

"THINGS THAT FRIGHTEN"

Exodus 4:1-4

We have here a story in which God was preparing Moses for the task of leading the Hebrews out of Egypt. He gave him a sign of authority. The Bible states, then (Moses) answered and said, what if they will not believe in me. Or listen to what I say. For they may say, the Lord has not appeared to you. "And the (Lord) said unto him -- what is that in your hand. And he said, a staff, a shepherd's staff. Then he said, throw it on the ground. So he threw it on the ground and it became a serpent and Moses fled from it. But the Lord said to Moses, stretch out your hand and grasp it by the tail. So he stretched out his hand and caught it. And it became a shepherd's staff in his hand. Ex. 4:1-4.

There are many things in life that frighten us. When the Lord told him to take ahold, take it by the tail. We are all passing through life with many things that are ordinary things to meet. But quite often, many of the things we face will frighten us. Some times the morally good things are turned into serpents. And we see that these things frighten us.

Now Moses was (known by many many things.) There have been many famous generals and soldiers by their unique dress and their style. General George Patton will be remembered for his firey temper. Handle Colt '45's, General MacArthur will always be remembered for his frayed old General's cap, and his old pipe. Teddy Roosevelt is remembered for the phrase "speaking softly but carry a big stick".

Although Moses did not have a pistol, he did not have a pipe to smoke - he carried a big stick, a shepherd's staff. And there are so many lessons that we might learn from Moses and from the staff because this thing actually frightened him. We can learn from this. Because the staff was used to lean against during the desert wanderings. It was a support to him. Another thing about this staff, that which guided his flocks, and he made advancement. It was really a token of his office.

I. POSSESSING USEFUL THINGS

I think the first lesson that we learn from the shepherd's staff is - that God can use what we have for good. He can use the useful things in our lives. When Moses met God in the back of the desert, Moses possessed very little in material goods. About the only thing that I think he had was some clothes on his back, and he had this common shepherd's staff. However, the staff was really all that God needed. For in the days that followed, Moses saw God energize his staff. To defy a King, divide a sea, and to perform other great miracles. This reminds us if we are willing to submit to God's leadership - God can use the most common things in our lives. As a means of expressing his divine power.

In the 6th chapter of John, the Disciple tells us that on one occasion - with a few loaves and two fishes - Jesus fed over 5,000 people. As the dinner hour approached, Jesus suggested to the Disciples that the time had come to feed the crowd. They did not see how that could be accomplished and they were frightened. Fearing that the incident might make Jesus look bad, they suggested that the crowd be sent away. Matt. 14:15. When it was obvious that Jesus was not going to leave, a small boy offered his lunch. Five barley loaves and two fishes. Although the boy did not have much - it was all that Jesus needed to feed the multitude. A miracle took place that day and when all had been fed, they gathered up and filled 12 baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves

which was left over from those that had eaten. John 6:13. Yes, I think God is able to take what we have and make them into useful things. And to use them for much good.

Quite often a person will say in the church, I am useless, I do not have very much to offer. To the church or to the world. And quite often, an individual can go and visit an elderly person, perhaps in a nursing home. And that person will relate how much that visit meant. How much good it accomplished. God can take the little simple things, like your smile, your hand shake, your willingness to offer - and lighten the load of a lonely life. The shepherd's staff, and five loaves of bread, and two fish - and perhaps, your small talent. God can use these simple things. They will be useful to work miracles.

So, we first think about possessing useful things. No one is at zero - everyone possesses something.

II. PASSING THROUGH LIFE IS FRIGHTENING

Now all of us have reached the point in life, on certain occasions, that we would certainly like to (go off and hide.) The Bible says that when Moses threw down his staff, V. 3 - it became a serpent. And Moses fled from it.

Now, I wonder if you would blame Moses for running. I expect some of you would have done the same thing. And yet another thought is - I wonder how far some of you would travel before you stopped.

Have you ever wanted to run away and hide. Has life ever been so unbearable that you simply wanted to become anonomous. I think this is another truth here of this text in which we learn from the shepherd's staff. There was a time when he wanted to run away and hide.

Dale Carnegie in his book, How To Stop Worrying and Start Living - tells about dropping in one day at the University of Chicago and talking with a man who asked him how he kept from worrying. He said, I have always taken and tried the bit of advice given me by the President of SearsRoebuck. When you have a lemon - make a lemonaide.

