

Knowing Our Limits

by Josh Reimer

I. Introduction

- a. Jesus had to deal with a certain kind of person (**Matthew 23:1-13**).
 1. They seemed more interested in the attention that came with their position than in actually accomplishing God's will.
 2. They reveled in being called teacher or rabbi or father - Jesus said that was wrong.
 - A. They would have said, "I want to lead the people to God" when they should have said, "I want the people to go to God."
 - B. They would have said, "I want to be a teacher" when they should have said, "I want God's word to be taught."
 3. That may seem like a subtle difference, but it really wasn't. And we can see that from how they reacted to Jesus.
 - A. If they had said, "I want the people to go to God", then perhaps they would have seen that Jesus was the best one to lead them. And perhaps they would have let Him.
 - B. If they had said, "I want God's word to be taught," then perhaps they would have seen Jesus for the perfect teacher that He was. And perhaps they would have listened.
 - C. But instead they said, "I want to lead the people to God", "I want to be a teacher." They refused to see Jesus for who He was and they persecuted Him.
 - D. Pilate could see why they wanted Jesus crucified. Mark 15:10 says of Pilate: *For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy.*
- b. If we aren't careful, we can become much like these men were.
 1. I might say, "I want to be a preacher" or "I want to save souls" when I should be saying, "I want the Word to be preached" and "I want souls to be saved."
 2. Again, it seems like a very subtle difference.
 - A. And I'm not saying that we should not want to be preachers and save souls - we should want those things.
 - B. But we should want them so that God's will can be accomplished and not for the attention it may bring to us.
 - C. And the point of this lesson today will be to explore the difference between these two mindsets.

II. Not every person is suited to every task.

- a. We can see in the Old Testament that God chose certain people for certain tasks. And He did not choose other people.
 1. King Saul learned that the hard way (**1 Samuel 13:6-14**).
 - A. A sacrifice needed to be offered here. The people were in danger and distress; they were scattered; and Samuel did not get there soon enough.
 - B. So Saul decided to take matters into his own hands and offer this burnt offering. He felt compelled (12).
 - C. Notice what Samuel says in verse 13. Saul had "done foolishly" and "not kept the commandment of the Lord."
 - D. The task of offering this burnt offering was not for Saul and he had to learn that in a very painful way (14).

2. King Uzziah learned the same lesson in, perhaps, an even more painful way (**2 Chronicles 26:16-19**).
 - A. Burning incense to the Lord was a good and a necessary task. But it wasn't a task for the king.
 - B. The priest, Azariah, told him he had trespassed. And God made His feelings on the subject clear as well when He struck Uzziah with leprosy.
 3. In both of these examples, these were necessary tasks. But the ones who performed them were just not qualified.
- b. It's the same for Christians today.
1. We need public speaking in our assemblies, but it's not a task for a woman. 1 Corinthians 14:34 says: *Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.*
 2. If possible, we should have elders. But it's not a task for a man without a wife, children, and a good reputation. Titus 1:5+6 says: *For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you -- if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination.*
- c. And this idea that not everyone is suited to every task is not just confined to tasks with technical requirements.
1. Saul and Uzziah were not priests so they were not qualified for those tasks. It wouldn't have mattered how knowledgeable they were on the subject of burnt offerings or burning incense. They just didn't meet the technical requirements God had laid out.
 2. But it is also possible to be unsuited for a task due to a lack of knowledge of ability.
- d. For example, not everyone can be a teacher because not everyone has the knowledge and the ability to teach.
1. James 3:1 says: *My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.*
 2. **1 Timothy 1:5-7**
 - A. The people described here seem to be pretty similar to the ones we talked about at the beginning of this sermon, the ones who Jesus had to deal with.
 - B. The best thing they could have done for the teaching of God's will would have been to get out of Jesus' way. But they wanted to be teachers.
 - C. The people described here in 1st Timothy wanted to be teachers too, even though they didn't even understand what they were trying to teach.
 - D. And that brings us to our next point...

