

"CAUGHT BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE"

Exodus 5:21+23

INTRODUCTION:

My subject and our text indicates a tough situation. It is when a person is penned in, closed in without hope.

Daily experience teaches that many of you have been between the rock and the hard place.

Teen-agers feel trapped -- hanging onto childhood but wanting to become adults. With all of their problems, they feel hemmed in.

Poor people - the rent is due, the utilities are due, the food is short. And it is three days until pay day.

People who have sinned understand this truth. There was a man who said, Woe is me for I am lost. I am a man of unclean lips. And I dwell in the midst of people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. I am lost. I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of unclean people. If this were true of Isaiah's time, and of Isaiah, and of his people -- then it is surely true of our time. Of my life, of my people. This is a word picture. That really says something to us - that tells a story.

It is like the fable - do you recall the little bull frog was awed by seeing an ox come down to the pond for a drink. He hopped away to tell his Grandfather of the

enormous creature. Detesting the thought that anyone should seem larger in the eyes of his grandson that he, the grandfather frog began to puff himself up. And ask, was he bigger than this.

Oh yes, grandfather, cried the little one. He was much, much larger. So the old frog continued to puff and to ask until he exploded.

It is not unusual for a person to be in a tough situation. For sometimes, you may be low on food, as McTavish the Scotchman. One day he looked out of his window, as the family was just going in to dinner. And he wailed, company is coming. And I bet they haven't eaten yet.

Quick as a flash, the old Scotchman ordered everybody out on the porch. *with tooth picks*

This business could be illustrated in so many ways. Edgar Allen Poe was starved and shivered into the grave at age 39.

Robert Burns found the wolf of starvation at his door at age 37. Lord Byron, at 36, this poet who had wings of fancy in his 30's - could not find his way out.

Shelly at age 30 was already tied up to the stain of this world. Now you could use all kind of adjectives to describe the miseries and the tragedies in the lives of these poets. But all of them were caught between the rock and the hard place.

When David went down to meet with Goliath and they put the armour on him, it was not what he was accustomed too. I Samuel 17:38-39. David asked them to remove it - he said, (let me be free to be me.) Because he was caught with Israel between the rock and the hard place, with this giant.

When Jacob had to leave home because of his dealings with Esau, he was in a similiar situation.

In 480 BC the Persians under King Xerxes attempted to capture the city states of Greece. Darius had attempted the same thing in 490, but it failed. As a huge Persian army advanced, a Greek soldier took 300 Spartan warriors and advanced to the narrow costal plain. And there was nothing more than a 50 foot wide beach between the mountain and the sea. It was an excellent defensive position. Where a small force could hold off a much larger army. In preparation for the battle, the Spartan soldiers combed their hair. Upon hearing this, Xerxes laughed. But he was later informed that he should take the event more seriously because it meant that the Spartans were preparing to die.

Prior to the battle, a Greek traitor revealed to the Persians a secret trail around the mountain - which enabled the Persians to strike from the front, and the rear. And when the sun rose on the day of battle, the King discovered that he and his 300 men were surrounded. They were absolutely caught between the rock and the hard place.

Moses returned to Egypt, the Hebrews received him with open arms. They were impressed with his unusual shepherd's staff. And they were convinced that the Egyptians would be over-thrown immediately.

Pharaoh who was not impressed with Moses decided to increase the burdens of the Hebrew slaves. It was not long before the Hebrews were blaming Moses, for all of their problems. They suggested he might do everyone a favor by just disappearing in the wilderness, for a second time, the Bible says.

✓ Ex. 5:22-23, Moses returned to the Lord and said - oh Lord, why has thou brought harm to this people. Why didst thou ever send me. Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name, he has done harm to this people. And Thou has not delivered thy people at all.

Moses was caught between the rock and the hard place.

Have you ever had a similar experience.

? What do you (do) when you are caught in a situation?

