

Beanstalk Christianity

Exodus 19:1-6

Preface

Illus: We've all read the story of "Jack and the Beanstalk." Jack and his mother were very poor and she sent him into town to sell the only possession they had left - their milk cow. As Jack traveled into town he meets a man who offers him some magic beans in trade for the cow. Jack was on a mission to provide for his family, but on the way he got distracted by some colorful beans and forgot his mission.

The children of Israel were much like Jack in the fairytale story. They were easily distracted from their mission.

Scripture

¹In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt--on the very day--they came to the Desert of Sinai. ²After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain. ³Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ⁴'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."
Exodus 19:1-6 NIV

Introduction

God's instructions to Israel could not have been more clear. God said to Israel that he wanted them to obey Him and keep His covenant. He wanted them to be a kingdom of priestly people and a holy nation.

This is not to say that God wanted to bless them and forget everybody else. God wanted to use Israel to be a shining example for the rest of the world.

You know the rest of the story. The children of Israel liked to think of themselves as the blessed and chosen people, but they never quite got around to the being priestly and holy part.

God had a mission for them, but all they did was complain and disobey God. It was in this desert of Sinai that before Moses got

down off the mountain they were worshipping a golden calf exactly what God told them NOT to do.

Things really haven't changed. We like to think we would not be unfaithful like the children of Israel were. However, we are constantly distracted and our faithfulness waivers.

I think we sometimes have "Beanstalk Christianity." God gives us clear instructions, but along the way we become distracted.

We become tempted and distracted because we often have a poor understanding what Salvation is all about.

1. Salvation is Fundamental

The most integral part of our faith in God is the necessity of every individual to become "saved."

Our eternal destiny is determined by the reality of our salvation. There is nothing in a person's religious experience that is more important than salvation. We must become a child of God. We must be born again to be a Christian.

Illus: I remember one week I was in Honduras on a mission trip. We stayed in a home in a residential community of a small town. There was nothing to do after sundown. A friend and I would go out for a walk each night. It was hot and the first night we went for a walk in short pants and tennis shoes. All of the people sit outside their little homes and talk at night because it is cooler outside than inside. As we walked down the road, people would make fun of us in our short pants and white legs. It was a bit intimidating.

The next night we decided to wear long pants and caps to draw less attention to ourselves. It worked in that people did not make fun of us. However, you could still hear the word "Gringo" as we passed most homes. That fact was that we were not Honduran. We stood out because we were "Gringos" and nothing was going to change that. To be Honduran, one must be born Honduran.

The only way to be a Christian is to be born again through the grace of God and His son Jesus Christ. Salvation is fundamental to living a Christian life.

As Christians, we must understand this important fact. God has us on a mission to tell others about the gift of salvation through Christ.

We constantly talk about the need to witness and win people to Christ, but statistics say that one person is won to Christ for every 50 church-going Christians.

Wouldn't you agree that something must be distracting us from our most important mission?

2. Salvation is Mysterious

There are passages in the New Testament that seem to suggest that salvation quick, easy and simple.

On the other hand there are passages that indicate salvation is a difficult and demanding process. They indicate a person should enter this relationship only after careful assessment of the cost and commitment involved.

The fact is that salvation is the work of God. Only God can make a Christian. Salvation is all His doing. Our works cannot make us a Christian. Only the blood of Christ can save us.

On the other hand, salvation is conditional. It is conditioned upon our acceptance and our surrender. In order to be saved, it is necessary for one to make a free, self conscious, personal choice to receive the gift of salvation.

Likewise the salvation relationship requires faith. It requires that we believe. John 3:16 it reads, *"For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."*

Now that word "believe" in the Greek is the verb form of the word "faith." Unfortunately, in our English language we do not have a verb form for the word faith (i.e. I faith, you faith, he faiths). Therefore in 1611 when those who translated the KJV of the Bible came to the verb form of the Greek word for "faith" they translated it, "Believe." **Literally it could be translated, "all the ones faithing him..."**

This wouldn't have been a problem except in the centuries since then, the word "believe" has changed in meaning.

