

Not Slaves but Fighters (8.6.1986)

by Nigel Lee

Nigel Lee emphasizes the importance of recognizing God's power and love in the face of life's challenges, encouraging believers to trust in His provision and the power of prayer.

Duration: 36:12

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the various lessons the Israelites learned from God during their journey in the wilderness. They first witnessed God's power in dealing with their enemies and His care for them by providing water. However, when they faced a shortage of water, they grumbled and complained. Moses cried out to God, and instead of immediately rejoicing, they needed to understand something about God and themselves. The speaker also shares personal experiences of facing difficulties at the beginning of ministry and how God can refresh and multiply resources. The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding God's grace and forgiveness in order to face challenges and fight against obstacles.

Transcript

They don't really believe in God the moment it gets difficult. Yes, they believe God loves them and God wants to save them, but the moment they come into crisis or difficulty or depression, then they begin to doubt that God has led them there and God can bring them out. God says, you've seen the Egyptians, I want you now to see me.

You will see the deliverance of the Lord. In impossible situations, here is the water of the sea in front of them and the Egyptian chariots clattering along behind. And God wanted to show them something of his power, his glory, before they went out to battle.

This is how the Lord himself trained his own disciples for world evangelism. He showed them his power. He showed them the great things that he could do.

Turn to Mark chapter 5. Not going to read it, but there are three stories there I want you to see. The first is of the man who could not be bound. People put him in chains and he broke the chains.

And the second story is of a woman who could not be healed. Verse 26. She'd suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors, spent all she had but only grew worse.

And then the third story is of the child who couldn't be raised from the dead. And with a word Christ solved every situation. The disciples watched the power of his word.

They spent some time with him and they ended believing that God was active and God could do impossible things. Some people have a God who is not really very powerful. He can't really change situations.

They have a God who, well, they wonder how he ever did actually create the world in the first place. How could he ever have raised Jesus from the dead? Because he seems to have somehow, his batteries have run down or something. He's lost his power.

We have a Jesus who doesn't really love them. You know one of the remarkable things about us is we believe that Jesus will love us if only we do something. We find difficulty in believing that Jesus loves us right at the point that we're at.

Do you think Jesus Christ would love you more if you did something? Supposing you led people to Christ every week during your... Supposing you had the most glorious times along with God in the morning before breakfast and revival filled your soul. Supposing you had the most, you know, power-packed life this summer on OM for the Lord Jesus. Would he love you any more than he does right now as you sit sleepily yawning away on that seat? God cannot love you any more than he does right now.

And there's nothing you can do to earn one little scrap more love out of God because he loves you as much as he is going to. It's his entire nature. Do you think your Lord loves you a little bit more when you are converted than he does? He will have a Holy Spirit who doesn't really answer prayer.

These Israelites needed first to be convinced that God was active. God can do unlikely, impossible things. Now I'm sure many of you believe that.

God has already been working in your experience just for some of you to come here. You've seen financial breakthroughs in answer to prayer. You've seen relatives, maybe parents, completely switch in their attitude to you being here.

God has already been opening up doors for you to come even to this point. Now that's part of your story, your testimony that you are to share with others on the team. To encourage them to believe in the God who does unlikely and impossible things.

God said to these Israelites, first thing you stand still and see God's power. The Egyptians came closer, closer, closer. Suddenly the waters rolled back and they walked through drier than we have been at this conference.

They came up the other side into the wilderness and then the Egyptians were wetter than we have been at this conference. God dealt with those Egyptians and they never saw them again and they're not even mentioned after chapter 14 in the book or 15. Now in chapter 15 they have a great tambourine whacking rejoicing time and Moses begins to sing and Miriam leads the people in singing and it's you know it's really they get going.

And they they sing one of the most majestic songs of praise to God in the Old Testament and then three days later the water's a bit off. Verse 22. Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the desert of Shur and for three days they traveled in the desert without finding water.

When they came to Mara they could not drink its water because it was bitter. So the people grumbled against Moses saying what are we to drink? Then Moses cried out to the Lord and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water and the water became sweet.

There the Lord made a decree and a law for them and there he tested them. He said if you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians for I am the Lord who heals you. Three days after one of the greatest victories that that we ever see in the Old Testament.

The tambourines out let's have a praise meeting. Let's have a let's have let's rejoice and get the people's spirits back up again. It wasn't a time of rejoicing that they needed just at that moment.