III. Trying to accomplish tasks for which we are not equipped can be harmful.

- a. How much good do you suppose was accomplished by these people who tried to teach what they didn't even understand?
 1. Verse 6 says they had "turned aside to idle talk."
 2. At best it was just idle talk - a waste of time. At worst, they mislead people who were trying to find the truth.
- b. Not every person is suited to every task. But every person is suited to some task. And that's how we make up the body of the church (**1 Corinthians 12:13-22**).
 1. My foot's job is standing and walking. More specifically, its job is to keep me from tipping over while I'm standing or walking.

2. Suppose my foot decided he wanted a more prestigious job. Suppose my foot decided to take over for my hand. Whatever I was doing with my hand, now I do with my foot. How well could I write with my foot? How well could I type? How well could I do simple things like turning a doorknob?
3. And while I picked up my foot to try and do a simple thing like turning a doorknob, I would probably end up losing my balance and falling down. So not only would I have failed to open the door, I would also be lying on the ground because my foot was too busy to do its job of keeping me from tipping over.
4. That may be kind of a silly example, but as a Christian I don't want to be a foot trying to twist a doorknob. If I don't have the tools to accomplish a job, then that's not my job. And if I'm spending my time attempting a task for which I'm ill equipped, then what will happen to the task I should be doing?
5. Here's an example.
 - A. In the last business meeting we talked about replacing some of the windows downstairs. They are cracked and ugly and they let a lot of cold air in during the winter.
 - B. What if, yesterday - instead of writing this sermon - I spent my day trying to replace those windows? Anyone who knows how handy I am knows that we would probably just have big holes down there instead of windows.
 - C. It's a job I'm not equipped for and if I attempted it, I would do more harm than good.
 - D. On top of that, the job I was supposed to do - writing this sermon - would not be done.
 - E. Suppose my attitude was, "I want to be known as the church handyman. I want to fix those windows." That would lead to a greater burden on the church here, wouldn't it?
 - F. Fortunately for the people who have bible class downstairs, I'm more interested in having those windows fixed than in being the one to fix them.
- c. Let's look at a couple quick examples of this in the New Testament.
 1. A man named Diotrefes apparently fancied himself as some kind of church guardian (**3 John 9+10**).
 - A. This Diotrefes loved having preeminence. He wanted to be some kind of leader in the church.
 - B. But we can see that it was a task he was not equipped for and he ended up doing harm.
 2. The second example I have has to do with teaching again. What we are about to read is a letter written by apostles and elders (**Acts 15:24-29**).
 - A. This letter was addressing an issue that came up due to inaccurate teaching.
 - B. Verse 24 describes those who were teaching Christians that they had to be circumcised and keep the Old Law.
 - C. What they were teaching was not true and we can see that it did cause harm. Verse 24 says that these ill equipped teachers had "troubled [them] with words, unsettling [their] souls."
- d. There are certainly a great many tasks that we need to do in order to accomplish God's will.
 1. Let's each do what we are capable of doing well.
 2. And let's make sure that we don't do more harm than good by attempting tasks that we aren't ready to handle.
 3. I may like the idea of being the church handyman, but I would surely do more harm

- than good if I tried to do that with my current skill set.
- e. The point I'm making is that we should not try to accomplish tasks for which we are not equipped. But that doesn't mean we can never do those tasks. It just means that we must first equip ourselves. For example, not everyone should be a teacher.
 - 1. We already read 1 Timothy 1:5-7 and James 3:1 which say that not everyone should be a teacher.
 - 2. Not every Christian should be a teacher. But every Christian should eventually be a teacher (**Hebrews 5:12**).
 - A. We can see that being equipped to teach is a matter of maturity.
 - B. Something I'm not equipped for today, I may be well equipped for later in life - especially if I work at it.

