

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

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Scripture: **Exodus 16, 19 and 25**
Sermon: **Lessons in the Journey**
What You Need to Know for the Rest of the Trip

Our scripture today is from the book of Exodus. Exodus means to exit, to leave, to be where you are and get out some where else. The book of Exodus is the story of the children of Israel as they leave their Egyptian slavery. That story is the most remarkable story in the entire Old Testament. I want to remind you that a million and a half people were set free from slavery, not because of an insurrection, not because of an invasion from an outside army, but because of God's wonderful work. Finally, after He had worked in the lives of leaders of Egypt, they turned to the million and a half people and said you can go free, we don't want you here anymore.

Those of you who remember a little of your geography know that Egypt is here and the Promise Land is here and in between is a huge track of land, know today as the Sinai Peninsula. It is a wilderness, desert area. The top of the Sinai Peninsula borders the Mediterranean Sea. For years people had built a highway along the ocean that connected the Middle East and connected Egypt and that was one of the greatest trade routes in all the world. If you were to leave Egypt and walk along that highway, along the Mediterranean Sea, you could be in the Holy Lands in about eight days. Amazingly, what God did, instead of putting people on the highway, enabling them to go onto the Promise Land, He turned them south, where they were to go into the wilderness and they were to wander in the wilderness for two years. The question that everybody has always asked is why did God do that? Why, with women, children and older people, why not get on this road and walk on into the Promise Land? Why send them down into the barren, wilderness area, where they were to wander for two years. The answer to the question why, is that God needed to teach them some lessons, some foundational principles that if they didn't learn those, they could never build a great nation. The Bible says in 1 Cor. Chapter 10 that these things were done to be examples for us so that what God was teaching them, God wants to teach us. I remind you that they are so foundational, that unless you learn them, you don't have anything upon which to build the greater truths of God.

Take your Bible and let me point you to some of these passages of scripture that will remind you of these great lessons, lessons they learned and lessons we need to learn as well. The first one is Exodus, Chapter 16. "In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them if only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt. There we sat around pots of meat, we ate all the food we wanted but now you have brought us out in this wilderness to starve this entire group to

death.” Here are people who immediately start murmuring to God. We were slaves but at least we had enough to eat and to drink. If the old human fallacy, we would rather be secure and be a slave, then to be free and have to take risks.

Immediately when they walked into the desert, they said, “We are all going to die. We have nothing to eat, nothing to drink. God, is this what you have done. You led us out here so we could all die?” Notice what God said to them in Verse 4. Then the Lord said to Moses, “ I will rain down bread from heaven. The people will go out each day and gather enough for that day, and that day I will test them to see whether they will follow my instructions.” This is what God said. First there was a miracle I didn’t read and that was the water which was brackish and you couldn’t drink it. God did a miracle and suddenly there was enough water. Then God said this is what I am going to do. I am going to send the hostess wander delivery truck to your front tent every morning. Every morning when you wake up, you are going to walk out and there is going to be bread for everybody. When they walked out, they saw the little pieces and they called them “manna.” The word manna means what in the world is this? What it meant was it had enough nutrients in it, the same as bread, that you could live off of it. The Bible says that for two years, every morning when they woke up they walked out and there was breakfast, lunch and dinner already prepared. The old joke is that every Hebrew family had a thousand ways to cook manna. Manna every where and your needs are met. What was God trying to teach them?

Lesson 1: You must learn to be dependent upon God for everything that you have. The first lesson He wanted to teach them out in the middle of the desert was you need to keep on looking up. If you do not, then you will get to the point where you think you can make it by yourself. If you think that you are independent of God, let me introduce you to a virus that you can’t see or a bacteria that it takes a microscope to see and I will show you how independent you are. Maybe God will, just like that, decide not to pump air into your lungs anymore. An accident will happen and you will recognize that everything you have is His. Then you begin to understand that all that you have and all that you are, is because of God’s gift to you. None of us can live independent of what God has given to us. Jesus taught us to pray. He talked about this experience. He said you are to pray, “*Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy Name Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us our bread day by day.*” The emphasis is not on bread, the emphasis is on day by day. Every day I wake up, every day I recognize that all that I have and all that I am, I owe because of who God is and His kindness and goodness to me. It is interesting to me that when Jesus sent his disciples out, that He taught them that lesson as well. The first time he sent the twelve out, He said, “This is what I want you to do. I want you to go on this trip, you are not to take any spare money, any spare clothes and you are not to pack a lunch. You are to go and learn what it means to be absolutely dependent on God.” Unfortunately, some of us get to the point in our life where we feel that our talents, our culture, our job, that we can make it without Him. What God was trying to tell them was that it is absolutely impossible. There is a passage of scripture in Deuteronomy. The Lord led you in the desert for these years, listen, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart. Whether you would keep His commandments. He humbled you, causing you

to be hungry, feeding you with manna to teach you that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God.” What is the first lesson you have to learn on your journey? First lesson: All that I am, all that I have, I am dependent upon Him. When I begin to live my life in independence, and to begin to feel that I can do it without Him, then I am not prepared to walk with Him. Second lesson: Turn to Exodus Chapter 17:8. When the Israelites came out into the desert, there was a group of nomads who lived there called Amalekites. Those individuals looked up and saw this million and a half people and they said, “My goodness, what are we going to do?” They decided that since there was an invading army they would attack first. The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites and Moses said to Joshua, “Choose some of the men and go out and fight the Amalekites and tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.” Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill and as long as Moses held up his hand the Israelites were winning. When ever he lowered his hand the Amalekites were winning. Moses hands grew tired and they put a stone under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up, one on one side and one on the other so that his hands remained steady to sunset.

