

HEADING FOR THE PROMISED LAND - MESSAGE 4 - EXIT RAMP NO 2

Numbers 11:4-14

Last week, I spoke about the 'way of God' in our lives. **Psalm 32:8**

And I spoke of a verse that has become for me a life motto. *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go, I will guide you with my eye upon you"*! I want you to do something this week.....think back through your life, especially the defining moments where your life changed significantly, and see if you can discern the 'way of God' that opened up for you. What does it look like? Well, it looks like God rolls out your future for you to walk on.

In the 1990s, I was NZ director of an organisation and the position required a lot of international travel. One of the side benefits of this was air miles. It wasn't long before I had gone from bronze, to silver, then gold with my air miles card. Overselling in economy class was common in those days and more often than not I would be upgraded to business class. I got quite used to "Mr Ashworth would you mind if we upgraded you today"? You know, the lounge, jacket, pre-take-off drink, newspaper, smugness, turning left not right, sometimes upstairs, no queuing, extra luggage allowance and the really nice meals with proper cutlery! Economy 'cattle class' does not the same ring about it; back of the bus, scramble to fit luggage, narrow seats, little packets of nuts or jelly baby biscuit things, wait forever for a drink, chicken or beef and cheese in a plastic packet that you cannot get open. It's good character-forming stuff. When I stopped travelling, the reverse happened. Gold to silver, to bronze and these days whatever is the lowest level. Just sit down and take a sleeping pill! There is the temptation to say when checking in something like – don't you know who I am? Can you see any kind of record of the miles I've flown; how full is the economy class tonight? Because you see, what happened is, I got used to being entitled to a standard of flying without paying for it and I expected to be treated like that for life. I felt entitled.....

The lie of entitlement trips up many a traveller in the kingdom. We have this idea that God owes us a business class lifestyle, and once we have had it "nothing less for me, I'm a king's kid"!

God resolves my problems like he is on tap and on call. Moses enjoyed an entitled life in the palace for the first 40 years of his life, but he had to learn contentment in the wilderness before he could lead the people into the Promised Land.

Holding the Bible Theology in Balance

Over recent years there has been a lot of teaching on Identity and Sonship, but every teaching pushed to its extreme becomes an error. What does Sonship become when it is not tempered by servanthood? It becomes entitlement. It was the sin of the elder brother prodigal who stayed at home. "All these years I've stayed at home working for you and you never put on a party for me"!

In the Bible, there are many truths that need to stand and temper each other, and truth is found in the nexus of both: *Sonship and Servanthood, Election or Predestination and Personal Freedom or Choice and Faith and Works.*

Don't believe the lie of entitlement; it will lure you towards an exit ramp. *God doesn't owe you the business class or first-class lifestyle.* I think the NT teaches that we are servants.

Luke 17:10 having done all that is commanded of us, say "we are unprofitable servants.... I am just doing my job".

Today's second exit ramp looks similar to the first.

Exit ramp No 1 is a ramp of entitlement. **Exit ramp No 2 is a ramp of unfulfilled thirst.** *Here is the belief behind this story - Life is tough, I want my thirsts met when and how I want!*

You see the greatest threat to securing what God had for Israel wasn't the enemies in the land, nor was it the miles of sand they had to trek through, it was the people themselves. It was what was in their hearts. It was the internal threat. It wasn't that God was reluctant to give them this land of milk and honey; it was that the people kept looking back to the past and not forward to the future. They were being lured away from their destination from within.

Does this not resonate with us also? How easy it is for us to become disgruntled and look back and hanker for what used to be instead of what God wants us to become. When what we want is not being delivered how and when we want it; in our personal lives or in our church.

I think Keith Green was one of the greatest songwriter and performers of the 1980s. Among his many well-known songs are *O Lord your Beautiful and There is a Redeemer*, but one of the lesser known songs is:

'So you wanna go back to Egypt' The opening words are:

So you wanna go back to Egypt where it's warm and secure...

Are you sorry you bought the one-way ticket when you thought you were so sure...

You wanted to live in the land of promise, but now it's getting so hard...

Are you sorry you're out here in the desert instead of your own back yard!