IV. We need to keep our eyes on the goal.

- a. The goal is accomplishing God's will, and I shouldn't care whether I'm on the forefront or in the background - as long as God's will is being accomplished.
- b. The apostle Paul was on the forefront, but I think we can see that he didn't care. He just wanted to see God's will done and word spread.
 - 1. He didn't care about being the one to baptize people. He just wanted them to be baptized (**1 Corinthians 1:14-17**).
 - 2. He didn't care about showing off his extensive knowledge of God's word. He just wanted the people to learn what they needed (**1 Corinthians 2:1+2**).
 - 3. He didn't care if he got credit for helping a church to grow. He just wanted it to grow (**1 Corinthians 3:4-7**).
 - 4. And he didn't even care if he was the one to preach Christ. He just wanted Christ to be preached (**Philippians 1:15-18**).
 - 5. Paul didn't have an "I want to be a preacher" attitude. He had an "I want God's word to be preached attitude."
 - 6. He kept his eyes on the goal, not on whether or not people recognized his contributions to that goal.
- c. Our goal is accomplishing God's will.
 - 1. That may sometimes mean stepping forward to do a job.
 - 2. Or it may sometimes mean stepping aside to let someone else do it.
 - 3. It may even mean doing one job to free up someone else for another job (**Acts 6:1-4**).
 - A. This task of providing for the Hellenist widows was an important one and it had to be done.
 - B. The apostles could have done it. But of all the Christians there, the apostles were the best suited for prayer and teaching the word. So seven other men were chosen to handle this task.
 - C. That didn't mean these seven men were incapable of prayer or teaching the word.
 - I. You don't have to look very far ahead to see one of these men - Stephen - doing a fine job of teaching God's word.
 - II. Stephen was well equipped to teach, but he must have understood that the apostles were even more well equipped for it.
 - III. Stephen didn't have an "I want to be a preacher" mindset. He had an "I want God's word to be preached" mindset and so he did this other task to

allow the best teachers to focus on teaching.

IV. Stephen kept his eyes on the goal.

- d. During our assembly times, the goal needs to be edification. We may each have something to offer, but the end result needs to be edification (**1 Corinthians 14:26**).
1. Things were a little different back then when they had the miraculous spiritual gifts that we no longer need nor have today.
 2. So back then, a man might be able to show God's power by speaking in a tongue. A different man might be able to reveal some new piece of God's will with a prophecy. Another man might have a psalm and yet another might have a teaching.
 3. But the mindset couldn't be, "hey everybody, look what I can do!" It had to be edification. It had to be building up the church to be better and stronger.
 4. They needed to do a good job not to show their own abilities, but to edify the church (**1 Corinthians 14:12**).
 5. And sometimes, the best thing a man could do for the church's edification was to just be quiet (**1 Corinthians 14:27-33**).
 - A. At most, three men were to speak in tongues - and then only if there was an interpreter. And at most, three men were to prophecy.
 - B. So what if you were the fourth prophet? Then your ability was not needed on that day.
 - C. Suppose the fourth prophet spoke anyway, and the fifth, and the sixth spoke too. The assembly could well become a jumbled confusing mess. Look at verse 33. "God is not the author of confusion."
 - D. There may be a task I want to do or a role I want to play, but if it's not for the edification of the church, then I had better not do it.
 6. The goal is not to show off our abilities or to make sure that every single member has their turn up front. The goal is edification.
- e. Let's keep our eyes on the goal.

V. Conclusion

- a. There is a lot of work that can be done for the Lord. And if we are all excited to do it, then that's wonderful.
- b. But let's realize that not every person is suited to every task.
- c. And if I am incapable of doing something but I attempt it anyway, then I could cause more harm than good.
- d. That doesn't mean we have to forget about the things we can't do or leave them undone.
 1. It just means that we may need to grow some more as Christians first.
 2. Or it may mean that we need to step aside and let someone else do it.
- e. The goal needs to be doing God's will. Let's accomplish that goal by...
 1. ...stepping up and doing the jobs we can do.
 2. ...improving our abilities so that there's more we can handle.
 3. ...and, when it's necessary, by stepping aside to let others do the jobs that they are best suited for.
- f. Let's accomplish God's will as a group in the best way that we can.
- g. If you have been putting your own wishes ahead of God's will, then I urge you to change that today.