

Who Qualifies to Stand in the Gap?

by K.P. Yohannan

To stand in the gap for a lost world, we must have a pure and authentic heart, motivated by love for God and not self-interest.

Scripture: Exodus 32:11-14, Ezekiel 22:26, Ezekiel 22:30, Matthew 7:22-23, Matthew 23:27-28

Topics: "Authenticity in Faith", "Intercession"

Description

K.P. Yohannan emphasizes the critical role of intercession in his sermon 'Who Qualifies to Stand in the Gap?', using Moses as a prime example of someone who stood in the gap for the people of Israel during a time of impending judgment. He illustrates how Moses, despite the people's sin, approached God with a pure heart and selfless motives, pleading for mercy and ultimately saving the nation. Yohannan warns that God seeks individuals with authentic hearts, not just those performing religious duties, and stresses the importance of having the right motives in our service to God. He draws parallels to the modern church, urging believers to evaluate their intentions and ensure they are rooted in love for Jesus. The sermon serves as a call to action for individuals to stand in the gap for others with genuine compassion and integrity.

Transcript

It was by far the darkest hour in the history of the people of Israel. The lives of the entire nation were hanging by a very thin thread. At any moment, the judgment of their righteous God could wipe them off the face of the earth. They knew that each breath they took was only on borrowed time. Frightened and trembling, the people stood at the foot of Mount Sinai, watching one old man slowly climb up the rough terrain to reach the top and meet the Holy God face-to-face. Moses' mission: to plead for mercy on behalf of several million people, to ask God to forgive their sin and continue to lead them to their promised land.

Moses himself must have felt the weight of the whole world on his shoulders. He knew God better than anyone alive. God couldn't simply forget His righteous standard and pretend the people's worship of the golden calf had never happened. He had to punish sin in accordance with His own character and His law, which demanded death for such a grave offense. Considering all this, why did Moses even try to make this tiring hike and approach God in such a hopeless situation? I believe he must have said to himself: "I have no doubt that because the people have broken their covenant with God, He must punish them.

But from all my previous encounters with Him, I have learned that He is also a merciful God who dearly loves His people. Perhaps there is a chance He will spare them if I stand in the gap for them." Chapter 32

of the book of Exodus contains the dialogue between God and Moses on Mount Sinai. The first part of their conversation had taken place when God gave Moses the tablets with the commandments and informed him of the idol worship that was going on in the camp of Israel. The second half happened after Moses went down to see for himself, smashed the tablets in the process, destroyed the golden calf and then came back up the mountain to plead for the lives of his people.

Here we see Moses standing in the breach of a broken dam, fighting to hold off the imminent flood of destruction that is about to wipe out an entire nation. Imagine with me, if you will, their conversation: God says, "Moses, step aside and let Me destroy them. They have gone too far--there is no hope for them. I will raise you up as a new nation instead, and your descendants will be My people." But Moses simply answers, "Please, God, You cannot do that. These are Your people.

You are the One who led them out of Egypt. If You are going to destroy them, then please kill me also. Wipe my name out of Your book." God heard Moses' prayer as he pleaded for millions of people who had walked away from the living God. Amazing! His standing in the gap allowed the entire nation of Israel to be saved. What was it that compelled God to listen to Moses? Why did God accept him and grant his request? God looked at Moses' heart, and He saw a man who was totally unselfish in all his ways.

His heart was pure. His motives were without hidden agendas. God could say this about him: "Moses, My servant, with whom I share all My secrets." He walked with God in such a way that he could go up the mountain and sit and talk with God, and then go down and speak to the people. He was able to identify with them yet at the same time remain God's faithful servant. We can learn a valuable lesson from Moses' life. When souls are hanging in the balance, it is not the majority of the crowd that will make the difference.

All God needs and looks for is one individual whose heart is pure. My brothers and sisters, this means you and I can make the difference in our home, our workplace, our community, our state and our nation. Please believe me, we can--if our hearts are right. The history of the nation of Israel is marked by terrible times of judgment, devastation and exile, yet there is always the hope of God's promise--that He will not wipe them out completely and will show them mercy if they seek Him again.

When we read the Old Testament, we encounter a God who takes no pleasure in judging and punishing His people for their rebellion and sin. On the contrary, He is deeply grieved; and He actually looks for a reason to keep from having to go through with His judgment. In Ezekiel 22:30, we see the pain and sadness of His heart when He tells us through the prophet: "So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one."

The background to this verse is this: God's people--the entire nation--had forsaken the living God. They were totally given over to idolatry, corruption, self-centered living, greed, lust and seeking after the things of this world. God was deeply grieved over His beloved people. He knew He would have to send His severe judgment and wipe them out. But in the middle of all this chaos, He must have paused and remembered Mount Sinai, and how Moses selflessly stood in the gap and saved his people.

Right then, in His love and desire to find a way to ward off judgment, God must have decided: "I will look for just one individual--not 10, 15 or 10,000--with a heart like Moses', whose intercession I can accept; one, among all My people, who is honest with total integrity, who has a deep concern for others and is pure in his intentions, who will stand in the gap on their behalf and pray and plead for their lives. I will carefully search through the entire nation, among the thousands of priests, prophets and people who

declare they belong to Me and work for My cause."

