

God's Work, God's Way
July 26, 2020

The lesson God has for us today may shake your beliefs about doing His work. If so, I encourage you to take a few days or weeks to examine the scriptures and pray to God for understanding of His truth.

We're going to start with the Israelites all the way back in the book of Exodus. The Israelites had been in Egypt for 400 years. In the beginning, God made Joseph the head of Egypt under the King. Joseph saved the country from ruin during a seven year drought.

I have no doubt that for several generations following, Joseph was honored, and the Israelites were also treated well because of Joseph. But then we read the following.

Exodus 1:6-11 (NIV) ... Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them. Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. "Look," he said to his people, "the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country." So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor...

The area we know as Egypt was not always ruled by one people group. During the time that the Israelites were in Egypt control of the country changed hands. The new king likely knew of Joseph, but did not appreciate him because he was aligned with the old government. This may have been part of the fear of the Israelites assisting the ousted group to retake control of the land. Thus, they enslaved the Israelites.

So the Israelites started to call on the name of their God for help. And God came to their rescue. God called Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. God brought three plagues upon both the Israelites and the Egyptians. Then God brought seven more plagues just on the Egyptians, to prove Yahweh's power. In this way, God convinced the King to release the Israelites. God also needed to convince the Israelites that their rescue was entirely in his hands. Read this message from God through Moses.

Exodus 14:14 (NIV) The LORD (Yahweh) will fight for you; you need only to be still.

And God proved this early on. Just as soon as they left Egypt, the Egyptians changed their minds and chased after them. But God kept the two groups separate, made a dry path for Israel to cross the sea, and then drowned the Egyptian army. God defeated the Egyptians.

In the desert, God miraculously provided for the Israelites in the form of manna, quail, and water. When the Amalekites came up against them to fight, God won the battle through the Israelite fighters. God provided everything that the Israelites and their flocks needed to survive in the Sinai wilderness. God defeated the Amalekites. God defeated the Sinai wilderness.

As they approached the Promised Land the Israelites did not trust in God to defeat the Canaanites. The Canaanites looked more powerful, to them, than the Egyptians. Once again, God had to convince the Israelites that he was stronger than ANYONE they came up against. God defeated the Canaanites.

God proved that Israel's military victories were due to Him fighting, not them. When they trusted in him, they won. When they failed to trust in God, they lost. This brings us to our first point.

God defeated Israel's enemies. Their wins did not result from their superior numbers, skill, weapons, intelligence or anything else about them. Victory was always due to God fighting for them.

God did not need the Israelites to fight. God could have won all the battles on his own. On several occasions he proved this by telling them NOT to fight. The following was one of those times.

2 Chronicles 20:1-2 (NIV) ... the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to make war on Jehoshaphat (king of Judah). Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Sea.

2 Chronicles 20:15 (NIV) He (the prophet Jahaziel) said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.

2 Chronicles 20:22-24 (NIV) As they began to sing to and praise, the LORD (Yahweh) set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. The men of Ammon and Moab rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another.

When the men of Judah came to the place that overlooks the desert and looked toward the vast army, they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped.

God won the battle all by himself. God did not need the Israelites to fight.

God does not need anything from anyone. Paul spoke of this in the book of Acts, in Athens.

Acts 17:24-25 (NIV) The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

God does not need anything from anyone.

Now these three points might raise a question in your minds. **If God did not need Israel to fight, why command them to do so?**

God was teaching them to trust Him for success in all they did.

Whenever they trusted in themselves instead of God, they lost. They lost militarily, in battles. They lost economically, in farming. They lost relationally, in social and family life. God promised them great prosperity if they would live their lives trusting in him. In that trust, they would obey his commands. God wanted to bless Israel tremendously. The basis for those blessings would be their faith in God.

Today, we are supposed to learn these lessons from the Old Testament. And we are to learn from our own experience that they are true. God wants us to trust him with our everyday lives. We must trust him with this church. We must trust him to build his kingdom.

God can save people without our help. God does not need what we contribute.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus says something that we often ignore.

Matthew 16:18 (NIV) ... I will build my church...

I believe that Jesus meant those words to be taken literally. HE is building his church. HE is gathering disciples into a kingdom of believers. HE is doing this. Many Christians have failed to learn this lesson. Instead they try to build God's kingdom themselves.

