

Reality Check

Sermon:

Good Morning/Afternoon! There is a note page in your bulletin so you can follow along with today's message; if you didn't get one and would like one, please raise your hand and one of our men will bring you one.

I hope everyone had a wonderful Christmas! Thank you to those of you that came to Monday night's Christmas Eve service...for our family that's what kinda gets the actual Christmas celebration started, and as usual, you guys didn't disappoint...you sang like a choir of angels!

Pastor John finished up our Advent series...The Manger...as he spoke about the birth of Christ...our Savior. Which leaves us now looking down the barrel of 2019. The New Year with all its hopes and promises. A chance for us to do things differently, to be better in some way.

This time last year, the results of a YouGov online poll was released, revealing that 32 percent of Americans resolved to not make any resolutions for 2018. (Wouldn't making that resolution also break it?) So most of us made some kind of goal for the New Year. Here are some of the most popular resolutions according to that poll:

- Focus less on appearance
- Focus more on appearance
- Get a new hobby
- Stop or cut down on smoking or drinking
- Make new friends
- Get a new job
- Learn a new skill
- Read more books
- Get more sleep
- And in a 3-way tie for first place... Save money, exercise, and start our diets!

Or as we like to call it at our house...Monday. Everything has to start Monday, right? We can't just start immediately, or even tomorrow...when I scarf down one too many slices of pizza on Wednesday... "The diet starts Monday; might as well take the rest of the week off!"

Did you know that the 17th of January has an actual holiday associated with it? According to research conducted by Strava, the social network for athletes... “Quitter’s Day” ... is the day when most people, will give up on their health or fitness-based resolutions for the New Year.

So, according to that study, if you bought yourself a year-long gym membership for Christmas, chances are fairly high that the most exercise you’re going to get from it is writing that check every month. But your heart rate will probably increase when you do it, and that has to count for something, right?

Now, don’t let me discourage you...if you’re serious about getting in shape or working on any other aspect of your life this year, I support you 100 percent! In fact, I began my own journey to re-construct my temple several months ago, and I’m keenly aware of the challenges you’ll face along the way...things like Christmas cookies.

So let me encourage you to take on those challenges and to see them through, especially if your resolutions include the things that many Christians resolve for each New Year...read their Bible every day and be more of the person that God wants them to be.

Turn with me in your Bibles this morning to the book of Exodus, chapter 3. The message today is entitled Reality Check. If you didn’t bring your Bible, haul out that cell phone and open up the Baxter Road Bible Church app, or YouVersion, and follow along.

Just a side note here...if you have a smart phone (and most of us probably do) you can’t use “I left my Bible at home” as an excuse to not follow through with your resolution to read the Bible more often. You can even get it read to you while you’re driving from one place to another! Take advantage of the world’s tech to meet a spiritual goal.

This morning (afternoon) we’re going to take a look at Moses and his reasons for quitting a challenge that certainly wasn’t a resolution that he made for himself, but a task that God put in front of him...in this case, he was trying to quit before he ever got started!

OK...so, Exodus - Moses is in Midian shepherding his father-in-law's sheep. When we first get introduced to Moses in Exodus 2, we read that as a young man he killed an Egyptian that was beating a Hebrew. Later, when he stepped in to stop a fight between two other Hebrews, the men asked him if he was going to kill one of them if they didn't stop fighting.

At that point Moses knew the cat was out of the bag, and sure enough, he heard that Pharaoh had put a hit out on him. So he ran, met up with a girl, got married and settled in for what he probably thought would be an uneventful life.

Until that day he passed a bush that was on fire, but not being burned up. And he just had to go take a closer look.

Chapter 3:4-11: *⁴When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called out to him from the bush, "Moses, Moses!" "Here I am," he answered. ⁵"Do not come closer," he said. "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶Then he continued, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.*

⁷Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people in Egypt, and have heard them crying out because of their oppressors. I know about their sufferings, ⁸and I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and to bring them from that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey — the territory of the Canaanites, Hethites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. ⁹So because the Israelites' cry for help has come to me, and I have also seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them, ¹⁰therefore, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh so that you may lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

¹¹But Moses asked God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

Here comes Reality Check #1: It's not about you. If we look at the things God asks us to do and measure them against what we are capable of, we will respond the same way Moses did in verse 11: "Who am I?" And rightfully so. Even the most accomplished among us at some point is going to be faced with something they have no control over, and instantly get a sense of just how frail, and small, and helpless they are. Anyone feel like that during the earthquake?

Which leads us right into Reality Check #2: It's God who makes you able to do what he commands. Moses recognized God for who he was, so the statement God makes to him in verse 12 should be a huge encouragement! *"I will certainly be with you"* But maybe it was 17th of January or something, because Moses is looking for the door. He wants a way out of this thing that God is calling him to do.

Verse 13: *Then Moses asked God, "If I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what should I tell them?"*

And God's response in verse 14: *"I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you."*

God instructs Moses to gather up the elders of Israel, tell them what God has promised to do for them, then go to Pharaoh. God tells him that Pharaoh won't listen and that there will be plagues sent against Egypt but that in the end, Israel will leave Egypt with all the wealth they'll need.

Here's a condensed version of the first several verses of Chapter 4:

Moses Says: But what if they don't believe that you and I are actually having this conversation?

God Says: Check this out...throw down that staff, and I'll make it a snake. Hide you hand in your cloak, and I'll make it leprous, then return it to its original condition next time you put it in there. If they don't believe after that, toss some river water on the ground and it'll turn to blood.

