Series: Rebuilding our house of prayer

Sermon- Why you have been invited to the tent of meeting

Exodus 33:7-11, Phil 4:4-7 Sunday, August 20, 2017

As you know we are just coming of the BLESS series. BLESS was an acronym that stands for Beginning in Prayer, Listening, Eating together, Serving together and finally Sharing our stories. While we went through 6 sermons, I know that this is only very vaguely part of our consciousness. I think the BLESS series has helped us turn our heads towards the path we need to take. Now begins the real work for our church of of actually walking on the BLESS path. So we as a church are going to begin with prayer. In fact I am going to preach a sermon series on prayer starting today. We are going to look at the Biblical understanding of prayer, why we need to pray, what prayer actually is and how we can pray. I hope to touch upon the different kinds of prayer. To pray effectively we need to have the right tools. If you are an intercessor but did not know that someone was in hospital what use would that be. And if you had a prayer team but they were not regularly updated what good would that be. If you had a heart for your neighbors but did not know anything about them what good would that be. That is where having the right tools comes into play. But having the tools without the habit of going into the tent of meeting at designated times serves no purpose either. If we don’t show up to pray, prayer is not going to happen. So all our actions need to be pointed in the same direction. That is what it means to be on a mission together. That is why I am hoping that we will be complementing the sermon series in the Sunday School discussions and actually spending time in prayer every Wednesday evening at 7PM. I am hoping that at the end of this process that all of us will experience our own personal revivals. With that let’s dive into our passage for the day.

Well, one of the most fascinating things that Moses did when we lead the Israelites was that he created this little tent outside the camp. He called it a tent of meeting. And when he wanted to talk to God, that is where he went. And everytime he went in there all the people would stand in front of their own tents and watch Moses. And when Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would come and stand in front of the entrance of this tent. And when the people saw this they all worshipped God at the entrance to their own tents. In the tent God and Moses talked like one friend to another. Really really remarkable. That is how Moses lead his people for 40 years. The first thing I want to look at is what effect this interaction had on Moses. Well, the first thing you see is that this interaction with God in the tent of meeting and of course on Mt Sinai itself had the effect of stripping away any sense of pride that Moses would have had. So by the time the book of Num was written chapter 12 and verse 3 says this about Moses, “The man Moses was very humble, more humble than any man who was on the face of the earth”. Very rarely in the whole Bible you will see superlatives used about a human being. So this is really amazing. But I believe Moses’ humility was the direct result of spending time in the presence of God. Why would time with God make you humble? It is like this. I personally have never been to the Grand Canyon. I would love to go. But people who have gone have described the feeling of standing in front of the vastness of the canyon and feeling very very small. It is humbling right? So if you take the immenseness of the Grand Canyon and you amplify is till it is beyond anything you can imagine. That is what happens when you are standing in God’s presence. Now God is not just immense beyond imagination, he is also all powerful, perfertly holy, perfectly loving and many more things. So what effect would being in some proximity to the being of God do to any human being? I believe a true proximity to God would result in our being healed of an pride we may have in ourselves. That is exactly what happened to Moses. Now, there is a bit of the challenge here. In this world, if you want to climb up on the pecking order, especially in the United States, you almost have to be a self-promoting, wealth flaunting, over confident kind of person. Because the average person pegs their hopes on jwealth, power and prestige, people only look up to you as a leader, if you have what they aspire to have. Right? That is how you stay on the top of the ladder in the United States. The problem with that model is this. God hates pride. And when you have a lot of pride, your instinct is to want to do things your own way, using your own abilities and your own thinking. And that is not much use to God. Now every time Moses went into God’s presence, I am sure he was confronted by his true nature and his sin. And that is the best antidote to pride. Now you will say, that’s true, Moses was probably stripped of his pride every time he entered the tent of meeting and met God. But how did he lead a million people with a humility that we rarely get to see in our world especially among those in power? This is where trust in God comes in. You see, Proverbs 11:2 says with humility comes wisdom, and Proverbs 11:4 adds, riches, honor and life. In other words, God is saying, trust me, as you humble yourself, I will give you everything you could possibly need. And in Moses case, we can see how God gave Moses every gift he needed to lead the toughest bunch of people you could ever lead, the Israelites and he served God well as their leader for 40 years. If we have to be used by God effectively, he has to strip us of all our pride too. And to do that we need to spend some serious time with God in our own tent of meeting right here.

But when we get into the tent of meeting, it is not that we are just being humbled by God. No that is only the 1% of what really happens in the tent of meeting. The major part of what happens is that we get to experience God. We get to sense his presence and know his mind. And this is the most incredible experience we can ever have. No experience compares with this. Not standing on the summit of the tallest mountain on earth, not being invited to dine with your favorite celebrity, not winning a lottery. Nothing, nothing nothing compares with experiencing the presence of God himself.