God wants us to learn this lesson. God has been showing us this truth for the last 30 years. We have done a lot of outreach over the last three decades. We have made use of all of the following:

- Vacation Bible School for all but 4 of the last 35 years
- A Music Camp, 1993
- A Parent's Night Out, 1985
- Many Children's Parties, 1986
- A Visitation Night Ministry, 1990, 1999
- Church Brochures passed out in Four Seasons, 1991
- Christian Newspaper mailings, 1992, 1993
- A Parenting Seminar, 1992
- A Public School Teacher Appreciation Dinner , 1993
- Canvassing of the community, 1993
- Billy Graham Film night, 1994
- GORC parade lemonade giveaway, 1997-2001
- Family Fun Fair, 1997, 1999-2005
- God Cares Campaign, 1998
- A Welcome Wagon Giveaway, 1998
- Bike Rodeo, 1998, 1999
- A Financial Seminar, 1998
- Jesus Video project, 1999-2001
- Skate Nights, 2016-2018
- Project One Hundred, 2001
- Door-To-Door witnessing (F.A.I.T.H.), 2002
- TeamKid, 2002
- 40 Days of Purpose, 2004
- A Soda giveaway, 2004
- A Gas buy-down, 2004
- The Franklin Graham Festival, 2006
- Flea Markets, (two per year), 2006-2017
- Provided Back-to-School-Backpacks of Supplies for about a dozen years.
- Gift bags to Waugh Chapel Elementary Staff
- Gift Bags to move-ins across the street from our church, 2018

We have done all of these different things. We did them hoping that people would come to our church, hear the gospel, and get saved. We hoped that our church would get larger in size. Yet we have seen very few people respond to these efforts.

I don't think we did these things trusting in God to work. I think we hoped for our work to work. We trusted in us rather than God. We did not pray as if the results were all up to God. I know I didn't.

In contrast to this, God has brought people to this church aside from what we have done. Most of those who have become a part of us over the last three decades did not come in response to any of our outreach. God did not work through what we did. God worked despite what we did.

Too many churches believe conversions and baptisms are up to them to accomplish. They trust in their work.

Yet, only God can speak to hearts. Only God can convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Jesus told his disciples that apart from him, they could accomplish NOTHING.

God does not need us to do anything. He does not NEED us to share the Gospel. He could easily communicate the Gospel to lost people without our help. He could communicate the Gospel through visions and dreams. God does not need our help.

God has no needs, and no need of us. God is not dependent on our outreach or evangelism efforts in order to accomplish the building of his kingdom.

At the same time, God chooses to build his kingdom through us sharing the Gospel.

God does not need our efforts of evangelism in order to save people. But God chooses to do so. That means sharing the gospel is part of the good God wants for us. It is for OUR benefit that we share Jesus with those around us.

We must never trust in what we can do.

Trusting in what we can do leads to pride.

Trusting in what we can do leads to the wrong kind of prayer.

Trusting in what we can do leads to a focus on results.

Churches that focus on the results end up playing the maybe game.

Maybe if we hold flea markets, people will notice our church and come one Sunday.

Maybe if we get lots of teens coming to various activities, some will get baptized.

Maybe if we advertise with an electronic sign people will be impressed to come.

Maybe if we use more modern instruments and music, people will come back.

Maybe if we build an addition, God will fill it up with people.

God has never promised that if we do _____, he will make our church larger in size.

A desire for a bigger church is about our glory instead of God's glory. God can receive more glory from a faithful church of a dozen than an unfaithful church of thousands.

We are not to focus on the size of our church. We are not to focus on growth in numbers. We are not to focus on looking good, or growing, or cool in the eyes of the community.

Instead we are to focus on Jesus, on what Jesus can do, on what Jesus IS doing to build his kingdom. He calls us to faith in Him, not in us, faith in what He can do, not what we can do.

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Jesus can save you. I can't save you. This church can't save you. Only Jesus can save you from your sins. And he is willing to do so in the next few moments. If you will confess your sin, believe Jesus died to pay for your sins, believe that God raised him from the dead and made him Lord of the earth, and turn your life over to him, you will be saved.