

Desperation that Defies Defeat

By
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“Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written” (Exodus 32.32)

Moses had been in the mount pleading with God for his people for forty days. Alone with God he had made intercessions for the people whom he had led out of Egyptian bondage. He returns with the law, but as he nears the camp, he hears a shout. It is a strange and unnatural noise. He discovers that they have forgotten God so soon. The brick yards were forgotten. The terrible plagues that God used to deliver them – forgotten. The miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea – forgotten. The mighty works of God – all forgotten – and now they bow to a golden calf.

It was a great shock to Moses, the first great rebuff. It disappointed him. His first thought was to invoke the wrath of God upon them. But that thought lasted only but a moment. Instead, he caught a fleeting glimpse of what it means for men to fall into the hands of an angry God. No tragedy could be more woeful; no loss could be more irreparable. Moses realizes this and suddenly his love for his people seemed to transcend his disappointment. Rather than turn them over to an angry God, he prayed a prayer that is unequalled in human history, except for the prayers of Jesus on the cross. In fact Moses prayer is very like the Savior’s prayer asking God to forgive his tormentor’s even as he sacrificed himself for them. Moses’ prayer was so hot with human compassion that it burned its way through time and space and melted the heart of God.

The substance of the prayer is “Oh Lord, forgive this people, and if not, blot me out of thy book which thou hast written.” Moses in this prayer had reached the point of

desperation where he was willing to make his soul an offering for sin. He was literally presenting himself a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God. He was living a thousand years ahead of his day. He was experiencing the same devotion that throbbed in the great bosom of Jesus Christ when he turned his back upon every pleasant thing and steadfastly set his face toward Calvary.

Religion is too often reduced to the common place and the ordinary. Men try to explain away the supernatural. They do not want to accept the mysticism that moves through the realm of divine revelation. Nicodemus tried to reduce the marvelous phenomenon of the spiritual birth to the cold factual terms of the physical birth. One of the first things for us to learn is that everything associated with God is extraordinary. It is only when we come to the end of ourselves and go on out into the mystical and indefinable that we discover God where character is molded into the thought pattern of the eternal.

As long as we live and think in ordinary terms and live ordinary lives, we will never become the people that God wants us to be. Living ordinary lives we often stand face to face with many scriptures that we cannot apply to our own experience. "Present your bodies a living sacrifice." "Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect." "If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother, wife and children, brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life, he cannot be my disciple." "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." "As ye would that men should do unto you, do ye unto them likewise." The difficulty that we have in applying extreme scriptures to our own experience is determined by the degree of our consecration and the depth of our desperation. It is easy to say what you might do, but in the trying hour when you're

brought to the test, you are not willing to follow through. In many cases the devil was right when he said, “All that a man has will he give for his life.” But we read the words of Jesus: “He that seeketh to save his life shall lose it, but he that giveth his life for my sake and for the Gospel shall save it to life eternal.”

I read the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin. The shepherd who lost his sheep disregarded the cold stormy night and went out seeking the sheep that was lost. The woman who lost her coin spared no effort and barred no extreme. The record tells us that she searched diligently until she found it. I think of the woman who pressed her way to Jesus. All odds were against her, but faint and feeble, faltering and fumbling, with a grim set upon her emaciated face, she came to Jesus in desperation. Four men brought a sick man to Jesus. “You can’t get in,” they were told. But they did the unpredictable in their desperation, making a hole in the roof to let the man down to Jesus. The Syrophonecian woman would not take “no” for an answer. The wife of Jacob said, “Give me a child or I’ll die.”

John Knox prayed, “Give me Scotland or I die.” John Vassar cried, “Drops of grief can ne’r repay the debt of love I owe.” I tell you that Heaven will stand still and listen to the prayer of the desperate man. When Joshua joined in battle against the Amorites and began to run out of daylight, he stood in the sight of all Israel crying, “Sun stand thou still upon Gibeon and thou moon in the valley of Agelon.” And it did!

[Editor’s note: At this point in the text, Rev. Robinson inserts a note to relate a personal story of how God answered his desperate prayer when he was in Anniston, Alabama. No details are given.]

Moses' desperate prayer to spare the Israelites was more extreme than the prayer of Abraham over Sodom and Gomorrah.

Moses' desperate prayer was more extreme than the prayer of Jeremiah who prayed "day and night for his people."

Moses' desperate prayer was more extreme than the prayer of Steven who prayed for his tormentors even as he was dying at their hands.

Moses' was transcending generations of time and was in company with the man who sweat great drops of blood in the garden.

Moses' placed himself between the sinful people and a holy God much like Jesus who stretched himself upon the old rugged cross of Calvary to die for the unholy and the unjust.

Without Christ, you are dead in trespasses and sins. You are undone. You stand condemned and guilty of death. But there is one who stands between you and God and his name is Jesus. You cannot save yourself. You may try but your attempts will end in desperation – desperation over the magnitude of your sin and the burden of your disobedience in worshipping false gods. Turn your desperation into prayer tonight. Turn to the only one who can save you. Turn to Jesus.