Lesson 2: You must learn not only dependence, you must learn how you can defend yourself against the enemy. These people were not trying to start a war. They just happened to be on their way somewhere else. These people thought that a war was imminent. They attacked them. Some people, when they become a Christian, think that is going to solve all of their problems. The reality is it may create new ones. What you can be assured of is that the enemy of evil is going to attack you. You are going to find temptations real in your life that perhaps you didn't notice before. The reason he is going to do that is because he has just lost somebody that he has been using. While he can not keep you out of heaven, he can try to destroy your influence where you can influence others to go to heaven with you. You need never to be surprised. Know that the enemy is going to attack you. The question is how do I defend myself? The lesson that you learn is you defend yourself as you pray to God and find the source of strength in Him. Not in you, in Him. Notice this scripture. As long as Moses prayed, the Israelites won the battle. What he found was, he started getting tired. Whenever he put his hands down, all of a sudden they started to lose. One man came on one side, one man came on the other and held his hands up and they began to win. Notice what that scripture teaches. One: It teaches you that you have to keep on praying. It is not enough in your Christian life to just pray for strength or for an issue one time and then go off and leave it. You've got to keep on. You pray for the child when he is six, when he is twelve, you have to pray when he is sixteen, you have to pray when he is twenty-six and you pray when he is sixty-six. You just keep on praying. You pray for that Sunday School class in September, you pray for it each Sunday, you pray all of the time. You have to recognize that your entire strength is in the Lord. Moses just kept on praying. Sometimes you just get tired, you become discouraged, frustrated, I just can't do it anymore. This is the next lesson you need to learn. You need to be a part of a prayer group. It maybe family members, people at work, people at Sunday School class. I personally think every Sunday school class

needs to be divided into prayer groups and that everyone of else will hold up the hands of each other who are discouraged and defeated.

All of you I think, are aware that among Baptists we have about five thousand missionaries over seas. We have about five thousand missionaries in the United States and we put them in a list and they are in a list according to their birthdays. Every day there are people around the world praying for all of these missionaries on their birthdays and I have said that they are probably the most prayed for people in the world on that particular day. It is remarkable the stories that come out of that as these missionaries recount of the miracles God worked in their lives because somebody is holding their hands up and are praying for them.

Maurice and I were sharing this week. One of our missionaries around the world went into the store and his car was hijacked and immediately news went out around the world that a missionary was in trouble. People around the world began to pray and all of a sudden we get the word back that the family is safe, the car is okay and all of that is attributed to the fact that people have been praying for them. In our congregation as you know, Maurice is usually here every week. Maurice and his family were missionaries in Kuwait. The Iraqi army came in. They had to go find shelter in the American embassy. People began to pray for Laurie on her birthday. Can you imagine a man like Sudam walk out of his palace and say I heard God speak to me in the night. I think we ought to let the women and children go. They came back. It was time for Maurice's birthday. People around the world prayed and he was released.

People come up to me and they say, Is there something I can do for you?" You don't have to ask me the question. My answer is always the same. Pray for me for I understand that when you pray my hands are lifted up and that is the defense that I need to be able to go on with God's will and God's work. God wants to teach you that the defense that you have is the defense of prayer.

There is a third lesson He wanted to teach them and that is over in chapter 19. It is the story of the giving of the 10 Commandments. Moses goes up on the mountain, God chisels the Ten Commandments with His finger on stones and Moses brings it back down. What is He trying to teach us? He is trying to teach you the directions for your life. How does God want us to live and how can I best live life that is pleasing to me and pleasing to God? I need to remind you that God didn't create the Ten Commandments in Exodus 19. The Ten Commandments were literally woven into the universe when God made it. All He did in chapter 19 was to put them in order where we could memorize them. They have always been. For example God did not create the law of gravity when the world was 500 years old. We just learned about it four thousand years later. It has always been. The laws of God have always been worked into the universe. In chapter 19, He just told them to us and said this is how I want you to live.

I remember talking one day to a young adult, a girl who was very critical of church. This is what she said. " If I wanted a whole bunch of rules, I would join the Marines. I don't want to live by a bunch of rules. I think everybody ought to live like they think they ought to and the very best they can. I don't want to go to a church where they tell you a bunch of rules." The first thing she misunderstood is that Christianity is not me giving you a set of rules. Christianity is telling you about a person you can build a

relationship with. It is not rules, it is relationship. Even if it was rules, you need to ask yourself the question, “Why did God give us the rules?” Why did He give us the principles? The answer is given in the Bible. They were given for your good. God did not sit up in heaven one day and say, “Let me see how I can make everybody I have made miserable.” God said, “Let me see how I can make everybody happy. For example, which one’s do you want to do without? Let us do without *Thou Shalt Not Steal*. You go out and work real hard and you put all of it together and then somebody steals it from you. You want to do without that one? How about number seven, the one about adultery. How about being in a marriage and you have to go out of town and you don’t know whether your mate is going to be faithful or not? I deal with people all the time who have that sort of thing and I want to tell you it is absolute misery. God said I want you to be happy. This is the way you are happy. Make a commitment in your family and make a commitment in your life and you will be able to have an emotional security you can’t have any other way. God gave them to us for our good. What He did, He said, this is the way I made people. Therefore if they do this, they will operate well.

