

Exodus: The Way Out of Insignificance

Welcome/Prayer

Foreword

In this sermon series, we are studying the Book of Exodus, the story of the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. *Exodus* literally means an exit, departure, or way out. For this message, we're going to look at the central figure in the Exodus story, Moses, and learn how his encounter with God showed him the way out of insignificance.

Introduction

One of the traps that can ensnare us is looking to people and/or our personal accomplishments to define our significance in life. In his best-selling book, *The Search for Significance*, Robert McGee makes this assertion: "From life's outset, we find ourselves...searching to satisfy some inner, unexplained yearning. Our hunger causes us to search for people who will love us... [and] to perform to gain praise from others." (McGee, p.7)ⁱ If what McGee says is true, then our eternal search for significance ultimately ends in feelings of insignificance. In fact, McGee contends that we will never find our way to true significance until "the light comes on," and until we see ourselves as we really are and acknowledge the pain, hurt, and anger that fills our lives. It's when we realize how isolated and alone we really are and how much we need the Lord, then we'll understand the way out of our insignificance.

1. How and where do people in our culture search for significance?
2. Describe some ways you have tried to find significance or value. How did that work for you?
3. What are some ways in which "the light comes on" and shows us who we really are and the pain that fills our lives or that we've inflicted on others?
4. How did Moses try to win the approval of others?

Preparation

Read the following text related to today's message:

Exodus 3:1-12 (NLT excerpts)

One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up. God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!" "Here I am!" Moses replied. "Do not come any closer," the Lord warned. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground.

Then the Lord told him, "I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt."

But Moses protested to God, "Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?" God answered, "I will be with you. And this is your sign that I am the one who has sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain."

Break it Down

The "light went on" for Moses on Mount Sinai when God appeared to him in the form of a burning bush. As dialog developed between the Lord and Moses, we learn that Moses found the way out of

insignificance. Our significance is not determined by others' approval and our achievements. Significance is found in God's presence and His power.

Significance = God's Presence + God's Power

God's Presence

When God told Moses of His plan for Moses' life, we quickly discover how anxious and insecure Moses became. Moses' feelings of insignificance (e.g., "Who am *I* to appear before Pharaoh? Who am *I* to lead the people of Israel...?") might resonate with many of us today. We may feel self-conscious about our decisions or skills, so we seek approval or validation from others. Yet, when we realize that God is with us in every situation we face...when we focus on His presence and not on others' approval, we find the way out of our insignificance. God will never leave us or forsake us, and therein lies our significance.

1. Have you ever felt like Moses and said, "Who am I to...?" (see Exodus 3:11) What contributed to your feelings of inadequacy or insecurity?
2. Whose approval do you seek? Explain why that is important to you.
3. What are some things people do to try to impress others or to win others' approval?
4. How have you experienced God's presence, and how has His presence made you feel significant?

God's Power

Like the rest of us, Moses' sense of worth was largely dependent on his abilities, his successes, his achievements. Despite his education and leadership experience, Moses felt inadequate and insecure about speaking to Pharaoh and about leading his own people, the Israelites, to the Promised Land. Subsequently, it was by God's power that Moses found significance; it was when the Lord took Moses' staff, a symbol of his identity as a shepherd, and used it to demonstrate His power through Moses. Moses' prized possession became a symbol of God's presence and God's power in his life. It was not Moses' own achievements that gave him significance; it was God's power in and through Moses' life that showed him the way out and allowed him to find true significance.

1. How do we underestimate our own abilities?
2. Describe a time when you overcame feeling like a complete failure.
3. Looking back on a situation or circumstance when you experienced God's power at work in your life, how did you recognize it as His power and not your own ability? Explain.
4. Consider what Moses was thinking during his interchange with God regarding "losing" his staff (refer to Exodus 4:1-5). What symbol in your life would you be hard-pressed to "lose" for God to demonstrate His power?

Conclusion

Emptying ourselves of the need for others' approval, of clinging to our ambitions and achievements, we open ourselves to God's presence and His power. God wants the "light to come on" for us. Choose to believe in and experience His ever-presence and graciously allow His power to work in your life; then, you will realize that He is showing you the way out of insignificance.

1. Describe the value you get from your own achievements? What drives you to seek worth or significance in others' approval?
2. How can you demonstrate that God's presence with you is a higher priority than your own achievements or others' approval?
3. What can you give to God (in terms of talents, traits, treasures) that He might use to reveal His power?

Close in Prayer

¹ McGee, Robert. *The Search for Significance*. Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998.