

HAVING WHAT WE NEED

Exodus 34

Scientists tell us we only use a part of the brain capacity we have. The recent Olympic Games remind us of how athletes continue to break records for speed, strength and endurance. But as pitchers report for spring training in baseball, there is one part of that game which seems to remain constant—pitching and hitting the baseball. We hear about amazing young baseball prospects throwing fastballs over 100 mph. That seems to be a lot better than the past. In the 1910's they clocked Walter Johnson at 83 mph electronic signals. Iowa's own Bob Feller was clocked at 98 versus a motorcycle. Using primitive radar they clocked Nolan Ryan in the 1980's at near 100. But these all recorded the speeds when it got to the batter. Modern radars clock the speed soon after the pitcher releases the ball. Using modern technology they believe that Johnson actually pitched at 92, Feller at 104, and Ryan at 108! Extensive study by physicists shows that the human can only pitch the ball so fast—there isn't much room for improvement.

Not only that, the distance from the pitcher's mound to home plate seems to be the perfect distance for a balance between hitting the ball and striking out the batter. Increase the distance and hits would happen like a slow pitch softball game. Decrease it, and games would end in scoreless ties. It is the perfect distance for the limitation both for the pitchers' arms and the batter's ability to process the pitch.

We have limitations as humans.

Deuteronomy tells us that when Moses died, "His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated." That may not seem like a big deal to us, but in 1 Kings we read about a failing King David that he did not fit into that category of an "undimmed eye and a vigor unabated." That caused a crisis in Israel because there was doubt then that David had what it took to rule. That crisis was only settled when David chose Solomon as his successor who in effect ruled in place of the dying king. But there was no such crisis with Moses. When he died, he was clearly the leader of God's people Israel. He was given what he needed to do that.

This stands in contradiction to the way Moses felt about himself in Exodus 3 when God called him. Moses had every excuse in the book to get out of that responsibility. From the outside it could look that he was a good choice. He had been amazingly rescued from death when the Egyptian princess saw him as a baby hidden in a basket among the reeds of the Nile River. He was hidden because the King of Egypt had ordered that all Israelite boys were to be killed. But she adopted Moses as her own. His very name, "Moses" is Egyptian. He grew up as a prince of Egypt, which didn't just mean he was well off, but he received an education and training in leadership. He did flee from Egypt when he killed an Egyptian slave driver who was abusing an Israelite slave, but that could be used as an emotional drive to continue to help his own people. But instead Moses felt he didn't have what it took.

We began earlier this month a group that meets after the 11 AM service on Sundays to talk about sharing our faith. Compared with getting free tickets to an ISU game, going on spring break vacation, and attending an activity with free pizza, how appealing does it sound to us to talk to others about our faith? A far greater fear for Americans than death, even with the pandemic, is speaking in public. And what makes it hard for us to share our faith is that like Moses, we don't feel we have what it takes to do it.

Yet, the Old Testament book of Numbers tells us something special about Moses. We may picture him like Charlton Heston in "The Ten Commandments" as this bold, charismatic leader, but Numbers tell us that Moses was the "humblest" man. Movies picture Moses speaking defiantly to the mighty Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. It didn't happen that way. In Exodus 3 when God called Moses, Moses gave the excuse that he couldn't speak clearly. God tells him that his brother Aaron could. So when Moses spoke to Pharaoh it was through the mouth of Aaron. Numbers tells us that when Aaron and his sister Miriam thought more highly of themselves than Moses, they developed leprosy. They were cured only because of Moses' intervention. Moses' very humility, which he thought would exclude him from leading the people of Israel, instead was used by God. Moses' humility made it clear that it was God's grace, not Moses' charisma, that was rescuing the people.

In fact we heard from former student Pastor Levi Willms last month that when Moses got angry with the people of Israel he said, "Why do you despise us (meaning God and him) when we sent water from the rock for you." In response to Moses saying "we," God forbids him from going into the promised land. It was a rare time when Moses forgot who was rescuing the people. And that was important, not because God has a great ego, but because only He can save us.

That is why God chooses to use you and me with all our faults and limitations to share His love with others. Through us it can become clear to others that it is God who is doing the blessing, not our charisma or talent. There are "mega-churches" in our culture that are led by people who have great charisma. But the experts who study why people go to churches have found that most of the people going to those churches are already Christian. Few are converts. Most conversions happen at mid-size churches where the key element is not the appearance on Sunday morning, but the sincere witness of friends who meet them one-on-one—friends like you and me.

Our epistle from Hebrews tells us that we "share in a heavenly calling." Does Hebrew go from there and say, "Now do all these great things." No, it says, "Consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to His Father who appointed Him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house." That is our starting and ending point as we hear God's call to share our faith. It is not about us and how great we are, or for that matter how weak and ineffective we are. It is about Jesus. That is why Paul said, "I can do all things through Jesus who strengthens me."

Despite what we might think, the prevailing attitude in our academic world is not that Christianity is crazy and should not be believed because it contradicts science. The prevailing standard is that all human beliefs should be considered. The objection is not to sharing Jesus personally, but saying that He is the only way. If we choose to follow Jesus, no one should ridicule us for that. It is when we say that our way as Christians is the only way that we are in trouble.

I am not saying that we have to stop saying that Jesus is the only way, but not use opposition to that view to keep us from telling others about Jesus. People don't want us to tell them what to believe, but Jesus isn't calling us to do that. Even if we were confident that we could do that, we can't. Only the Holy Spirit can give the faith to believe. Instead Jesus calls us to tell people what He means to us. It doesn't take any great speaking skills or persuasion power to do that. We just tell others about what we already have in Jesus. In fact our very hesitance to do that, to not want to be offensive to others, can be used by God to help our witness. When people see that we are sharing this as humble, gentle people, they are more likely to listen.

Moses was given what he needed to lead the people of Israel. And we are given what we need in our calling to share Jesus with others.