They needed to understand something about God and about themselves and after that things changed. What happens when life begins to taste bitter for us? Do you think that God sometimes doesn't really understand how you feel? I have found in my own life and observing others that very often we go through great difficulties at the beginnings of a period of ministry. One of the works that I sometimes am involved in in England is university evangelism taking missions and campaigns amongst students.

In the early days of those missions and campaigns I used to get sick particularly in my throat and after a while of that it suddenly stopped. I sometimes think God I mean Satan particularly opposes us and God wants to bring us through a time of satanic difficulty at the start of a campaign or an undertaking. Just to test us to see whether we're going to obey what the Lord has already told us.

Now here we find these Israelites and the waters are bitter and they're unhappy and grumbling and the Lord says I'm going to heal you not just the waters. I am the Lord who heals you. Your attitudes.

You begin to imagine when life gets hard that God has somehow turned against you. These people have been slaves for 400 years. They were used to thinking of the boss as someone who beat them and had no mercy at all.

Sometimes when people come into the kingdom of God they have the old attitude still carried in with them and the Lord will bring us into times of difficulty to show us just how wise he really is. God understands them and he knows a thing or two about deserts and bitter waters. And the Lord says to Moses you get a certain kind of tree and you put it in the water.

You get this tree and you put it in the middle of this experience and it'll sweeten it up beautifully for you. Some of our problems God deals with just instantly. Others he deals with gradually and we need to learn to distinguish between the things that he wants to deal with at a stroke and the things that he wants to deal with over a period of time.

He can deal with our consciences instantly. We may come to him when we feel guilty about something and be forgiven at a stroke. God doesn't want you lingering on with a guilty conscience unforgiven not a moment longer than it takes you to get to the cross.

But sometimes with our characters he will bring us back to the same lesson again and again so that he molds us and changes us over a period of time. How many of the great lessons that the the men of faith in the Old Testament learned arose out of difficulties? How many of the letters that we read in the New Testament were written out of prison? They grew out of the midst of suffering. I would have to say in all honesty the greatest lessons I have learnt in my marriage have been out of conflict.

God does nowhere promise us a nice smooth easy ride. He says I will go with you. I will feed you and sustain you.

I will never take my eyes off you. I will watch over you. I will strengthen you.

When the trial seems so great I will make a way of escape. But he uses sometimes these bitter experiences to make us understand more of himself. And then chapter 16.

Moving on quickly. They start to grumble again. The Israelites never learn anything except without a period of grumbling to start off with.

How like the people of God they are. The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the desert of Sin which is between Elim and Sinai on the 15th day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.

The Israelites said to them if only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt. There we sat round pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death. I think of that situation in Mark chapter 6 where the Lord took the disciples away for rest and refreshment.

The disciples had been out on campaign and they came back to tell the Lord all that they had been doing. They gathered round Jesus and they began to report verse 30. And there were so many people coming and going that they didn't even have a chance to eat.

Come with me he said by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest. So they went off for a bit of a break a bit of rest and refreshment. And when they arrived there were more people than they left behind.

When Jesus landed out of the boat there was a huge crowd. I fell out with people. I know what's going to happen now.

Jesus is going to start preaching to the people. We came here for a break. Why can't we get away from people? Do you ever feel like that? If they ever feel like wanting to get away from people.

How is the Lord going to accomplish his purpose? He wants to really refresh them. He wants to give them some refreshment so that they will be able to carry on. But there's just crowds of people.

He feeds the five thousand. He does it in a miraculous way that involves the disciples. They find a miracle taking place in their very hands as they go around the people feeding them with what God gave them.

They see that God can take the little that they have and multiply it to feed the crowds. They have an experience of the power of God's word at work. And then when everybody had eaten, everybody was satisfied.

Then what happens? Jesus says now take a basket each and pick up the bits. Now why did he do that? Is he again, is he some kind of litter campaign? Is he wanting to you know clean up Galilee or something? Each of these disciples finish up with a great big basket of fish and bread. I don't know whether you've ever served as a waiter in a in a restaurant.

What do the waiters eat? They very often eat bits off the plates that get sent back out that were never eaten. Really nice things that were never touched. Now the Lord is feeding his servants.

At the end of the day when they've been working and serving him, he knows that they too need feeding. And you know I want you to come to the end of it. You having been fed, you'll give yourself mile after mile on the doorsteps.

But make sure that you've got something to feed on from the Lord. The Lord wants to feed us. But he feeds these Israelites in the wilderness in a particular way.

It's it's a way that tests their own obedience. He says I want you to go out and gather your food every morning. And I will only give you the food for each day on the day.

And if you try to keep any food from one day over to the next day, it'll go rotten and stink. And there's no way that you can keep manna over to the next day. It'll get maggots in it if you try.

