

Southport Presbyterian Church
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God's Will and Your Life
Exodus 3:1-12

It was a God-sized project, to be sure. By God-sized, I mean it was a task those 24 people could not have accomplished on their own without God's intervention. By God-sized, I also mean that the ultimate results would be far greater than anything they could imagine at their point of time. God worked through them and ultimately received the praise and glory for what happened.

It was March 30, 1833 and 24 people with still familiar names like Brewer, Smock, McFarland, and Mann organized the New Providence Presbyterian Church. That very special meeting took place either at the home of Mary Sebern or at the Old Mud Schoolhouse, just a short distance west of the intersection of Banta and McFarland Roads. The name for this God-sized venture came from the New Providence Presbyterian Church of Mercer County, Kentucky from whence 3 of those charter members came.

We are here today, 175 years later, because those 24 people had the courage to step out in faith and believe that God was calling them to accomplish His will of establishing a church. Today, we are on the sixth site they used to worship our Great and Awesome God. Along the way there have been many other God-sized challenges, like a fire, a tornado, and division that caused some of them to begin another church in Acton.

More recently, in the 60-70's, SPC had the challenge of becoming a mission-minded church. In 1981, a daughter, the Center Gove Presbyterian Church, made up of 14 families from SPC was a God-sized project. In 1997, SPC moved to this present site, while at the same time beginning 5 new community outreach ministries. It was a venture which as we looked around us to see what God was doing in our area, we felt God was inviting us to join with Him in undertaking.

While there have been several God-sized projects since that time, I think of one I was privileged to be a part of. On a mission trip to Ghana, West Africa, in the summer of 2003, I met a young woman who had a dream of becoming a doctor so that she could glorify God by service to her beloved Ghanaians.

Sitting at a dinner with the team in the mission house of Manna Mission, we talked about her coming to the United States to pursue an education. We didn't have a budget to pay for her coming. This kind of a project didn't fit in our organizational structure. She didn't have a place to stay. The cost of her university education at IUPUI was estimated at \$28,000 a year since she was an international student.

Less than 6 months later she was here in this place worshipping with us. Less than 4 years later I was driving her to Boston to begin her studies at Harvard Medical School, where she is being mentored by the president and CEO of Massachusetts General Hospital. Last spring, here in this place, we had an auction that we hoped would raise \$10-15,000, to help defray her expenses. \$33,000 was raised. We praise and glorify God!

As we continue this series of messages and study *Experiencing God* together, we find that God desires to show us His will for our lives as individuals and our life as a church. We are to look around us to see what God is doing and see if He is calling us to join with Him.

Often, we find that He is calling us to projects or tasks that we cannot accomplish without Him working through us. As He works through us, we grow in our faith and He receives the glory.

We are not alone in knowing and doing the will of God in this fashion, the Bible is full of accounts of all kinds of people experiencing similar challenges. Think of Gideon and his small band of men taking on the mighty Midianites; or David dueling with Goliath; or Nehemiah being called to rebuild the Wall of Jerusalem; and the list goes on and on as we page through the Old and New Testaments.

Today, briefly, we are going to look at Moses as he encounters God in the desert and is given a venture which could only be accomplished through God working in and through him. Then, we will look to see how in a similar way God wants to show us His will for our lives.

Please follow along with me as I read Exodus 3:1-12.

God's will for Moses involved a God-sized challenge.

Now you must know that Moses wasn't really looking for a God-sized challenge in the season of his life in which find him in Exodus 3. Do you have any idea how old he was? Let's put it this way, Moses was not a spring chicken. He was 80 years old.

While the God-sized challenge that is presented to him in this chapter wasn't on his radar screen, Moses was exactly the right man for the job. Even though he was a Hebrew by birth, the first 40 years of Moses' life were spent in the Egyptian Pharaoh's court where he was treated like a prince. After a fit of anger that resulted in the murder of an Egyptian slave driver, the next 40 years were spent in the desert learning about what it takes to survive in the wilderness. No one in the world was better equipped for what God wanted to do than Moses.

As we pick up the story in the first part of Exodus 3, Moses is by himself in the solitude of the desert watching the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro. In what was an ordinary place for him, the far side of the desert next to Mount Horeb, which would later be called Mount Sinai, Moses encounters an extraordinary event.