I. TALK TO GOD

Now it seems that Moses here was in the squeeze and when he found himself in this situation, he talked to God. When you are caught in the squeeze - the world seems to say when in trouble, when in doubt, run around in circles. Scream a little bit and shout. Find fault with a lot of things. The Bible says when you find yourself in a squeeze - take the time to talk to God. Phil. 4:6-7. Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication and thanksgiving let your request be made

to God. And the peace of God shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Acts 16 - Informs us that Paul and Silas are now in prison for preaching the Gospel. While in prison, they put into practice the preaching. They refused to be anxious, and V. 25 says - Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God. The prisoners were listening to them.

2 Timothy 4:16-17 - In writing to this man, Paul said, he had been abandoned and that ruthless men were working against him. However, Paul talked to God about this. At my first defense, no one supported me, but all deserted me. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me. That through me a proclamation might be fully accomplished.

The word "stood" and "strengthened" reminds us that God can help us when we are caught in the squeeze.

Daniel 6 - We find that wonderful man going and talking to the Lord three times a day in prayer. He is between the rock and a difficult place.

In May, 1940, the battered British Army was stranded on the beaches of Dunkirk. Hitler's war machine was before them, and in the rear was the English Channel. They were caught - right between the rock and the hard place. The Army, and all of England prayed for God's help. In every boat and ship that would float, English citizens

floated across the channel to rescue the helpless Army. Most of the Army was rescued by a miracle of God and England survived to fight another day.

The advice is, when you find yourself caught in the squeeze, in the jaws of certain destruction, take the time to talk to God.

II. LISTEN TO GOD

I think when you find yourself in this place, it is wise to not only talk but listen to God. The Scriptures declare that this was the case that Moses pleaded his case before God. And he heard God say in Ex. 6:2 - I am the Lord. We must recognize that God is the Lord of the universe. He is in control. And that God doesn't have any problems. He has only solutions and answers.

Moses was reminded that God already had prepared a plan. That would bring victory to his people. When we find ourselves caught in the squeeze, we do ourselves great favor, if we'd take the time to listen to God.

Psalm 46:1-3 - Let us learn from this man. God is our refuge and strength - a very pleasant help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change, and though the mountains should slip into the heart of the sea. Though its waters roar and foam. Though the mountains quake. At its swelling price.

In our moments, our moments of fear - we hear the voice of Jesus saying -
John 14:18, 19. "I will not leave you as orphans - I will come to you after a little while the world will behold me no more. But you will behold me - because I live, you shall live also.

In the days of Jesus, probably there were no homes or institutions for fatherless children. Orphans were almost defenseless against a cruel and a sinful world. Captured for slaves and abused as animals. Orphans were helpless figures in the Roman age. In his last hour, Jesus assured his followers that he would not abandon them. His Spirit would come to give strength to live. This same Jesus lives today. Reminding us that he has not left us to exist as helpless orphans.

You remember Paul who suffered from a disease that he never named. Life appeared to be squeezing in, closing in on him. He prayed, seeking God's help. He tells us that God did not promise healing. But that he did hear God say to him, 2 Cor. 12:9 - my grace is sufficient for you.

When you are caught between the rock and the hard place, you can discover that God's grace is sufficient for that hour.

In recent times we have all read about Alexander Solzhenitsyn. He has related many difficult ordeals that he faced, and that were being faced by men in the prison camps of the Soviet Union. In stressing the power of spiritual values, he tells about a fellow prisoner who seemed to live victoriously in the midst of misery in the prison.

He said, every night after this man would crawl into his cot, he would read from a crumpled piece of paper. And while the man was reading, his face would shine with joy.

Solzhenitsyn later discovered that the verses were from the Bible - and had been written on this piece of paper. When caught between the rock and that most disappointing place - this man learned that he could listen to God.

III. TRUST YOURSELF TO GOD

In Gen. 35:3 - we find that Jacob was in a rough spot. That he trusted himself to God and went back to Bethel.

When you are caught in a place like this, you ought to do as Moses did - trust in God's leadership. Moses returned to God's people, and he returned to Pharaoh. In our moments of doubt and depression, we need to remind ourselves that we are super conquerors through Jesus Christ.