✓ Carnegie gave an illustration. It is a very stimulating story and I will not have time to tell you all of it. Her name was Thelma Thompson. And she lived in New York City. During the War, she had an experience. Her husband was stationed in an Army Camp near the desert in California. She went out there in order to be near him. She said I hated the place. I had never before been so miserable. My husband was ordered out on manuevers on the desert - and I was left in a tiny shack alone. The heat was unbearable 125 degrees in the shade by a cactus. Not a soul to talk to but Mexicans and Indians. They couldn't speak English. The wind blew and all the food I ate, and the very air I breathed, were filled with sand, sand, sand. I was so utterly wretched and feeling sorry for myself = that I wrote my parents and told them I was giving up - I was coming home. I just couldn't stand it one minute longer. I'd rather be in jail. Her father answered the letter. He wrote her two lines -- and she said these two lines turned her life around.

Two men looked out from prison bars
One saw the mud, the other saw the stars.

She said, I read that over and over. I was ashamed of myself. I made up my mind

that I would find out what was good in my present situation. I would look for the stars. So she made friends with the natives. Their reaction was amazing. She showed interest in their weaving and pottery. They gave her presents of her favorite pieces - which they usually sold to the tourists. She said, I studied the cactus and the Joshua trees. I learned about prairie dogs and desert sunsets. I hunted for sea shells that had been left there millions of years ago. The sand was an ocean floor. She said the desert hadn't change, the Indians hadn't changed, but I had changed my attitude of mine and by so doing, I turned a wretched experience into an exciting adventure of my life. I was stimulated and excited by this new world and so I wrote a book about it. And, how marvelous, that sometimes a person wants to run away and hide from something. Frightened. Passing through life is a frightening experience.

Some of the greatest prophets of God had this desire. Elijah was a courageous prophet and on one occasion he challenged the prophets of Baal. He won a victory, but when Queen Jezebel, who promoted Baal worship, let it be known that she was going to kill the prophet. When Elijah heard that, the Bible says, he was afraid. He was frightened.

And he ran for his life and he came to Bethsheba - which belongs to Judah. He left his servant there. And he went on a day's journey into the wilderness. And he sat down under a Juniper tree and according to I Kings 19 - he requested for himself that he might die.

At some point in life, most of us have faced a Jezebel - don't be surprised if you feel like running away and hiding, when you are confronted by Jezebel. Every man has been alarmed, some ability has been degraded. A useful thing in your life has become a serpent. Something very useful has become profane and as Moses threw down the

staff - it became a serpent.

Jonah was commissioned by God to preach to a wicked city. In response to God's call, Jonah rose up to flee to Tarsus from the presence of the Lord. Jonah 1:3. The prophet had no desire to preach - he hated those people. The only alternative was to run.

Have you ever been confronted with God's will? Run from God's will. Left it, fled.

When Jesus was arrested, Peter sought to defend Jesus. He pulled his sword out and cut off the ear of a servant. He probably aimed at his head, but he missed. To Peter's amazement, Jesus did not resist. But he instructed Peter to put away his sword. Now the Disciples were confused and afraid and frightened, they could not understand the submission and attitude of Jesus. The Bible says, Matt. 26:56 - all the Disciples left him and fled. And a few hours later, as the trial of Jesus reached its climax, a young woman asked Peter if he were a follower of Jesus. Hiding behind a curtain of curses, he shouted, I do not know the man. Matt. 26:74.

Guilt, fear, failure, anger, tragedy can cause the best of us to run and to hide.

A famous Doctor says that young people want to run away and hide, because they have a deep feeling of inferiority.

Say you are 16 years old, your name is Helen High School. To be honest, you are not exactly gorgeous. Your shoulders are a little rounded. And you have trouble remembering to close your mouth. That seems to worry your folks a lot. Then there are pimples distributed at random. Over your forehead and chin. And your over-sized ears keep peeking out from under the hair that should hide them. You think often about these flaws and have wondering with reverence - why God wasn't paying more attention. When you were being assembled.

You never had a real date in your life except for that disaster last February. For Mom's friend, Mrs. Nosegood had arranged a blind date. That almost signaled the end of the world. It was risky to accept. But you were too excited to think rationally. Charming Charlie arrived in high spirits, expecting to meet the girl of his dreams. You were not what he had in mind. Do you remember the disappointment on his face. As he shuffled into the living room, the night of your date. He just sulked through the evening. And brought you home two hours early.

I've read about another mother who was so over-whelmed about the responsibility of rearing four small children. She crawled under the covers and refused to get out of bed. All of us have had times when life becomes so unbearable - that we feel compelled to run away. Even if you feel this way, don't give up. There is hope for you - even though you are passing through life and it is frightening.