Let me share a story of one such encounter with God. David Soren when he was just a little 5 year old had a real heart for God. However, as he grew up, he went through many painful experiences and those experiences made him bitter and angry. And he rebelled against God and got hooked onto many addictions. Then one day he hit rock bottom. That night a pastor came to his house in the middle of the night and prayed with him and he kneeled next to his bed and give his life back to God. A little bit later he had an incredible experience with God. He was listening to some Christian music when suddenly he was truck by the tender purity he heard in those voices. At that moment he realized that he had become too tough and too hard. He realized that he has built this thick wall around himself to protect himself from the evil world. But instead it had become a false identity. In fact he realized that he had become imprisoned in a harness of false strength. So he knelt down and asked God to set him free of his hardness and make him pure and tender like a child again. That moment he felt God come over him with a majesty that is beyond anything he was able to describe. He talked about it like a glory and eternal greatness that seemed literally endless. It was like he saw the universe itself and God who was even greater. Then he says, it was as if he saw God’s hands reaching down and picking him up in His arms. You can imagine that experience changes his life going forward. You can read more about this man and his story if you google David Soren.

But my point in sharing the story is that, I believe everyone can have a life-changing encounter with God that is fresh enough in their memory that it affects everything they do. Now if it has been a while back and it does not have that much of an impact on you today, then we as a church need to pray that everyone of us has this level of personal intimacy with God. I believe it will be this group of people who have been in the tent of meeting who will rebuild this church! Think about this, what if our church became the place where people who want to hear powerful testimonies come. And what it takes to get there from here is prayer. Prayer opens up for us the privilege of experiencing the intimate presence of God.

Now the Bible also asks us to pray so that we can be used by God. Go back the conversations that Moses had with Yahweh. Yes they talked but what do you think the God of the universe said to Moses? Was he talking about the score of desert baseball they used to play in those days. Do you thing they talked about what the newest line of desert slippers should look like or perhaps they were exchanging camp gossip stories? No I don’t think so! In fact I am certain they were not just shooting the breeze and gossiping. What God communicated to Moses was the direction Moses needed to take the camp next. And what Moses shared with God was why he would not be able to do it and I am sure that by the end of the time, Moses had a sense of exactly what he was going to do and why and how. Then he comes out of the tent of meeting and executes on that vision. So here is the take away for us. We can go nowhere unless we spend a whole bunch of time in the tent of meeting ourselves. And we are there not not just to read out our laundry lists. Actually we will begin with laundry lists. But then as we pause, we will get a sense of something new that God has put in our minds and you can be sure that that is God calling our next move. It is also when we are with God that he also helps remind us of what He has already accomplished in our midst. Think about this, in spite of all the challenges and discouragement and low Sunday morning attendance we have had last year, God has gone ahead and increased the impact that we are having on the community around us. God has enabled us to connect with New Stanley in exciting new ways. God has helped us persist with our discipleship groups where God’s word is wrestled with on a weekly basis, God had enabled us to have impactful fully outreach oriented VBS’ and God has even caused our Venture Club to grow in numbers. How did all this happen? Because some of us, have been listening to God, been willing to obey and take a leap of faith. Now, as we spend even more time in the tent of meeting, I can tell you for sure that God is going to continue to do amazing things. This is my commitment to you. That I myself will be spending more time in the tent of meeting. I cannot tell you to do to anything that I am not willing to do first. But as we all do that, individually and corporately, each one of us will be in unity about God’s next move for us. We will be in mission together. So the third reason we need to go into the tent of meeting is to get our marching orders from God.

There is a final reason to go into the tent of meeting that I want to talk about today. We go into the tent of meeting, it give us power over evil. History is filled with stories of God’s servants who began well and had a lot of success. The enemy took notice, begins assaults and everything came crashing down. At the individual level too, the enemy will try a lot of things against us. Even though the enemy cannot touch our eternal salvation, but the enemy can cause us to grieve God, offend the angels and make us look no different from non-believers in our actions and finally make us completely ineffective as a witness so that we are not useful in bringing others to Christ. These are the plays the evil one has to make even believers align with the evil agenda. And our chief weapon against evil is prayer. In the Lord’s prayer we have this beautiful declaration “you do not lead us into temptation”, in fact “you deliver us from evil”. And that work of delivering us from evil and temptations occurs as we align ourselves to God in prayer.

Four reasons to be in prayer, to humble ourselves before God, to experience the presence of God, to be directed by God and to be delivered from evil. These are by no means the only reasons to pray. But as we start on an exciting prayer journey together I am hoping that having a clearer idea of why we are spending time in prayer will keep up going when the enemy tries to throw a wrench in the works. So each one of us be blessed with an amazing prayer journey this next year as we together rebuild this house of prayer. Let us pray.