If we might borrow something from the New Testament, Paul listed a series of things that can make any Christian feel as though he was caught between the rock and the place of no escape. He adds, Rom. 8:37 - who shall separate us from the love of Christ. Shall tribulation, distress, or persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or sword - but in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

Now the expression - we overwhelmingly conquer - is only one word in the Greek. And what this one word means is, that we conquer completely. Now if you are going to compare the meaning of this word with a football score - say, it would be expressed like this. 100 - 0.

In the year 490, we see the Persians attempted to conquer the Greeks. And under the leadership of a great leader, they met the Persian army. On the plains of Marathon. Instead of establishing a defensive position, the Greek army attack. The Persians were caught off guard. And the attack was so vicious - that the Persians were almost wiped out. The Greek historians tell us - the Greek army lost 192 men. The Persians lost 6,400 men. On that day, the Greeks were super conquerors. Just as the Greeks were able to conquer the Persian's at Marathon. So Christ empowers us, to be victorious in life. And trust our lives to him, and we are able to win the victory.

There is a little known story about Tommy John, who is one of the outstanding baseball pitchers of our generation. You find that tragedy and joy came to this young man. In the middle of July his record stood at 13-3. He would be an easy 20 game winner. And he had been pitching shut-outs, and having great success, in his chosen sport. But inspite of this, he had an injury to come. And he was like the Lord had given - and there was one of the nerves that had been damaged in the elbow. And the 3rd operation on his arm was done on December 17th, 1974. And they found scarred tissue and so they re-positioned the nerve back into the muscle. Sally, his wife, was feeling panic. The muscle in his forearm deflated like a balloon. And the skin was loose around his hand. He had to work on the feeling in his pitching hand. They had cut his salary by 10%. But he was determined to go back and try again. He tried to pitch for batting practice. Men were telling him, you ought to be realistic and know that you will never be able to pitch again. Forks of food dropped from his hand, and he had to

teach himself how to eat, with his right hand. And how to brush his hair in a different way. He prayed to God. He seemed to hear God saying to him . . . I gave you the gift. You are my child. And this experience will be good for you. And so Tommy argued with God, and God was saying, trust me, give me all of your worries. And Tommy was determined to trust God. If not, baseball, then something better he reasoned. And he began to master various passages in the Bible. One Sunday morning he was in church, and the Pastor used the text, Luke 1:37. Nothing shall be impossible. His theme was on the power of God. And how God had the power to forgive. And the power to help in the time of affliction. And it is true that in every church on Sunday morning, there are some who face impossible situations, by human definition.

But we believe God would like to display this power in somebody's life (this morning.) God wants to get you into place where you will trust him. And that was the thing that Tommy John was praying about that morning. Lord, I am going to take you at your word, you said that nothing is impossible for you. You say in the Bible, if we ask anything in your name, it will be given. I pray for completeness, for healing, and restoration. You will do your part and I'll do mine. I'll work and trust your power - because I believe that such a thing is completely possible.

We find that Tommy John and Sally, his wife, began to trust and not worry about the next day, or the next season. But he began to work on the impossible. To gain strength in adversity. You'll be a stronger person and a better Christian from this experience. For the next two months, Tommy threw batting practice every day. And sometimes, he had to take his fingers and adjust them with the other hand. So that he could get them to function properly. It was a difficult come-back for him. He had to sort of learn the mechanics all over again. And finally, he was able to throw the ball again at a speed of 80 MPH. But the coach wanted him to do a little better.

So he had opportunity once again, and was given the chance to pitch. And what a come-back. With a 10-10 record - he ended that season. He had his old confidence back. But he knew that God opened doors. Like you wouldn't believe it, he said. And he asked for opportunities before churches, schools, wherever he could speak - he would talk about his faith and about God helping him in that most hard time of his life.

Exactly 3 years to the day of the arm surgery, Tommy pitched and won his 20th game. It was a great season for him - a miraculous come-back. And he had been pitching for 14 years when most pitchers would have been ready to quit.

The thrilling story of Tommy John. We find ourselves between the rock and the hard place. Let us also talk to God - let us be willing to listen to God. And let us trust ourselves to God. Whatever your situation today, the Lord will give you strength - the strength you need.