Exit ramp 2 is where people demand of God

Why did you get me into this? I want what I used to have and I want it now.....

I don't want to feel thirsty from deep inside me.... So I will go and find what will meet the thirst without your help. We tell ourselves, God is not what I need so I will take an off-ramp for a while. I will go because there I feel in control and I get what I think I need. The people on the journey soon forgot their slavery and imprisonment. Very quickly, the manna for breakfast lunch and tea lost its appeal. It's called sin when we leave what God has provided and go off or go back looking for something else. Sin offers an enjoyable life now, even a manageable life now. Sin offers a kind of satisfaction that we will not experience if we stay on the narrow road to life. Sin offers to quench your inner drives but leaves you feeling empty and unfulfilled. Later in chapter 11, they gorged themselves on quail meat until they were sick of it. What they thought they wanted didn't fulfil.

So how does this work out for us today? Satan puts up a sign for us – "Exit ramp 2 kms ahead"....Get ready here is your opportunity!!! And sadly many followers of Jesus are lured off into the desert chasing some unfulfilled thirst, addiction or desire. And what you do when you start listening to those inner drives that come from inside and underneath your water line is that you enliven them and you believe the lie again – *"that if you just give in to them you will feel in control and not be thirsty anymore."*

Now all this results in a Moses meltdown! It's all too much for him. Remember they have been on the trek for over one year and by now it's clear they have not taken the 11-day fast track route. Moses starts complaining himself to God....

The people's complaints have a compounding effect on the leadership God has put in place. You know what I'm am going say now don't you?

Be careful and prayerful for your leaders. They are human too, with feet of clay....More about this next time from Chapter 12. But I want you to see from the Word that what you say and do does impact others.

Hebrews 13:17 Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them a reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit. Many people refuse leadership today because why would you want to put yourself into a place where people take a cheap shot at you? You are under scrutiny, critiqued and criticised and the expectation of the people is; you bought us out here now you fix the problem or we will take an off-ramp and find satisfaction elsewhere. And what the people said and did displeased the Lord. I'm going to speak more on leadership next time from chapter 12.

So here is today's message; from under the water line in our lives come these thirsts and desires that never seem to get met. If left unchecked, they will make a shipwreck of your life and your faith. What was it the woman at the well said to Jesus? – "Give me this water that I will never thirst again"! She wrongly believed that life could be found in finding the right husband and she had tried five of them! To unmask your misbeliefs, you simply complete the following sentence.....

'For me, life is to be found in'..... (Finish the sentence).....

'I feel alive when (Finish the sentence) – Not have a cup of Bell tea!

When you do this, you are exposing the underside of your waterline beliefs, and you are telling yourself the truth about yourself. It is right here God's Spirit wants to bring change in your life and in our church. It is from here that discontent, complaint, grumbling and criticism come. It is from here that the exit ramps to life look so appealing because the lies have been empowered and enlivened.

Here is my desire for our church.....That God's presence will so come into our meetings when we gather that we will encounter Him; that he will speak to us deeply and we will obey...I AM will be with you – fear not!

That the cloud of God will hover over us. That the fire of God will even come to cleanse and empower us. That we will be discontented with comfortable Christianity and become not just believers, but *travellers on the road to life* –people of the way! That we will resist complaining about our leaders and help make their task easier. That we will repent from the lie of entitlement and the lie that fulfilment can be found by quenching inner thirsts for things that lead us away from God purposes in our lives. Have you ever wondered where David was when he wrote the 23rd Psalm? The Lord is my shepherd. I have *everything* I want! He might well have been out in the wilderness tending sheep because he had learned that God supplies everything we need in the wilderness. *He makes me lie down green pastures, He leads me beside still waters, and he restores my soul.* And he went onto write also.....*As the Deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you – you alone are my strength, my song, to you alone will my spirit yield.* That's what this is about.

But it's not spectacular. It's a daily plod of ordinariness which is a safe place to be. You see, God might get you out of Egypt, but it's quite another thing to get the Egypt out of you when you keep on enlivening it and think that it's where life is to be found. Jesus said – I AM the water of LIFE. Who has sent us on this trek? – The great I AM. This trek through the desert is not a race; it's a trek you just need to finish.