



Getting Behind Jesus

Exodus 3:1-15; Psalm 105; Mat 16:21-28; Romans 12:9-21

Not many of us like to follow. We might not want to walk in front, but we want to call the shots. We want to be sure that our concerns are held in the same priority we would give them. This is not the way of faith, however. In the life of faith, we are challenged to fall in behind Jesus as Lord and Savior. Will we follow His lead in faithful service?

Moses was not looking for God. Moses had rather forgotten his people suffering in Egypt. OK, well, he had not forgotten, but what was he to do about them? He was far from Egypt. Pharaoh wanted him dead for having killed an Egyptian many years ago. His hands were tied. He had a new life with Jethro's family—wife, children, and a job. Sure he thought about life back in Egypt, his family left behind, and the plight of his people. There was just nothing he could do about it. He had not abandoned Egypt by choice. He had fled in order to survive and begin a new life. Midian was where he belonged. Egypt was little more than a memory. That was all there was to it.

Then God came on the scene. Somehow, that just changes everything. See, God is great at interrupting our plans, dreams, and purposes in life. Maybe God gets a kick out of shaking things up a little. Maybe God thinks we too quickly get too comfortable and forget our need for God. Maybe God wants to keep us open to new possibilities, to live by faith rather than by habit. After all, when life is too comfortable, faith is not necessary.

Moses was not out looking for God. His father-in-law was a priest. He had grown up with stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. At one point, he had thought he might become God's instrument to liberate his people from oppression. That had gone very badly. He had killed an Egyptian, then found out that his deed was public knowledge. He had been forced to flee from Egypt—So much for his efforts to redeem his people! He had tried to accomplish God's job, but it had come to nothing. His attempts to bring about God's faithful visitation and memory of the promise to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph had come to nothing. That life was over and done with. He had a new life now. He was finished with helping his people, or so he thought.

Then God stepped in to catch him by surprise. Moses' first reaction was fear. After all, he was guilty of murder. It was just an Egyptian that he had killed, but perhaps God had come around to make him pay for his crime. That was not the case. God did not bring up any question of Moses' background, righteousness, or qualifications. Rather, God issued a charge for Moses to follow God's leadership in redeeming the people from Egypt.

Moses had heard and seen the plight of the people. He had once tried to do something about it. He had not done it following God's direction, however. Now God wanted Moses to return to Egypt, this time under God's direction, following God's guidance rather than his own.

Moses was concerned. Moses was scared of the task at hand. He had tried it already and failed. Now God said, "Go, for I will be with you." It took Moses a while to hear and understand the meaning of those words. He was still thinking of his own failure and inability to accomplish so great a task as to deliver the people from Egyptian bondage. He had taken out one oppressor and lost the ability to remain in Egypt. What was the point of going back to try again?

God said, “Go, I will be with you. As a sign of my presence, you will worship me on this very mountain after you have accomplished the task at hand.”

I don’t know about you, but that doesn’t quite strike me as much of a sign to reassure me of God’s presence. After you have done what I am telling you to do, then you will receive proof that I have been with you. Isn’t that a little late? What about a sign beforehand? How about a little pointer that I am understanding this correctly? Faith just does not work that way, seemingly, neither does God.

God went further with Moses. He said, “I am the One who causes to be—I create and determine and accomplish what I set out to do. I am with you.” Once Moses accepted that God was calling and God would see to fulfilling His own will to redeem the people, things went much smoother. It was then that Moses was able to allow God to direct his steps, even when it meant accomplishing what he had once tried and failed to accomplish.

Moses did not yet know what God would do. Faith called him to trust God to accomplish through him what he could not envision for himself. He was charged not with knowing beforehand, but with following God wherever he might be led. The Psalmist could look back on God’s dealings through Moses and Aaron, but for Moses it was a question of trusting God in a blind. He would have to accept God’s faithfulness and follow according to God’s design.

Peter found himself in a similar quandary with Jesus. He had already acclaimed Jesus as Messiah, but now we find that he had his own ideas as to how Messiah was to live, act, and perform. He wanted Jesus to fit in with the way he knew things were supposed to work. In all the stories Messiah was to be the military leader and powerful redeemer of the nation. There was nothing at all in there about Messiah dying on a cross. Peter was just trying to straighten Jesus out. He did not realize just how opposed his concept of Messiah was to Jesus’ purpose and plan.

We read the text as see the term translated Satan, thinking immediately of some celestial opponent to God. The Greek word just means “adversary,” at times accuser or enemy. Jesus did not use the term so much in reference to some celestial being, as regarding Peter’s opposition to God’s will. Peter was supposed to be a follower. Followers are not the ones to give direction and take the lead. Rather, they are to fall in behind the leader, assured that their leader will give the right direction. Instead of following, Peter was trying to take the lead. Jesus turned to him to say, “Get back in position and stop interfering with where I am headed. Stop being my adversary and get with the program.” He told the rest the same. If they would be Jesus’ followers, each would have to bear a cross, as well.

The church in Rome apparently needed to hear some of the same from Paul. They needed to be reminded that the character of Jesus’ life was to be the character of the church’s life, as well. They were to follow the example of Christ Jesus in declaring redemption through a change in their living and giving their lives for others. Live according to genuine love, overcoming evil with good.

Moses had failed, for he tried to use force to bring about deliverance and redemption. Peter wanted Messiah to display military might, while Jesus chose the way of love and submission. Paul says that it is in Jesus’ example that we also find the path to true redemption by using love as God’s means to deliverance. After all, we do not have the power to enforce our desires on the world. Rather, we have the responsibility to follow Jesus along the path of love. Will we get behind Him where we belong?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*