As he turns around, following the wayward path of one of his sheep, he sees one of the millions of straggly bushes that were every where, burning. While it was rare to see such a sight, it happened once in a while through a lightening strike, or spontaneous combustion which he never really understood.

What immediately made this bush different was the fact that it wasn't consumed by the flames. Every thing was so tinder-dry; it should have been gone in a very short time. Being curious, Moses ventured closer. As we now know, this was one of those sacred moments when God was going to demonstrate His will to Moses.

When Moses was close enough to hear, from within the bush, God called his name, "Moses! Moses!" Shaken with fear, Moses responds, "Here I am."

"Don't come any closer," God continues. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Meeting him right where he is, God continues, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." This really freaks out Moses. He covers his face, shaking in fear.

As Moses is trying to gain his composure and regain his emotional bearings, God tells him that he has seen the misery and heard the cries of His people in Egypt. He is concerned about them and is coming down to rescue them, bringing them to a place of prosperity and goodness.

Certainly, Hebrew blood still flowed through Moses veins. There was plenty of time to think, there in the desert. He often wondered about and prayed for his people. He was overjoyed as he processed what he was hearing, that is, until God spoke the next words that would forever change his life- “So now, go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

There it was. God was interrupting his life with a God-sized challenge, which he could not possibly carry out. “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” God answers as He always does when He delivers a God-sized challenge, “I will be with you.”

Do you see the picture so beautifully portrayed for us? God meets Moses in the ordinary of his everyday life and presents him with a challenge that He cannot possibly accomplish by himself. It will only be through God working in and through him that this mission will be accomplished. Today, we are still talking about what happens next as God brings about the Exodus of His people from Egyptian slavery, one of the greatest events in Israel’s history.

Let’s briefly look at some important truths that we can take away from Moses’ God-sized challenge.

A relationship with Jesus is essential in knowing God’s will.

When Moses woke up the day of the burning bush, he had no idea that he would begin a relationship with the living God that day. God broke through the ordinary of his life and initiated a relationship with him. One scholar that I read said that the experience of the burning bush was Moses’ conversion.

So it is with us. Before we can really see what God is doing around us, inviting us to join Him, we must enter into a personal relationship with this Awesome, Creator God. For us that relationship begins through confessing our sins and through faith accepting the gift of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. He brings us forgiveness for our sins, meaning, peace, and joy in the present, and hope for all the days of our future.

He comes to us in the midst of ordinary days like today and extends His arms of love and acceptance. If you have never responded to His invitation to enter into this relationship, you can go no further in trying to know God’s will for you life. If Moses had turned his back on the burning bush without encountering God the story would have ended there. God could have delivered His people in another way.

Maybe today is your burning bush. Maybe this is holy ground for you, here in the midst of the ordinary. If nothing else, out of curiosity, explore what a relationship with Jesus could mean for you today.

When we respond to God’s invitation to be in a relationship with Him and to join Him in what He is doing in our world, Jesus becomes our model for living. We’ve got it better than Moses; God came to us in flesh and blood, preaching, teaching, and healing. The more we have the courage to step out in faithful obedience and live our lives like He lived His, the more we discover and follow God’s will for our lives.

To be in a relationship with Jesus, following His example, means that we become servants like He was. Emptying ourselves of status and power, we reach out to love the world for which He gave His life. Being a follower of Jesus doesn’t elevate us to look down on others, it always lowers us to being willing to wash their feet.

Dear friends, this is where it all begins. We first experience God and begin to know His will for our lives by responding to His gracious invitation into a relationship with Him through Jesus. There are no short cuts. This is where it begins. Without this step of faith, it is all theory and not experience.

Have you taken that step of faith? If not, what's holding you back?

Knowing and doing God's will often involves God-sized challenges.

Like Moses, we can be certain that when we know and do God's will, we will be confronted with God-sized challenges. They are God-sized because we cannot possibly accomplish them by ourselves. Without God's intervention, we will fail.

These challenges are God-sized because we cannot possibly predict what God will do in the future. Someone has said, "Anyone can count the seeds in an apple. Only God can count the apples in a seed." Moses had no idea what God was going to accomplish in the lives and history of those who left the bondage of Egypt. Those 24 people on that March day in 1833, had no idea of what God was going to do in the future through the New Providence, now Southport Presbyterian Church. It was a God-sized challenge.

Responding to the God-sized challenge God invites us to join always means risk. Often, those challenges don't fit cleanly into our strategic plan, our budget, or our organizational structure.

