

When God says NO

HN 30/1/05 m

Reading: Numbers 20:1-13, II Corinthians 12

Study: Deuteronomy 3:23-29

Palms : 115:12-18, 115:1-7, 24:1-4, 24:7-10

Have you ever been gazumped? Some years ago I was gazumped. After searching for months we finally settled on the house that we would buy. It was almost 5pm when we said yes, we will pay the price agreed upon. Our search was finally over— relief was mixed with excitement. This would be our house.

But next morning when we arrived at the estate agents office to sign the contract we were told we had been gazumped. We quickly found out what this meant. Overnight someone had offered a higher price and the seller had accepted their offer – not ours. Without a signed contract we could do nothing except walk away terribly disappointed. This would not be our house after all.

Pleading

Moses had spent over 40 years leading the children of Israel. He led them out of Egypt to the very border of the Promised Land. Moses was ready to lead them into the land, their very own possession. But they rebelled against him and against the command of the Lord to go up and possess the land.

Instead he had to put up with their ongoing rebellion for 40 years. Now he was on the verge of entering Canaan once again. But in the meantime the Lord had told him that he would not enter into the land. We will see why shortly. Nevertheless Moses made a desperate plea to be permitted to cross over and see the Promised Land.

I pray let me cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, those fine hills and Lebanon. The spies who went up from Kadesh reported that it was a land flowing with milk and honey. This was the land God promised to their fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses had never been in the land yet it was his life long desire to see this land and to lead the people of God into it. Hence this personal plea – O Lord God.

Moses had seen many mighty works of God back in Egypt and even in the wilderness – though it was often the hand of judgment there in the desert. More recently he had led the people in great victories over two Amorite kings, Sihon and Og. Moses was excited at seeing the hand of God bringing them victory and so here praised the Lord God for his greatness and majesty – no other was like the God of Israel.

He knew God to be a God of mercy also. So he made this earnest yet humble plea – please Lord let me cross over and see wonderful land!

The apostle Paul made a similar plea concerning his thorn in the flesh. *Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me* (II Corinthians 12:8). And Jesus

himself in the garden of Gethsemane pleaded – *take this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done* (Luke 22:42).

The answer to each of these pleas was NO – Jesus of course knew this would be so. He came down from heaven for the very purpose that he drink the cup of Gods wrath – Gods wrath against our sin. It was not the will of God to grant any of these requests. Paul was to learn that God’s grace is sufficient. Moses would learn that God’s judgment is final.

Provoked

The Lord was angry with me on your account. In 1:37 Moses said *the Lord was angry with me for your sakes, saying even you shall not go in there.* It may be that the Lord held Moses responsible for failing to lead the people up from Kadesh into the land. It was Joshua and Caleb who exhorted the people to go up and fight. But they rebelled saying *let us select a new leader and return to Egypt* (Numbers 14:4). It was not an easy time for Moses.

But Moses was probably referring to another incident – the time not long after this rebellion when they ran out of water in the desert. They contended with Moses and Aaron again (Numbers 20). The Lord told Moses to go and *speak to the rock before their eyes and it will yield water.* Moses was angry with the people, fed up with their rebellion, and struck the rock twice with his rod.

Water came out of the rock but the Lord was angry with Moses for dishonouring Him. *Therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the Land which I have given them* said the Lord.

The people provoked Moses into this rash action, an action that was not glorifying to God. The Lord was angry with Moses declaring that he would not enter Canaan. So when Moses pleaded to cross over the Jordan the Lord said, *Enough of that! Speak to me no more of this matter.*

Moses is remembered as a man of great faith, a great leader of the people of God (Hebrews 3 & 11). Yet here we see him under great pressure, being criticized and blamed by the people for the predicament they were in – a situation brought about by their own rebellion. Moses was provoked into this rash action, but this was no excuse as far as the Lord was concerned. Moses had to live with the consequences of his sin.

Leading the people of God is no easy task. Many a leader has fallen victim to a rebellious people, people who constantly undermine his teaching or spread rumours about his life, until he finally quits. No wonder Scripture teaches *remember those who rule over you, obey them, submit to them* (Hebrews 13:7, 17). *Let them rule with joy and not grief.* This was certainly not the case with Moses. In fact it rarely happens.

Still he had to give account (Hebrews 13:17). The leader must not be provoked by the words or behaviour of any of the people. He is a man chosen and appointed by God and responsible to God. As difficult and frustrating as his task may be he must not be provoked into personal enmity, anger or retribution. He must always be looking to God for strength.

Moses had gone to the Lord about this complaint and the Lord appeared and spoke to him. But still for a moment his frustration burst out into a rash action and the Lord judged him.

Watch your life and doctrine Paul told Timothy. Be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry. *A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance so that they may know the truth* (II Timothy 24f).

Permission denied

The Lord's reply to Moses' plea was amazingly frank, reminding us of the close relationship Moses had with the Lord. *The Lord spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend* (Exodus 33:11). Moses was not rebuked for making his plea but was told very clearly to leave the matter rest.

We need to remember this also in some of our prayers. Sometimes we too easily give up praying—usually this is about things that do not concern us personally. But when it comes to more personal matters, things concerning our own body or reputation we tend to continue pleading long after the Lord has said No. Paul had a physical disability – but the Lord did not heal him. Moses desperately wanted to cross the Jordan but the Lord said No.

Is there something you keep praying for when the Lord has said No? If it is that you win the lottery then the answer will be no. If it is that you get a divorce then the answer will be no. If it is that you will get a new face then the answer will be no.

If it is that you get a better job, a bigger house, a new car, then the answer may well be No. Remember godliness with contentment is great gain. The Lord can certainly provide such things but is it his will for you at this time – that is the question. Don't exhaust yourself pleading when the Lord has said no or not now. Nobody said prayer was meant to be easy!

Pray for Joshua

Moses turned from pleading for himself to praying for Joshua. He was personally disappointed but accepted the Lord's will. He accepted and moved on. The Lord told him to go up on Pisgah from where he could see the Promised Land. He looked to the bigger picture of the people entering into the land. We would all do well to do this!

The work of the Lord would continue on without him. Some leaders find it hard to accept this truth. They start to believe that they are indispensable. The work, the church will not continue without them. Sadly this is true in some cases but then we know that the work was not of Christ but rather a sect or a cult. When the leader is taken away the followers are scattered for they were following a man not Christ.

The Lord your God himself crosses over before you said Moses (31:3). The Lord is the only one who is indispensable. Christ is the head of the church. Leaders will come and go but the work of the Lord will carry on. Moses was humbled. He would not share in the conquest of Canaan. Let not my name, your name or the name of any man or woman be exalted but the name of the Lord alone be exalted in the church of Jesus Christ.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon