

"Moses 2 It can't end like this"

As I have spoken of last week, the year of 2016 has passed, and become "a part of our life". And the year of 2017 which has just started will also become "a part of our life" later. The year of 2016 and 2017 is not the entirety of our lives. It is a just short period of time in our life in the past and in the future.

However, we boast in victory of ourselves easily, or on the other hand, we get depressed badly as if that one year is our whole life. Far from it, we decide whether we are winners or losers of our life by the results of a single day.

Last week, I told you about Moses' life from his birth to his age of forty. When he was having a fulfilling life, both mentally and physically, he tried to save his people but failed and broke down. He was exiled from Egypt and escaped to the wilderness of Midian. What happened to him there was not the entirety of his life but just a part of it. Later, he lived in this wilderness for forty years. But that was not the entirety of his life either. This period of forty years is also just a part of his life.

Last week, I spoke of why Jesus chose Peter as one of his twelve disciples. It is written in Acts, ¹³"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13) Yes. Peter was an uneducated ordinary man. But Jesus chose this man. He was a fisher man who had strong muscles from his work. So his physical strength was not a problem to him at all. But his character had problems. He had a warm heart and was very passionate. But he blundered a lot. He was short tempered and always had to say one word too many.

But Jesus dared to choose Peter as his disciple. It is because Peter was sensitive to his sins in his heart. He knew that he was a sinner before God more than anyone else. Jesus' attention was on this particular point. There must have been those with better character or those more intelligent in Jerusalem or in the area of Galilee. But Peter had such a heart to realize his sins. It means no matter how a person is imperfect or no matter how his character is unrefined, God can make him change as long as he knows who he is before God. It is because a

person is well grounded to be changed. Regarding Peter, Jesus knew that God will make up his weakness, and will prepare him as a disciple later. As a result, Peter was changed like a different person and became a leader of the church.

Let's go back to Moses. When he killed the Egyptian at the age of forty because of his heart to the Hebrews, his people, he was full in strength and in wisdom. But he had to escape to the wilderness of Midian at the most substantial time of his life. He did not live in Midian for a mere year or two but he lived there for forty years as a shepherd until the age of eighty. He spent his prime time in the wilderness where there was nothing. We would call this a "demotion" or an "exile from the capital."

If we lose something, we can get it back. But we can't take back time. Moses spent a very monotonous life there for forty long years.

He met a woman named Zipporah there. She became his wife and Moses raised a family. I can imagine his daily life. He woke up early in the morning before dawn and took his sheep out to the field. He managed to find just enough of the scarce green grass to take care of his flock. During the day, the burning sun shone down on the dry land and scorched Moses. In the evening, he saw the red sun setting in the land. The monotonous day like this continued for a month, for a year, for even ten years then for forty years. Although his surroundings never changed, Moses himself aged with wrinkles on his face and gray hairs in his beard. This was Moses' days in Midian.

He once had a burning passion to save his people from Egypt. Actually, he was in the center of Egypt where it seemed possible to use his power to save the Hebrews. There was a time when Moses' servants fell down on their knees before him in the palace in Egypt. But now in the field, only sheep laid down before him. He must have thought that his life would end in this wilderness.

In Genesis chapter 46 verse 34, it is written, "For all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians." Moses who pursued all kinds of studies in Egypt and lived as a prince had to work for forty years as a shepherd, which the Egyptians detested very much.

A shepherd needs patience to lead his helpless sheep. Moses who was impatient had to learn to walk slowly with his sheep. But this was the most important character he needed in order to lead several million Israelites in the wilderness for forty years, later in his life. Psalms chapter 77 verse 20 says, "You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron." It also says in Numbers chapter 12 verse 3,"³ (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.) He needed years and months to learn how to lead the sheep that would not move as he wished. And this was crucial later in his life. He was able to gain humbleness which was written in the Bible as "more humble than anyone else" through his work which "didn't go as he wished."

These were all learned during his forty years in Midian. The forty years of life in the wilderness seemed meaningless. But it was the most crucial place for Moses to experience in order to take the next step. Working with sweat from his forehead was the experience he couldn't have in the palace even if he had wanted to. Shearing the sheep, spinning their wool and weaving it, milking the sheep, making dairy products, skinning the animals to make tents and clothes, preserving salted meat, learning the way to negotiate with other nomads. Learning about geographical features, weather, climate, and languages. He would not have been able to learn anything like this in Egypt. But the best thing he experienced among those was to face God in the silence of the wilderness every day.

No one knew. Even Moses didn't know. But this was God's plan. Without knowing, he was prepared for "The day". God's plan is too high and too magnificent for us to see. It was impossible for Moses to lead millions of Israelites from Egypt and roam with them in the wilderness for forty years without the experience he had in the Midian, which at the time seemed to be meaningless. If Moses was led to the desert with the Israelites with only the wisdom from books, he would have been dejected by the severe life in the wilderness.

It is as written in the Bible "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

Moses came to Horeb, the mountain of God. He saw the burning bush. Strange to say, it was burning but didn't burn up. It is impossible for something to be burning but to never disintegrate.

Moses took action. We would probably do the same. He said "I will go over and see this strange sight". When he approached the bush and tried to see what it was, God called him from the burning bush. "Moses! Moses!" and Moses answered, "Here I am." ⁵ "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." (Exodus 3:5)

⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." (Exodus 3:9-10)

Wait a minute! How old was Moses at that time? He was 80 years old. From our point of view, it is impossible for an eighty year old person to do such a thing. It is the age to retire after working in Midian for forty years and to leave his work to his children and grandchildren. Needless to say, he knew about it and answered God immediately. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11)

It would be understandable if Moses had been called by God when he was full of power, when he had slain the Egyptian. The window of opportunity had passed while he spent his time in the wilderness quietly for 40 years. Why did God ignore Moses in his prime? And why did God call Moses at his age of 80.

