

TO THE PROMISED LAND

March 28, 2010

Many people tend to ask me two questions when they find out that I am a pastor:

- How many people do you have in your church?
- Do you have a church building?

At the beginning of our church, I was complaining to the Lord about the low attendance of the congregation. He clearly spoke to me right away in my heart, "If there is more than one person, it is more than you deserve." OK Lord, that settles it, then.

People have a tendency to decide the quality and depth of a church by the sheer size of congregation, building or how many programs they have. I don't think that it is a proper measuring bar. I am not saying that having a big congregation and large church buildings are wrong. But there are better ways to see the quality and depth of the church. How about the love for one another? How about dedication to the Word of God and the Lord Himself?

About three years ago, a believer from CA donated 5 acres land which is located a couple of miles southwest from here. As many of you knew, over 60% of the land was in the wash which is in a flood zone. It was quite useless for a church property. I asked the Lord for a reason why we got that land. He didn't answer. Last November, Barry and Tina Smith who used to live in this property liked ours, they suggested an idea of swapping the properties for our mutual benefits.

Before we got this property, we made several attempts to secure a church property either for rental or purchase. For some unknown reasons, they were unsuccessful. We now know why. The Lord chose to bless us with this property where we can build a church building and hang our sign.

With that in mind, today I believe that there is a lesson from the Lord about the journey that Moses and the Israelites took through the wilderness before they reached the Promised Land. However, the Lord willing, we don't have to wait 40 years to get our building done.

A. RED SEA CROSSING

Exodus 14:10 And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord.

The first challenge of their journey in the wilderness was facing the Red Sea in front of them, and having the world's most powerful Egyptian army with 600 chariots behind them. But why would God allow them to face this horrendous dilemma at the beginning of their journey?

Before the Lord could plant them in their new life in the Promised Land, He had to uproot them from the old. That meant, in part, teaching them how to completely trust Him in the midst of seemingly hopeless predicaments.

We, too, will face difficulties as we travel through the journey of constructing a church building in this land. I've heard some horror stories about interactions with the Pima County building inspectors. I'm sure that the building inspectors are merely doing their job.

God will test our faith time after time to show us what we are lacking, not because the Lord needs to discover, but for us to know how faithless we are sometimes.

It is not unusual in the midst of a difficult situation that we totally accuse God of everything, because we do not see the end of His lesson for us. We often take our eyes off the Lord and stare at the situation only. Of course, we feel like we are trapped for good like the Israelites felt in front of the Red Sea. What would God speak to us in that kind of situation? The same thing He spoke through Moses to the Israelites:

Exodus 14:13-14 And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. 14 The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."

Exodus 14:28 Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horse-men, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained.

It is amazing what God can do without our help. Sometimes we feel like our efforts are so vital to His plan that He just cannot make one second without us. But it is His power, not ours that sees us through. When He does remind us, all we can do, like these Hebrews, is believe in Him all the more.

B. THE PROVISION FROM HEAVEN

Exodus 16:3-4 And the children of Israel said to them, "Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." 4 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not.

Not very long after crossing the Red Sea with God's miracle, the Israelites's food and water ran out in the middle of the wilderness. So what did they do? Did they wait patiently upon the Lord for His provision? No, they immediately started to do what they did best for next forty years – complaining and grumbling.

The Lord provided them bread 'manna' which was so good that it was out of this world, literally. However, the blessing of bread from heaven came with the responsibility of obedience. This responsibility would test the Israelites and measure their obedience. It is not because God didn't know how they would respond, but because they didn't know themselves.

Y'all know that a church building project costs us money. I promise you that you will not see a building fund thermometer or begging for more money to you guys at each service. It is the Lord who provides the fund through you guys. As you are being obedient to the Lord, He will make it happen.

Then, people would ask another question about the construction: "Do you have a construction schedule when you are going to start and when you are going to finish?" Yes, I do, as a matter of fact, I know exactly when we are going to start the ground breaking and when we are going to have our first service in the building – the dates our Lord wants us to have those events. We need to do what the Israelites did in the wilderness.

Exodus 40:36-37 Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. 37 But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up.

C. MORE THAN ENOUGH

Exodus 36:4-6 Then all the craftsmen who were doing all the work of the sanctuary came, each from the work he was doing, 5 and they spoke to Moses, saying, "The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work which the Lord commanded us to do." 6 So Moses gave a commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, "Let neither man nor woman do any more work for the offering of the sanctuary." And the people were restrained from bringing

It probably is a fantasy of every pastor that there will be more than enough, but it can happen when the people of God put their hearts into it. If everyone in our congregation actually tithes in obedience to the Lord, we will be able to have a church building within a year.

D. EXPECT THE BATTLES

Exodus 17:10-12 So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. 11 And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. 12 But Moses' hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

The Israelites had to fight two types of battles while they traveled through the wilderness. The first one was the external battles against the heathen tribes who wanted to block their advancement to the Promised Land.

Exodus 32:1-4 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." 2 And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." 3 So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. 4 And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!"

The second one was the spiritual corruption – idol worship – within their camp.

Don't you ever think that the devil and his demons will applaud us as we are going to have a church building so that we can spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. He will do anything and everything to stop us or slow us down. He will attack us externally as well as internally.

Dividing unity of Christians is a well-known tactic of satan throughout the centuries. If he cannot win a fight against Christians from outside, he will bring in divisive words among us to make cliques within the ranks and files.

How many churches have lost their sight of the Lord while they are in their church building project! We hope and pray that we would never lose our sight of the Lord Jesus in any situation. After all, the church is not a building even though it would be wonderful to have one. The church is the believers of Jesus Christ – you guys. It is not the church building we are going to worship, but Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

E. RECEIVING THE WORD OF THE LORD

Exodus 24:12 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them."

Whether we have a church building or not, the most important thing in our life is receiving the Word of God from Him and dwelling in His presence through prayers individually.

The Word of God has the power to set us free from the bondage, the power to keep us free from temptation and the power to take us to the place where we can have a close and intimate relationship with our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ.

F. APPLICATIONS

Exodus 24:16-17 Now the glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. 17 The sight of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel.

According to the description of God by Moses, our God is a consuming fire. A consuming fire can do two different things.

If the material that is inside of the consuming fire is wood:

1) The consuming fire can destroy it.

Don't make a mistake about it. The loving God, the merciful God, the compassionate God is a holy and righteous God. He will not ignore our sins, nor will He wink at our ungodly lifestyle.

If the material that is inside of the consuming fire is steel:

2) The consuming fire can purge anything that is worldly out of us and refine us, temper us and bring us into the eternal.

As the fire in the blaze refines, tempers and purifies the steel, the consuming fire of our God will transmit us into permanency in Him.