God made the most thorough search ever conducted on the face of the earth, but He came up empty-handed. "I found none," He lamented, and the land was destroyed and the people killed or taken away into exile. Why was there no one at all who could have stood in the gap for God's people? At least among the priests and Levites there should have been someone who qualified. Were God's standards higher than in Moses' time? No, not at all. But something very alarming had happened in the lives and ministries of those priests and Levites who had been specifically appointed by God to teach and lead His people according to His Word.

In Ezekiel 22:26, God describes very clearly why the spiritual corrosion among the nation was so total: "Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean." When I read these words, they really spoke to my heart. I want to draw your attention to the part of Ezekiel 22:26 where God says, "They have not distinguished between the holy and the unholy."

This particular verse is interestingly paraphrased in the Living Bible: "Your priests have violated my laws and defiled my Temple and my holiness. To them the things of God are no more important than any daily task." Incredible! Among these thousands of priests and prophets, God could not find one person--even though every one of them was busy in ministry. What were these people doing? What was their problem? God says, "They took the ministry lightly and treated My work just like any other secular job.

They lost the heart of the whole thing!" The motive behind each action is what gives the action its value. The motive behind your service, your prayers, your toil--whatever you do--is what the Lord examines and evaluates. Your work may be minimal, or it may be a sleepless, 24-hour job. No matter what it is, the reason you do it is so much more important, in God's eyes, than what you actually do. In other words, the question "why" is far more crucial than the question "what."

Over the years I have watched Gospel for Asia expand to many countries and touch the lives of millions of people. All the while, this one burden and longing continues to grow in my own heart: "Lord, create in us a deeper reality. Make us authentic in our hearts, that we will be pure before You." You see, authenticity is what it takes to stand in the gap for a lost world and to do a work for God that will last throughout eternity. Otherwise, we will only end up with a huge pile of wood, hay and stubble that will be burned up into just a pinch of ash.

Do you remember how strongly and angrily Jesus spoke to the Pharisees and scribes of His day? These people were believed to be righteous and holy because externally, they did everything perfectly: They fasted, prayed, memorized the law of Moses and taught the Holy Scriptures. In fact, these men were scholars--the equivalent of Ph.D.s in theology. They were employed full-time in the work of God. Everything else in life was secondary. Their total lifetime commitment was to God and His law and to the task of teaching and practicing it.

But you know what? Jesus pronounced His worst judgment, not on the prostitutes, drunkards and the most wicked crooks in this society, but on this religious crowd. His words to them in Matthew 23:27, 33 are extremely strong: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. . . . Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?"

Why did Jesus deal so severely with them? What was their problem? They did everything so correctly and according to all the rules and regulations. But Jesus was not looking at their outside deeds, but at the "why"--the motives of their hearts. What He saw there was the exact same problem as what occurred in the days of Ezekiel: They served God with an external form, but their heart was not in it. And thus they disqualified themselves from being used by God to stand in the gap for the people.

What about us as New Testament believers? What is our track record with the living God? We can boast of thousands of impressive churches and accomplishments in the name of Christ, and many of our preachers and evangelists have huge followings. But how would we fare as individuals if God would evaluate us by the same criteria He used in Moses' and Ezekiel's days? Would we qualify to stand in the gap for those who are about to be destroyed and plunged into hell? Jesus had much to say about the heart motives of those who claim to be His followers.

In fact, in Matthew 7:22-23, He described a scene from the future, the Day of Judgment: "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' " This is a very sobering passage of Scripture. Imagine for a moment how sad and terrified these people will feel as they cry out in desperation, "Jesus, You somehow must have made a mistake!

Don't You remember me? I'm the one who saw thousands of people healed in my ministry. Demons trembled and left people when I commanded them to get out in the name of Jesus. And Lord, how many thousands made decisions for You at my evangelistic meetings?" Amazingly, Jesus doesn't reply, "No, you're lying. You didn't do any of these things." In fact, He makes no comment at all about the subject they used for their defense. His silence about the whole matter of their ministry accomplishments is proof and declaration that they did perform all those miracles and works.

But then Jesus very plainly tells them, without further explanation or qualification: "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" Let me ask you, how did such an incredible amount of spiritual Christian work, which received the applause of the whole world and drew enormous crowds, turn out in the end to be "works of iniquity"? I believe the answer is this: Those workers did all their ministry not for the glory of God, but for their own name, their benefit, man's approval and man's honor.

Their motivation and reason for serving God were carnal, and in the depth of their heart their intentions were impure. My brothers and sisters, I know these are very strong statements. For all of us who desire to serve the Lord and are committed to reach our generation with the Gospel, my deepest concern is that we have a pure and authentic heart before the Lord. We must never work and serve because of a challenge, money, a title, a position or even because millions of people are going to hell and we have to do something about it.

It is my prayer and hope that we serve the living God for one reason, and no other: deep down in our hearts, we love Jesus more than anything else in this life, and His love is our only motivation for action. Only those things done out of sincere love will last in eternity.

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