In 1611 "to believe" meant "to hold dear," "to give one's allegiance to," "to give oneself to."

Today, however, the word "believe" has come to mean primarily the cognitive acceptance of some proposition. It is intellectual agreement that something is true.

The weakness in our churches today is when we tend to make salvation an intellectual belief in a set of propositions or agreement to a set of facts.

Because of that, often salvation becomes more of a status in the church, or an event or a ritual that once it is done - it's done.

Come get your ticket punched for heaven.

By the careful selection of the scripture passages we use, we tend to manipulate people into "making professions of faith" and then we have placed upon God the responsibility of honoring our plan.

We have often preached a salvation that doesn't necessarily include repentance.

But there has to be a point where we realize that our plan for life is not working and we give up on our plan and ask God to change our life and help us to follow His plan. A point when we turn our allegiance totally to God.

I have heard television preachers say at the end of their program - "just pray this prayer and you will be saved."

But unless the Holy Spirit convicts you and you repent which means to do an about face in life, you can pray until you are blue in the face and it will do no good.

3. Salvation Involves Commitment

The relationship between an individual person and Christ is so intimate, so personal, so dynamic that it is beyond anything we can know within our natural families. In fact, Jesus said, *"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."*

And yet, our churches are full of "Christians" who respond to God by doing everything except the mission God has called all of us to!

We are like Jack and the beanstalk - we are hoping for an easy way out. Maybe we'll find some magic beans that will answer all of our problems.

Jack's basic problem was that he cared more about himself than he did his mission.

Our churches are full of people who care more about themselves than they do the Lord.

How real is it that your neighbors and friends could very well spend eternity in hell? Are you on mission for God?

God told the prophet Ezekiel:

Ezek 3:17 (NIV) *"¹⁷ Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. ¹⁸ When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood."*

Now if God told Ezekiel he would be accountable for those he did not warn about coming judgment, how much more will he hold us accountable?

Salvation requires commitment. Salvation requires commitment first to our relationship with God through Christ. Also, it requires commitment to telling others about salvation available through Christ.

The gospel is the good news and we are obliged to spread it.

4. Salvation Involves Passion

Just a couple of months ago I preached a sermon title "Real Christians." The first point was that real Christians are changed people.

If we have truly been saved, and we realize the ugly sin in our lives that God has taken away, and we know that Jesus lives in us - how can we go on in life without being completely changed?

The way we think ought to change, our priorities should change, our goals should to change, what we enjoy should change.

People should say "There is something different about you."

Illus: I was talking to the tire salesman at Easy-Haul this week. He was telling me that he serviced a customer for 1.5 years when one day the man he dealt with said, "I didn't know you were a Christian." He said that statement crushed him. He never again wanted someone to know him that long before recognizing he was a Christian.

If we are truly saved, we should be passionate about God and people will know it.

But our churches all full of people who have made some sort of emotional decision and you can't see any real difference in them from before their decision to after.

What do you say about a church member who claims to know Christ but shows no evidence in any way that they have met God?

Jesus told a parable about the wheat and the weeds. Supposedly the wheat and weeds grow together. But Jesus said...

Matt 13:30 (NIV) *"Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."*

Jesus said in the last day MANY will say to Him that they did all kinds of marvelous works in His name, but He says that He will tell them *"depart from me, I never knew you."*

I have heard it said that some people will miss heaven by 18 inches - the distance from your head to your heart.

Salvation involves commitment and passion.

Conclusion

Last Sunday I preached a sermon on worship. I spoke about people's lack of commitment and faithfulness to worship. I got pretty wound up. This past week I have received all sorts of comments about me getting so worked up last Sunday.

Let me be honest with you. That subject is so dear to my heart because I question whether unfaithful people are actually saved. I cannot judge if someone is truly a Christian or not. But I can tell you this, everything in the Bible tells me that when we experience Christ, we are changed.

I cannot fathom knowing Christ as your Savior and being unfaithful to Him.

Do you really know that you are saved - not because of some past experience, but **because of your present growing relationship with God?**

Are you really living for Jesus? Are you involved in the mission He has called you to?