Such was the case of the five new community outreach ministries we started when we moved to this campus from our Southview ministry site. They didn't easily fit into our organizational structure and our budget lines. Yet, we've been able to reach the lives of hundreds of people through them over these last 10 years. God receives the praise and the glory. He's the One who invited us to join Him. He's the One who has made the impossible reality.

Over 30 years ago, when some people took the first steps of starting a pre-school, who could have dreamed that it would become a school with more than 400 students; a school recognized for its academic excellence; holy ground where dozens of children have begun a relationship with Jesus; a conduit for many to become a part of our church family; and have a budget of a million dollars. Praise God!

The God-sized challenge is now starting a middle school in the fall of this year. Humanly speaking, there are many obstacles and questions. I believe that God will make an outstanding school where young people receive an excellent education and grow in their faith in our awesome God. Ultimately God will be glorified for what He has done.

A couple of years ago, just before Christmas I had lunch with a wonderful pastor who had come to the United States from Burma after having been persecuted there by a repressive regime. Tawnling is the Pastor of the Chin Church, which meets at our Southview campus on Sunday afternoons. When I met him at lunch with that day, I was amazed to hear that there were 400 Chin people in Perry Township.

We looked around us to see what God was doing and felt He was calling us to be involved. When they began meeting there less than 2 years ago, their congregation numbered just over a 100. Today, they number 300 and there are 1300 in Perry Township. We have a wonderful group of people who are following Jesus' model of servant hood, helping them in all kinds of ways. We now have a new God-sized challenge as they outgrow the facilities. Stay tuned for what God is going to do. Praise and glory be to our Great and Awesome God!

Application

When it was all said and done, I believe Moses could look back in great humility and praise God for doing what first seemed impossible. Likewise, those 24 charter members who founded our church in 1833, as they look down on us from heaven, must be able to say in great humility, "Praise God for using us to start something that has progressed beyond anything we could have imagined!" How sweet it is to reflect upon what God has done in ways beyond our dreams.

This week, in a conversation with a young friend I meet with regularly, He said what he desires most is someday be able to look back on his life and have no regrets. He understands that it is only as he knows and does the will of God for his life, that he will realize that wish. Wow! What a profound wish!

As I have thought about our conversation, I am reminded of this story told by John Ortberg in his newest book, *When The Game Is Over, It All Goes Back In The Box*. The great Scottish essayist and historian, Thomas Carlyle, wrote profoundly about the meaning of life coming from more than the best of the stuff of this life.

It seems that Carlyle had married his secretary, Jane Welsh, a highly intelligent and attractive woman, who continued to serve him after their marriage. Some time after their marriage, Jane became ill. While Carlyle was not tempted by money and the stuff of this life, he was so absorbed in his work that he didn't seem to notice his wife's ill health much. Jane continued to work until she was diagnosed with cancer and finally confined to her bed. While Carlyle genuinely loved her, he just didn't seem to have the time to spend with her.

After several years of this, Jane died. The day of her funeral was stormy and they carried her body to the graveyard in the rain and the mud. After all the people were gone, Carlyle went back to his house that felt incredibly empty. He found himself going into Jane's room and sitting in the chair next to her bed where he had spent far too little time.

He noticed her diary next to the bed. He picked it up and began to read. There on one page was written only one line: "Yesterday he spent an hour with me and it was like heaven." He was crushed by the realization that he had spent so little time and had been so inattentive. He had been so preoccupied by his work that he hadn't realized how much she suffered and how much she loved and adored him.

As he continued to page through her diary, his heart was broken and he could never forget these words found on another page, "I have listened all day to hear his steps in the hall, but now it is late and I guess he won't come today." Friends later found him in the churchyard kneeling at her grave covered with mud.

Even though he lived 15 more years, Carlyle made little attempt to write again. He was eaten up by regret and lived the life of a partial recluse.

While not wanting to be melodramatic, someday will we look back on our lives with regret? Maybe it will be the fearful regret of never really knowing God? Maybe it will be the regret of knowing that God had invited us to join Him in doing something that was God-sized and we were afraid to act.

If you want to know the will of God, you must first begin a relationship with God through His Son Jesus. If you want to do the will of God, look around you and see what God is doing and ask if He is inviting you to join Him.

I pray that there will be no regrets!