

“OUT OF WATER? DON’T HAVE A BIRD!”

Sermon, September 19-20, 2020 – Ken Bailey preaching

Text: Exodus 16:2-15

A father planned a surprise trip for his several children. He had picked out a secret destination full of wonder and adventure that he knew they would enjoy. In addition, he planned several stops along the way, each of which would challenge the kids, draw them into the adventure, and deepen their life experience.

He wanted to build a sense of anticipation, so he only told them the barest details ahead of time, beyond that it would be a great experience that they could do as a family.

The great day came, and he piled the kids in to the family car. They were on their way!

It wasn’t long before the adventure began.

“Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Are we there yet?”

“I have to go to the bathroom!”

“Timmy’s hitting me! Make him stop!”

“Well, sis looked at me funny! Make her stop!”

When they got to the first educational stop, things did not improve.

“THIS is where we are going? THIS stupid place?”

“I’m missing my favorite TV program back home! Stupid Dad. Always forcing things on us!”

“You’re trying to control our lives again. Little Johnny’s parents let him do whatever he wants!”

And so it went. At a service station potty stop, one of the kids tried to run away and it took an extra hour finding them. At the next educational stop, another kid let the air out of the car’s tires in anger and caused a further delay. When the time came to stop for dinner, a huge argument ensued from the back seat as to which fast food establishment should be the choice of vendor.

Finally, the car pulled over. “Okay, kids, we’re here,” the Father said, wearily.

“OUT OF WATER? DON’T HAVE A BIRD!”

Sermon, September 19-20, 2020 – Ken Bailey preaching

Text: Exodus 16:2-15

“But... this is our own house!” said one of the kids, looking out the window.

“Yes, it is,” the Father quietly replied. “None of you seems to be willing to trust me enough to find out what I had planned for you all. So the trip is off. Now get inside and do your chores.”

---

Part of this little fictional story resonates with me personally. You know of my youth, how I grew up in remote western Colorado. Some of you have heard of the trips my family would take every summer to Nevada and Arizona, where we had relatives. I can tell you of many wonders we experienced as a family along the way – of breath-taking canyons and arches in Utah, monoliths in Monument Valley, Arizona – cliff dwelling carved into a solid rock face at Mesa Verde – Four Corners, the only place in the United States where a person can be in four states at once. Hole-In-The-Rock Utah, a place very much like the fictional “Wheel Well” in the movie, Cars. Of Holiday Inns and Stuckey’s, Wall Drug and Chief Wampum’s Tourist Trap, Mexican Hat and the Painted Desert. These trips not only vastly expanded my young experience of what the American West had to offer, they greatly bonded us as a family in the shared adventure – and created memories I treasure to this day.

And – had I had my own way at the time – I would have missed it all. You see, as a kid I didn’t want to travel. I wanted to stay in remote Rangely and look at the oil wells.

---

Our desires and goals are often different than our Heavenly Father’s. From our limited perspective, we know what we want. It usually involves being left alone in our present world to pursue the things that enthrall us and avoid the things that don’t. We deal easier with short-term goals than long ones that require work and patience. We get excited when we learn there is a God that can help us out, and rescue us from trouble – but it isn’t long before He seems to have not gotten the memo as to what is good for us and either is off on His own plan, or seems to have left the building with Elvis and isn’t taking our phone calls.

And that is when the enemy comes in – the desire to complain, grumble – and to call Him a liar.

“OUT OF WATER? DON’T HAVE A BIRD!”

Sermon, September 19-20, 2020 – Ken Bailey preaching

Text: Exodus 16:2-15

“You don’t really know what is good for us. You don’t really love us. We were wrong to trust You – look where it has gotten us. You just care about Yourself and Your own glory. We wish we had stayed back in Egypt!” Or Rangely. Or wherever.

---

You see, God does love us. But His goals are not our goals, and His ways of reaching them are not ours. Our desires are basic: safety, food, entertainment, wealth, security, power, sensual pleasures. His goal is a bit loftier: that we may grow up into “a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”. He gave us His Son to show us what the perfect human would look and act like. And He is now on a mission to take each of us there. To make each of us people of true value and wealth and beauty. But His ways are not our ways. We want instant results. He is in it for the long haul.

---

This is why the Biblical account of the exodus of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt to a “land flowing with milk and honey” – a journey that took forty years of wandering through a barren desert to get there – is not only intended to be useful to ancient readers, but to modern ones as well (as it says in First Corinthians 10, “Now, these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction... that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved...”).

We’ve heard it many times since we were kids. Israelites go into Egypt after Joseph has risen to favor there in government and prepared Egypt in advance for a great famine the Lord revealed was coming. Joseph is revered in Egypt, but as time passes, he is forgotten and the Egyptians enslave his descendants. The Israelites cry out in their oppression and God sends Moses and Aaron to tell Pharaoh, ‘Let My people go.’