But once a week I'm going to change the system. Once a week you have to keep it. And it'll be as beautiful and fresh as the previous day when you gathered it.

And if you try on that day, the Sabbath day to go out and gather your food, you'll go hungry. Because not one Sabbath day of the 40 years will I provide manna for you. I provide double the previous day.

Now you see God is willing to provide what we need to feed us, but in a way that tests our obedience. Because he wants us to feed on him and on what he gives, but in a way that develops our character. A way that develops us.

God is a God who feeds his people. But he wants to feed you in ways that will train you. And then chapter 17 from verse 3. Fourth lesson.

They've been seeing so far something of God's power. God's power to deal with their enemies. And then they've seen God's care for them in the bitter waters.

Now God's provision to sustain them with that regular provision of manna. Now they're going to see something of God's grace. Chapter 17 verse 3. The people were thirsty for water.

And they grumbled against Moses. They said, why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and our livestock die of thirst? This sounds rather familiar, doesn't it? Then Moses cried out to the Lord, what am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me. They're grumbling again.

Now things are getting worse. It isn't just that there's bad tasting water. There's no water at all now.

God has been leading them this way. Sometimes we imagine that when God leads us, then it's automatically easier. It is not always true.

God sometimes leads his people into a more difficult route. He can lead his people into prison. I don't want to discourage those that have signed up for the greater Europe team.

But we must not assume that God's leading always automatically leads to life being effortlessly easy and we can float around on the hovercraft. Moses cried out, what am I going to do with these people, Lord? The Lord answered Moses, walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go.

I will stand there before you or some versions have it on the rock at Horeb, strike the rock and water will come out of it for the people to drink. So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. The people are now beginning to fight, but they're fighting against God himself.

God, I don't even believe you're amongst us. We doubt whether you're even amongst your people. God, we're getting fed up with this kind of pressure.

Is the Lord among us or not? How are you going to deal with this? How is God going to draw the hearts of his people back to himself? Because it does happen that sometimes our hearts, as Christian men and women, get drawn away from the Lord and we become angry with him. The word goes out, get the rod, bring the rod of Moses. You can't imagine the authority that was wrapped up in that rod.

Egypt had been dismantled as a civilization. That rod had turned the Nile to blood. God had honored the authority that was exposed.

Moses had put that rod into the Red Sea and the Red Sea had rolled back. And there are the people all grumbling against God. God said to Moses, get the rod.

It's no more than they deserve. They've been going for months with every offense against God and God's character. They have lied about Moses.

They have blasphemed against God. Moses is now walking towards them with, God says, I will come down and I will make this rock my throne. Moses, you as the representative of people are to walk right up to this rock, raise that rod in the air.

And bring it down. That rod fell against the rock and God, as it were, took the blow on himself. We do react against the Lord.

We think we deserve better. We want something different. We dislike the way God is leading.

Where he took into himself all the guilt of our sin. God will show the rod, if you like, of his rock falling on his own son. God loves them and forgives them and we want to deal with the problems of guilt of this country.

People can come to these occasions, feel guilty. The things that they've said or done just before coming. Things in their behavior that they don't know what to do about.

And we want your hearts to be settled down with God's new covenant. But God says, I will deal with your mind. I will write.

I'll make your whole Christian life a matter of legalism. And you'll begin to want to go my way and love my ways. Even when you sin, I will remember your sins and iniquities and all chewed up inside with guilt.

Because somehow what you feel inside will be denying the message that you're preaching. Know that he is a God with anything that there may be inside. Then finally the people go out to do battle with him.

They learn this final lesson. The battle, the outcome of it depends far more on the prayer meeting than it does on the fighting down below. Do you see what happened? Their focus of understanding has shifted to include God now.

It's not just a question of how hard we fight and what our tactics are. His arms held up by the two on either side of him. And it's God who gives them the victory.

God answers prayer. Their hearts have begun to be opened up to the reality of God as part of their national life. I hope you really believe God is a vehicle that we don't have to have insurance cover for.

The most important thing during these days is that you open up in fresh ways to the reality of God himself. That was what the Lord was doing in the experience of those Israelites in those days. Teaching them more of Him.

God changes in ways that believing that we don't need to hang back but we can throw ourselves into. We're going to end right now. I believe, I hope you'll forgive me if I'm a large measure of confidence, that if you go to the white tent out there, the other white tent, certainly the plan from now on even if they haven't managed to get it tonight but I hope it's there tonight.

Good night. Sleep well.

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