Why didn't God give the mission to a younger person who is of their best both mentally and physically? There may have been others suitable for God's mission. But this is God's plan and His will. Moses who had thought that he could do anything with his strength was totally crushed. Now he realized that he couldn't depend on anything but God. God showed Moses that what would become will not be done in his own strength, but be done entirely by God. God had been waited until this time had come.

God told Moses who saw the burning bush, "Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals for the place where you are standing is holy ground." as if to confirm this.

God did not prepare thousands of armors and swords in the burning bush to free his people from slavery in Egypt. God did not leave money along the bush towards this effort. God said just one word to Moses. "Take off your sandals."

I have heard that the biggest problem for victims of an earthquake is to run away without wearing their shoes. It is hard to know without having experience. But imagine being in an earthquake. During the night, the house suddenly starts to shake violently. Everything falls on the floor. All the shelves fall and the plates shatter all around. There is a power failure. In this situation, what would happen if we go out without wearing shoes? My sole is sore just imagining myself walking on the broken glass shards with bare feet. In the desert, sand gets very hot under the scorching sun and there are dangerous insects and animals living in the sand. So nobody wants to walk without shoes in the desert, where cactuses and rocks are. It is impossible to live without shoes.

But God told Moses, "Take off your sandals." When he obeyed God's word, he was now prepared to face Egypt. Through this incident, God taught him to rely on God completely, rather than his own strength. People may think that it is the time for Moses to stand up for his people when he had completed his studies in Egypt. But it was not God's timing. The time had come when Moses relied solely on God. Forty years of Midian was the time he needed to learn how to be obedient to God.

How old was Abraham when God called him? "The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you."² "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. (Genesis 12:1-2) It was at the age of 75. It was the time when his physical strength had been taken away like Moses.

When Gideon fought with his enemies, he had 32,000 soldiers at first. "But God told to him. "You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, 'My own strength has saved me.' (Judges 7:2)

This is why God reduced the number of soldiers from 32,000 to 10,000, and again reduced to them to 300 in the end. It is our common sense to decide the win or

loss of a fight by the number of soldiers. But God dared to choose only a few to gain victory because He wanted to teach them how to rely on God,

How about the disciples whom Jesus had picked himself? Are they a group of people that others agreed to and praised? No. People must have been surprised and shocked. God chose the imperfect. But when they relied on God completely, God showed us His amazing work.

I watch a Japanese TV drama titled "Shizumanu Taiyo" meaning "The Sun that never sets" In the story, Hajime Onchi, the hero, is sent to remote countries starting with Karachi in Pakistan, Tehran in Iran, and Nairobi of Kenya in Africa. It was because he became a leader of the labor union of a National Air Line. At first, he was told to work in Karachi for just two years. Then he was sent to Tehran, where he was scheduled to work for temporarily, but he was made to stay much longer. This hard assignment also influenced his family. When he was expecting to leaving for Japan after Tehran, he was told again to go to Africa. Because of this assignment, he was not able to be present at his mother's death. During this period of time, he experienced many hardships that crushed his heart, time after time. Yes. He can't see his future. If they know when their assignment is set to be over, they can set goals for themselves and work hard aiming for that goal. But his company didn't keep their promises and let him down many times.

Since I have never read this novel, I don't know what will happen in the end. I am not Hajime Onchi in this drama but just a TV viewer. So I watch it thinking, "Hajime Onchi, you can't end like this." I cheer him up and say, "Your previous co-worker, Mr. Shiro Gyoten, compromised his belief to race up the promotion ladder in Japan, but you had so many precious experiences no one could have. It can't compare with Mr. Gyoten's achievements. I am sure that these experiences will come back to you as a fruitful result later."

Then I think like this. My heart towards Mr. Onchi may be similar to God's view. I know that Mr. Onchi can't end like this. On the other hand, Mr. Onchi can't see his future, and he only works day by day. This is the huge difference between the hero in this drama and TV viewers like me. And it may be the same situation between us and God, because we live restlessly every day but God knows everything about us.

We have doubts about our life. What is our situation now? Are we going to be buried in a society like this? Why do we go the long way round? Does this have any benefit to our life? Same questions could be applied to Moses. Normally we would think that Moses, who used to be a prince of Egypt, ended his life in the wildness after running away from Egypt. However, if we see his life with our faith, we can find something extraordinary we would never have expected in these forty years.

There are many times when we find ourselves in situations we don't understand. But this is the time when God tells us something. He wants us to realize that there are more important things in our life than the situation we are facing now. When we realize this, we notice that we are different from who we were yesterday. Moreover, if you find your weakness, we can see God's power. Needless to say, we know how small our strengths and wisdoms are. But God's wisdom and power is so magnificent.

Brothers and sisters in Christ. Please remember this to take home in your hearts. Your failure today is not all about your life. Hard experiences you have had this past year is not the entirety of your life. Yesterday and the past year are all linked together to other days and years to lead to one direction. We don't see the whole picture of our lives yet. So please don't look down and be burdened. Instead, look up and ask God's will. Let's do our best today and every day. Humbly admit your limit and rely on God. Our life is still on the route to a successful completion through our best effort and God's providence. Let's pray.

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