Pharaoh is stubborn, God sends plagues, finally he releases the slaves, and the people leave. They are no sooner gone than he changes his mind and sends his army to get them back. Trapped by the Red Sea, all seems lost, but God parts the sea, the people escape, and they see their pursuers destroyed.

But being freed from the threat of the powerful Egyptians is not the end of their problems. As the people – 600,000 men and their families – wander in the

“OUT OF WATER? DON’T HAVE A BIRD!”

Sermon, September 19-20, 2020 – Ken Bailey preaching

Text: Exodus 16:2-15

wilderness on their way to the Promised Land, further problems develop. There is no good water. There are no food. There is food, but only mana, which gets boring. There is no water again.

And the people respond ... with complaints. Complaints against Moses, and complaints against his God.

They whined and moaned and complained. “Why did we ever listen to you?” they told Moses. And “weren’t there enough graves in Egypt, that your God should bring us all the way out here into the desert to kill us with thirst?”

Whoa! That implicates God on several levels: 1) As God’s spokesman, Moses was a sucker and a con man; 2) God was callous -- He didn’t care if the people lived or died; 3) He not only was killing them, but He had made them leave the life of ease in Egypt and march all the way out into the desert to get killed!

“Life of Ease in Egypt”? “Doesn’t care to help if they live or die?” These people had short memories. They had just watched this supposedly uncaring God wipe out with various plagues the most powerful nation on earth at the time, freeing the Israelites in the process, and then part a very sea itself so that they could escape and the enemy army be permanently neutralized. (God closing the lake over the heads of the army after opening it for His people proved it was Divine Action and not just a handy natural coincidence!)

But now these same Israelites, who just weeks ago were crying out over their labors and task-masters in Egypt, were viewing that land with nostalgia – the place of fleshpots and bread to eat!

That dirty God! He tricked us to leave our comfortable slavery and come out here with Him to die in the desert! What a fiend!

The process repeats itself three times in Exodus 15-16-17 – the people react to bitter water, lack of tasty food, and then no water at all. Each time, God meets their needs. Each time, their gratefulness extends only as far as their next need,

“OUT OF WATER? DON’T HAVE A BIRD!”

Sermon, September 19-20, 2020 – Ken Bailey preaching

Text: Exodus 16:2-15

and then it is right back to, “That dirty God! Why did we every let you talk us into this, Moses?”

We read “the rest of the story” in Numbers 11 and Psalm 78. The retelling there is even more forceful than the telling in Exodus. The people were not just grumbling here and there; each family was weeping in its tent with dad outside so that Moses could see them as he walked by. “Why do you let us suffer so?” Moses has had enough. He goes to God, and starts to whine himself – “Did I conceive this people, that I should carry them around like a nursing mom with a whining baby?” He then asks God to either provide or to take his life – while noting that it would take slaughtering entire herds or catching an ocean of fish to feed them the meat that they were craving.

God has had enough, too. In Exodus, He merely promises to respond and provide. In Numbers, His attitude is a little more evident – “You want meat to eat, all 600,000 of you? I’ll give you meat to eat. Not one day, not ten days, not twenty days, but an entire month – until it comes out of your noses, and you can’t stand it anymore!

Do you think the Creator had had His fill of whining by then, by any chance?

So He provided the meat – huge flocks of quail, which would show up every evening and then drop to earth around the camps, to be picked up and then made into dinner. The next evening it was the same. And the next. The people greedily rushed out to chow down. And, while they were still chewing, fire from God broke out in the camp and killed a bunch of them off.

Before we are tempted to write the Heavenly Father off as cruel, how about you human parents out there? Every have to deal with a whining kid, who won’t accept that they can’t have a cookie before dinner – or something else they wanted that you responded with “no” or “wait”? Ever have this happen in public – say, in a super-market? Do you love your children?

What emotion did you feel toward them at that time? (Don’t answer that!)

“OUT OF WATER? DON’T HAVE A BIRD!”

Sermon, September 19-20, 2020 – Ken Bailey preaching

Text: Exodus 16:2-15

Did you then go on to treat them to Chuck E Cheese as soon as you got out of the supermarket? (Probably not).

We know how the Bible Story ends. The pattern would continue. God would continue to try to do the good He had in mind for His people (Ten Commandments, etc.) but as soon as Moses was not there watching, the people would quickly rebel and try to replace him, turn back to Egypt, or make a God more to their liking (such as the ever-popular shiny metal cow)!

Finally, they lost their chance for the Promised Land entirely. God kept them in the wilderness until they all died off, then started over with the next generation.

Not our favorite Sunday School bible story, is it? More fun to talk about God “creating the seas, creating the trees, creating the elephants, too.” But remember that verse from First Corinthians – they were written, not only to be a lesson to those to whom these things happened, but to us as well.

So what can we learn from the generation of Hebrews that God freed from the Egyptians, only to eventually let them die in the desert as they kept accusing Him of planning to do?