There is an old story about a man who bought a car, one of the first cars ever built. He paid a lot of money for it in that day. He was out on an old, bumpy trail and the car broke down. There were no mechanics around, and he said “How in the world am I going to get this car fixed?” He walked outside and kicked the tires, a bad investment. About that time he looked up and there was another car. The fellow stopped and asked if he had trouble. He said, “Yes, I can’t get this old car to operate”. The fellow lifted the hood and did a few things and said, “Now start the car.” The car hummed wonderfully. He asked, “Are you a mechanic?” He said “No”. “Then how did you know how to fix it?” He said, “Because my name is Henry Ford. I made it.”

God gave us the principles because He knows how He made us. When you live in them, you will find happiness and joy in your life. I remind you that it doesn’t make any difference whether you want to live by them or not, they are still going to be there. You don’t break the Ten Commandments, you can only break yourself against the Ten Commandments. They are the laws of the universe and if you want directions for your life, you will make a decision this is how I am going to live. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if you walked into a biology room and the student raised their hand and said, “I don’t like what people have been saying all the time about biology. I want to make up my own rules. I don’t like the way you have been mixing this in chemistry class. I will mix what I want.” Let me know, I don’t want to be around. I don’t like the rules of God. If you live by them, you will find joy in your life. You have to learn directions.

Turn over to the last one. The last lesson we need to learn is in Chapter 25, Verse 8. “Then have them make a sanctuary and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all of its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.” The fourth lesson you need to learn is how to give devotion to God. How to worship. I am sorry we have a lot of members of our church who don’t agree with God. God said worship is so important to you that every seventh day you are to take time and come to worship. We have a lot of members who think they can be just as good as God wants them to be if they come once a month, every sixth month, or once a year. If you were to ask them how about your own relationship with God, they would say I am doing just fine. You are

doing just fine if you want to worship a small God and you end up an infant Christian. The God who made us said, “This is what it takes to really know Me.” This is how often it takes for you to grow in your spiritual life. You see worship is the time when I come to think about who God is. All my life I am sitting out there chiseling Him down to my size and I come one day out of seven and I begin to realize how great He is. If you don’t do that, you will end up with a God about this big.

I am reminded of a man who told a friend of his he was going to see Niagara Falls. He said bring me back a souvenir. The man found an old coke bottle and put some water in it and brought it back. He said this is Niagara Falls. He said I always did want to see them falls. Niagara Falls in a coke bottle. God in my little small concept of who He is. The word worship is two words. Worth ship and what it means is what you worship is what you think is priority. What you think is important. God said I tell you what I want you to do. I want you to put this special tent, this sanctuary, this worship place, I want you to put it in the very center. I want it to be in the very heart of your community and it is the place where you are to worship. It is the place of reverence, it is the place of awe, the place of gratitude, the place of learning, the place where I come to be with my other believers, it is all of these things. This is to be priority. Let me remind you, then if you don’t learn the lesson of worship, you will never make it on the rest of the journey.

I learned the first lesson of dependence when I was a college student. I had gone to college on an athletic scholarship. Part of that scholarship , I was the sports editor for the college newspaper. I hadn’t been to college long when all of my plans began to change because I had the unsettling feeling God wanted to do something else with my life. I gave up my scholarship, being editor of the sports section, I took over a little church that paid me twenty-five dollars a week. I sat down in the college dormitory and I said, “God, I am willing to do what you want me to do but I can’t stay in school on twenty-five dollars a week.” A week later, one of my older brothers, just above me, who was part of a two man fighter pilot team, wrote me and said I have just been promoted, I have been thinking about you in college and I would like to send all the money I got in my promotion to help you get through school. In thirty days, all of the money I had given up, had been replaced. Why did God want to do that for me? I think for the same reason he wanted to do it for these people The same reason He wants to do it for you . Teach you to depend on Him. God taught us dependence. God taught us directions. God taught us defense. God teaches us devotion and you are not ready for the rest of the journey until you learn the lessons in the wilderness.

I wanted to ask you, have you learned the lessons? God is not only interested in getting you out of Egypt, He is ready to get you to the promise land. Some of us not two years, twenty years. We have been wandering around in the wilderness because we haven’t learned any lessons. I wander today as you get ready to make fresh commitments to God if you don’t need to say, “Dear God, you have tried to teach them and you have tried to teach me. Today I want to say I want to be a better student, a better disciple, I want to learn the lessons, I want to be what you want me to be.” Some of you will start making progress you never dreamed possible.