

## THE FIRST MOVE

Exodus 13:1-3a

Husbands are real experts on what is wrong with their wives. The husband could say, “They are too picky. They don’t let us rest. They expect us to understand all that is going on in them. They change their moods so often. They don’t realize that we can only focus on one thing at the time.”

Wives, of course, then, are experts on what is wrong with their husbands. They could say, “They are slobs. They don’t realize all I do. They don’t listen. They spend too much time in front of a screen.”

The conflicts between husbands and wives, friends, fellow employees, nations don’t end because of complaints about how bad the other side is. They begin to end when one side takes the responsibility to do what they can. In a sense they give in. As a husband I may be an expert on all that is wrong with my wife, but I can’t change her. What I can do is something about what is wrong with me. Until I do that, there is nothing I can do to end the conflict.

In Exodus 13 God seems to tell the people of Israel to do something that puts the responsibility all on them. He says, “Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is Mine.” The firstborn is what you have already. You hope you have more livestock, more sons, but the first is dedicated to God. The first born “opens the womb.” There are no others unless that comes first. Also the firstborn son is the one who receives the inheritance. In a sense by asking for the firstborn, God is saying to Israel, “Dedicate all to me.” In other words, “You make the first move. It is up to you to make this relationship between us work.”

In a similar way God tells the people of Israel to give Him their first fruits. When they harvested, their first crop was to be dedicated to God. The idea was, “Give your first to God, and He will make sure you get the rest.”

I have told the story many times of the man who was lost in the desert. He was about to give up and die when he saw what he thought was a shack in the distance. He wasn’t sure if it was a mirage or not. But he kept going and found that the shack was real. He went inside and found a pump with a note and a bottle of water attached to it. The note told him to not drink the water, but pour it into the pump to help prime it and get water from a well. He asks himself, “What shall I do? If I pour the water down the well, I may get nothing. If I drink it now, at least I get some water.”

So it is with what God called the people of Israel to do. And it is what God calls us to do. Jesus said, “Seek you first the Kingdom of God, and these things will be added to you.” In

other words, “Pour the water down the pump and trust that God will give the rest.” It seems as though God is putting it on us to make the first move.

What we are forgetting is what God asks for is already His. As Moses told the people, “Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the LORD brought you out from this place.” God wasn’t talking to anyone when He asked them to dedicate their firstborn to Him. He was talking to the people of Israel. Just back in chapter 12 of Exodus He had rescued them from the Egyptian army by allowing the people to cross over the Red Sea on dry ground. God had given them everything. They already owed all to Him. He had already made the first move.

So He has with us. God made us and the world we live in. It all belongs to Him. When He asks for the first fruit, He is only asking for what is already his. And that should be enough.

But it isn’t enough for God. Joseph and Mary took the baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to dedicate Him to God. How can God (Jesus) be dedicated to God (the Father)? He can because in Jesus God became human. He came to do what we people fail to do.

We expect God to make the first move. But we forget how He already did by making us and giving us each other. Then we expect Him to do more—to fix our problems. Then when He doesn’t, we live as if He doesn’t exist.

Juan Marichal, Gaylord Perry, Don Drysdale—those are names of some Hall of Fame pitchers who depended on the spit ball—an illegal pitch. You might expect that of people from whom winning was all that mattered. But another Hall of Fame pitcher who depended on the spit ball was Don Sutton. Sutton was a devout Christian who read his Bible every morning. Yet, he still used the spit ball.

Gino Marchetti was a Hall of Famer who was voted one of the greatest defensive ends of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Opposing quarterbacks feared his pass rushes. Part of his success was because of his uncanny ability to anticipate the snap and take off just before it. He was actually offside most of the time. Yet Marchetti was a devout Roman Catholic.

I am not trying to get on those old athletes’ cases, but think of how we act as if God didn’t exist. We look at images of provocative or undressed women. We don’t even bring it up in our minds to God because we know we don’t want to repent of it. Or tune out when we hear about how we can get involved in helping share our faith with others. Or we say, “Let the young ones do it.”

But what did God do? He could easily say, “Forget you,” to each of us. Instead He sent His son into the world. This was His only begotten son, His beloved son. And that son was dedicated to His Father, which meant it was His life that was sacrificed for you and me.

While we argue and point the finger of blame elsewhere, God did something. He made the first, second, third, and on and on moves. He came to us in Jesus and continues to come to us so that we respond in love to Him.

God offered His first born so that we can willingly offer our lives to God. But we offer them not to suffer and be nailed to a cross, but to live in God's love. No it isn't always easy. It is like the struggles in a marriage because it is not all about "me." But in that relationship we can have someone who loves us and shares with us. How much greater the relationship God offers to us when He always makes the first move.