Firstly, we must analyze the reason for God’s anger against them. It wasn’t that they were suffering and came asking Him for help – indeed, when he first recruited Moses to go get them, God said it was in response to His hearing their cries.

Communicating your needs to God is not sin. But deliberately insulting Him in the process is another story.

Each time the Israelites grieved God in the desert, they made the same claim – that His lack of provision was proof that He didn’t care and could not be trusted – in spite of His past record of proving the contrary! “God is gonna let us DIE in this desert! We never should have come!”

They goaded Him by – as would be later defined by Jesus Himself in the New Testament – “forcing a test” upon the LORD their God. “Can God set a table in the wilderness? Is He with us or not?”

“OUT OF WATER? DON’T HAVE A BIRD!”

Sermon, September 19-20, 2020 – Ken Bailey preaching

Text: Exodus 16:2-15

The Bible says that, if we continue to beg God for something He has showed us we are not to have, He may reverse Himself and give us our request – but send a lean-ness to our soul along with it.

So why would a loving God lead us into places where we are in need, and then seem slow at times to provide a way out?

He knows our needs and desires – the Bible says He remembers that He made us out of dust. As a loving Father, he has promised to take care of what we truly need (food, clothing, shelter) if we seek His kingdom and righteousness. It further says He gives us the desires of our heart, if we set our heart to delight in He the Giver rather than just to seek the gift.

So, what is going on when He knows our needs but lets them stand?

The Bible says in the Exodus passage that God desired to test Israel by putting them in places of need and then delaying to remedy the problem. If they cried for bread and He didn’t immediately drive up in a bread wagon, would they still trust Him? Or would they go all to pieces and jump ship?

Good-time-Charlies that are just there for you as long as you keep supplying them with gifts are not real friends at all. And God wanted to mold His people into “real friends” – followers who truly loved and trusted Him, not just followed around because he gave them stuff.

He wanted them, when he let them hunger, to recall past times in which He miraculously came through for them when all seems hopeless. He desired them to go to Moses and make their needs known, but then to learn to confidently trust that He would provide when the time was right. And to continue to love Him and seek His face until that time came, rather than griping against Him as if He had betrayed them.

Also, when each need was ultimately met, the tale of the rescue could be added to the growing list of examples of God’s past faithfulness, that the people could call to mind to boost their faith when they met future needs that stood in the way of their faith.

“OUT OF WATER? DON’T HAVE A BIRD!”

Sermon, September 19-20, 2020 – Ken Bailey preaching

Text: Exodus 16:2-15

Instead, the people seemed to prefer to practice “Compassion Amnesia” when it came to the Almighty and the claims of His trustworthiness.

Building trust is like building muscles. Trust doesn’t grow and mature if it is not continually stretched; indeed, it can atrophy if it is not kept in good shape. We too need to be frequently reminded of God’s past faithfulness and goodness to us.

We keep our faith in trim by feeding upon the Word of God, especially His promises. Write some down and post them on your bathroom mirror if necessary! Write down also the times He has provided and come through for you, so that in the lean times, when the Enemy of your soul whispers in your ear, “What has that Big Lout ever really done for YOU?” you can instead focus on your list instead of the lying voice.

Take your requests to God, but look to Him as the Giver who knows your needs; continue to be positive and praise Him, even though your pain. Tell Him you believe He is faithful, regardless of what you have or do not have at the moment.

And, if He seems to not want you to have something that you desire, accept it. Thank Him for loving you and others enough to withhold it if it is better you now have it, or not have it just then.

Don’t be afraid to go to God if you struggle in loving the Giver more than seeking the gifts. He remembers you are but dust, and He loves you. Tell him if your love for Him feels inadequate, and trust Him to build it up as you rest in Him ... just as you trust Him to build you up in your struggles against sin, even when you fall.

And confess your struggles to trusted other Christians. Pray over them together – this is a great function of the Church, and why God loved the world so much that He did not leave us as Christian Lone Rangers.

I had a dream years ago, as a young boy. I dreamt of walking at night with my family to a distant amusement park in winter. We were crossing a hill, with the lights of the Park visible in the distance, when I noticed what a great sledding hill we were crossing. Somehow, I found a sled and started sledding, thinking I would then go and catch up with my family to go to the Amusement Park after that.



“OUT OF WATER? DON’T HAVE A BIRD!”

Sermon, September 19-20, 2020 – Ken Bailey preaching

Text: Exodus 16:2-15

To my horror, before I knew it, my family was back! The evening was over and the park was closed; they were now on their way home. I had become so consumed in enjoying what was right in front of me by sledding that I had missed out completely on what was planned and what would have been far more of a treat and blessing!

Let’s not be ones who keep repeating the same old mistakes. Each day is a new day. The next time we run out of water, let’s not have a bird over it – lets determine we are going to trust the loving Lord this time and get it right. Amen.