when God Almighty brings that name back for the people of God, He seems to be pointing out something important to the people of God!

First there is Jacob and like Jacob, you are a nation that wrestles with God. Oh, the grief and anguish we cause God not just by disobeying Him, but by fighting, arguing, debating endlessly with our Heavenly Father.

Like rebellious teenage kids we think we know more than God, understand the world better than He does, and even think we can see the future better than He can.

There is no better example in scripture of this than the prodigal son! Here was a young man that wanted his father's inheritance so he could live his life the way he wanted too rather than stay with his father's estate and work with his father and brother toward a future guided by fatherly wisdom rather than youthful ignorance and exuberance.

But what we don't always realize about this passage is what it means culturally in the Semitic culture to ask for your inheritance when you are alive.

A missionary that served in the Middle East for 30 years was curious how a son asking for his inheritance, before his father died, would be regarded by the locals he ministered to. So, he asked if anyone would ever do this or had done it.

Each time he asked every reply was some form of an emphatic, "NEVER!!!",

"But why?" he would follow up.

"Because" they would continue,

"That means you want your father dead!"

Every time we disobey, argue with, fight, and debate our Heavenly Father's will, it's as if we are wrestling the Kingdom from His hands for our own purposes so we can simply pick the father of our choosing, but Jesus says there is only one choice, apart from God, telling us in John 8:44, "You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it."

Then and only then do we realize that the 19th Century Philosopher Nietzsche was right when he said, "God is dead, God remains dead, and we have killed Him."

If that were all Frederick, all hope is lost and if God is dead, we're dead too. But there is another name, Israel, that tells us what God does, that needs not our decaying carcass in the tomb to raise us from the dead.

She was about 5 foot three and maybe a hundred pounds soaking wet. And she had a hard life. She told me how her husband left her alone with a baby to raise by herself and she had to fight and scrape for every penny to make a life for them.

She drove countless hours, had no one to help, had to rely on a variety of day cares to care for her infant son, which she vetted completely to insure it was the best environment for her precious little boy.

But she had an Achilles heel that challenged her raising her boy alone in the Old South of North Florida. She was very attractive and there was no end to the men who would harass her.

Oh She navigated the sexual harassment like silver fish in the chummed shark infested waters of the business world and rose to the ranks of management, put her boy through private school and watched him go to Florida University on full ride scholarship including room and board to eventually marry the woman of his dreams and give her grandchildren to boot.

In the meantime, this little 5-foot hundred-pound beauty met a good man, that was 6 foot 4 and about 280 lbs. of rock solid muscle, he was successful basketball player at Savannah State, a solid Lutheran Churchman, and a business owner that not only employed her and paid her what she was worth but married her and gave her the security she always deserved.

He brought her to the church, I eventually became the pastor at, and she became one of the best stewardship directors that little church ever had, guiding them from a budget of 80,000 dollars when I arrived to budget of over 400,000 dollars before I left 8 years later.

She *taught me* stewardship!

I always said if I just had 5 Paula's I could run the world.

One day she was sharing with me that she ran into a business associate that never called her any more or interacted with her in public if they were at the same conferences since she started dating Scott and eventually married him.

She had not made the correlation but the sexual harassment, bullying, and typical intimidation tactics of the office males evaporated since Scott entered her life. But she needed this one friend to help her realize why, even he, kept his distance when he told her, "Well I'm not gonna come and talk to you when you have that massive orangutang hovering over you!"

I laughed out loud when she told me that story because I saw Scott with his daughter every week and I knew he was a gentle, and usually quiet giant! But I also understood the intimidation factor for anyone that did not know him like I did, because he almost never smiled!

To see his daughter Stevie, and his petite wife Paula with him, he did have a hovering, intimidating, protective countenance...which probably accounted for the lack of boys asking Stevie out in High School.

This is what God is in the lives of God's people and for their enemies. Every evil force in the world cannot contend with our hovering, intimidating, protective God who is always ready to do battle on our behalf especially when we have no clue, we need Him to battle for us at all.

For those whom Christ has made his dwelling in, we can see this God when we need too. If there is a fight, we know He fights on our side.

As we learn from 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, “³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

The Law says, “No one can see God” But, the Gospel says, “People do.”
So that which we cannot do apart from God, God says we will!

If we need to lead people to do all that God commands us to do, with God, we will!

The laws of physics said the walls of Jericho would not come down, but with God’s command and a little marching, they did! The laws of fluid dynamics said the Red Sea was an impenetrable obstacle where the Israelites would be trapped and there slaughtered by Pharaoh’s army, but God said the sea would part to safely see them trough and vanquish the Egyptians too.

The survival of the fittest said the Israelites would perish in the desert, but God said, I will quench your thirst and feed your mouths for forty years and you shall not die.

The law said Jesus will go to the cross and die with the sins of the world laid on His body as He was nailed to the cross, But God the Father said, He is saved, He is Risen indeed!

“With men this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible.”

This is what Jesus said concerning a young man having just finished telling him he had to give up everything he owned to have eternal life.

Just like every miracle in the Bible where God had to do everything for anyone to experience the miracle of His working, so with our salvation God must do it all.

The Law says we cannot see Him, His mercy on the Cross for our sins, says we do.

Are there challenges we can’t conceive of accomplishing as a ministry here in Eustis, God says, according to His will we will do!

Are there people who seems out of our reach for salvation, God says we will hug them as family one day.

Is there pain that seems beyond bearing? God says there is a day when there will be no more tears.

So, our litany; that we sing in chorus together is simple for those who do not know God through the work of the Holy Spirit return to your Eternal Father by this simple phrase, everything that is not, with God *IT IS*.

AMEN

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