III. PROPER WAY TO GRAPPLE WITH THINGS

Now, we need to think about how instead of running, the other alternative. Moses

ran but God called him back. The Lord said to Moses, stretch out your hand and grasp it by the tail. He stretched out his hand and caught it. And it became a staff in his hand. V. 4.

Have you ever attempted to catch a poisonous snake by its tail, Why, the impossibility of that task is very impressive. If you have ever visited a place called Silver Springs, Florida, where you see them have live rattle snakes. A man with heavy clothing, heavy boots, a long pole - points out the characteristics of a snake. He angered the snakes and they would strike. The snake would strike so quick that only breaking a balloon would make the audience realize that the snake had struck. As you watched deadly snakes, you could think about Moses.

Now, what is happening here is this. It is a sign - Egypt is called Rahab - that is a serpent. Now God is going to attack Egypt in the line of the serpent. You see this reference or this sign, is the converting of pleasure of the staff into a serpent. And the serpent back into a staff.

This is true in the life of every Christian. One thinks nothing much about sin or temptations so long as he is drifting along. But when you set your mind against evil, and you resolve to break the chain that binds your life, then you realize how galding it is. Have you been making some friends in the land of Egypt. Are you learning how to be socialably acceptable. So long as you share it and stay in it - you will not think much about it. As long as you live around the things of Egypt - you will not be resolved in any way to take a flight from it. So God said to Egypt, to Pharoah, to the land of sin, my people do not belong down here. Let them go, but Egypt did not let them go. They made it miserable and oppressive. The world proposes that. And God's people

in Egypt's dark land, were able to deliver themselves. They had hard labors, sorrow, helplessness. Deliverance must come from without. And come it did through the mighty hand of Jehovah as he worked through the impossible by taking this shepherd's staff. Yes, when it was cast on the ground - it became a serpent.

Some years ago, a farmer moved to Florida. When he got there, he was so discouraged. The land was so wretched - it could neither grow fruit nor raise pigs. Nothing thrived but oaks and rattle snakes. Then he got the idea that he would turn his liability into an asset. He would make the most out of those rattle snakes, and to everyone's amazement - he started canning rattle snake meat. Tourists pour into that section to see his rattle snake farm. At the rate of thousands every year. His business is thriving. You can watch the poison from the pangs of his rattlers. Being shipped to laboratories to make toxin. You can see rattle snake skins sold for fancy prices. Women's shoes and hand bags. You can see rattle snake meat shipped all over the world. And even the local post office in the village has been named Rattle Snake, Florida. In honor of the man who was frightened at first, but who found the proper way to grapple with things.

In this modern day, in your life, when you have to grapple with Egypt and with the serpent, from a human standpoint - which is impossible. Think about it, to free the Hebrews from the great military power, or to grab a snake by its tail. With God's help, both were possible. When Moses picked up the snake by its tail, God was saying to Moses that you have authority. To lead God's people out of bondage.

There was a T. V. program some years ago, called The Hour Of Power, in which a testimony was given by a man who was able to do the impossible. The man with mechanical arms and hands, the story goes, he had resigned as a Pastor of a large church, in order

to go and work with retarded children. He dreamed of building a ranch in Arizona. To serve as a home - where these children should grow and develop. Selling everything he owned, he bought land in Arizona. He attempted to erect his first building. While working one day, he received an electrical shock. Which caused him to lose both hands and arms. The discouragement and despair, he refused to give up. With mechanical arms and hands, he continued his work. Newspapers in the state featured articles on his life and soon thousands in donations were made to his project. He had originally had hoped to have his home on a sound operating business in 10-15 years. However, hundreds of thousands of dollars were given. In a short period of time, the retarded children's home was in full operation. Like Moses, that handicapped Pastor was able to grasp and to grab a snake in his life by its tail. God used mechanical hands and arms, to turn the desert into a beautiful ranch of love. That Pastor had a handicapped body, but he did not have a handicapped faith. With God's help, he did the impossible.

*Walter Foy - Problem witnessing - college days - worked with 3rd Army
Winn - solicit donations - share four - cafe - 1st Big man walked
out saying I in tabernacle - said - "young man I wish I had the
courage that you have to stand up for the word" (four)*

Which tells me today, some of you who face the impossible things in your life, by a little bit of faith - if you would just go and take the proper way, to grapple with things. And use a little faith, you could win.

Elijah was eventually able to face Jezebel. Jonah was able to preach in Nineveh. Peter was able to witness for Christ. God gave them all strength to do what they thought was impossible. And I believe with all of my heart, today, he will do the same thing for you.

IV. PERMISSION TO RELY UPON DIVINE AID

I think the last lesson that we shall take note of, in recalling that each of us