Moses Says: But I can't talk so good.

God Says: I made your mouth; I'll operate it. You'll speak my words; in the way I want people to hear them. Now GO!

Moses Says: Verse 13 - *Please, Lord, send someone else.* Ah hah! Now we're getting to the real issue...

Zig Ziglar writes: My brother, the late Judge Ziglar, loved to tell the story of the fellow who went next door to borrow his neighbor's lawnmower. The neighbor explained that he could not let him use the mower because all the flights had been canceled from New York to Los Angeles. The borrower asked him what canceled flights from New York to Los Angeles had to do with borrowing his lawnmower. "It doesn't have anything to do with it, but if I don't want to let you use my lawnmower, one excuse is as good as another."

Moses didn't want to let God borrow his lawnmower. He's giving excuse after excuse as to why he isn't the guy God wants for this task. Problem is, each obstacle he comes up with, God shows him how he will give Moses the power to overcome it. But we finally get to the real reason why Moses is arguing... "I just don't wanna go."

Ready for Reality Check #3? Your life is not your own.

Paul makes that pretty clear in his first letter to the Corinthians; in chapter 6 verses 19 and 20 he writes: ¹⁹*Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;* ²⁰*you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. And he references that same thought again in the next chapter - You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of people. (1 Corinthians 7:23)*

There's a kind of running joke around nearly every workplace, and it's no different here. When things start to pile up and the stress levels start to rise, I walk into Pastor John's office and tell him I quit. To which he never fails to respond "Slaves can't quit, they have to be sold."

Romans 6:16-18 reads: ¹⁶*Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?* ¹⁷*But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed,* ¹⁸*and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.*

When you give your life to God, you give all of it. You become a slave of righteousness, you commit to serve God wherever he has need of you, and willingly

take on an obligation to do whatever the Master requires of you. That means no excuses, but man...we have a ton of them don't we?

Excuses like: "I'm not worthy to serve God." Just like Moses' "Who am I?", we bow out of serving God in some way because of our own sense of unrighteousness. We might wonder how God could possibly use someone like us? Maybe it's not even that we actually feel unworthy to be a part of God's plan for us, but it's an excuse that at least sounds spiritual.

In 1 Corinthians 1:26-27 Paul writes- ²⁶*Brothers and sisters, consider your calling: Not many were wise from a human perspective, not many powerful, not many of noble birth.* ²⁷*Instead, God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong.*

Knowing you aren't worthy to serve God is a great starting point for service. It's where Simon Peter started from when Jesus called him. After witnessing the power and holiness of Jesus, Simon "*fell down at Jesus' knees, saying 'Go away from me, for I'm a sinful man, Lord!'*" (Luke 5:8b). Like he did with Simon, Jesus uses humble people to do his work.

I was an honor graduate from the Survival Equipment Specialist technical school at Chanute Air Force Base, Illinois in late 1986. I arrived at my first assignment a few weeks later and came into the shop as a 19-year old airman...thinking that I had learned all I could learn...everything I needed to know to be the leader that I had shown I was in school.

I was pretty disappointed that after spending months learning all about parachutes and ejection systems that I had been assigned to a unit that did nothing but sew stuff. We manufactured and repaired anything from pencil pouches to massive fabric pieces for portable aircraft hangars. I felt I should have been part of the other shop on base that did all the parachute and life preserver work for the pilots...I had shown how good I was, and certainly they could really use someone like me over there. Instead, I was promptly plunked down behind a little Singer sewing machine, where I spent the majority of my days sewing patches on uniforms and small dust covers for various pieces of equipment.

I was amazed that the leadership of this shop would waste someone of my obvious talent on such a meaningless task. I knew everything there was to know about thread and fabric types, what kinds of seams to use for different upholstery and coverings depending on their intended use...heck, I was one of the best when it came to the inspection and repair of the sewing machines themselves!

After several weeks of grumping, I was finally called up to the "big leagues" where I was told I'd be helping to make a hundred covers for the outside storage area. The first step was to sew some fabric together...piece of cake. I walked into a room with 2 large sewing machines lined up in front of a rack of 8...50yd rolls of 4-1/2 foot-wide heavyweight vinyl.

My job was to sit at the first machine and stitch all those rolls into one continuous piece of fabric, while the man in front of me unfolded what I had sewn together and put another seam across the top to make it waterproof.

Suffice it to say I was unaware that making 8 rolls of material into a single sheet was even a thing, and after enduring several hours of "Faster!", "Your seams aren't even!", "Cut that apart and do it again!", and my favorite..."Waitin' on you, honor graduate!"...I finally got some humility beat into me, and became a student again.

When it comes to serving God, competence isn't everything. True, some areas of service require a certain level of ability, but there are often ways to serve that require nothing more than for you to show up with a willingness to be humble and teachable. The best part is that God uses that work to expand your competence and capacity for further service.

And that kind of puts a big ol' hole in the middle of another excuse..."I don't have the right skills to serve God."

Are you seriously saying that you avoid serving because you are worried that you will serve inadequately? Well, I suppose you're in good company; Moses did the same thing. This great man of God that led an entire nation out of captivity and into the land promised them by God himself started out by telling God that he didn't have the skills to pull off any of it.

I love this line I read recently in an article written by author Brad Archer: “The Lord is not constrained by the quality of our efforts; he brings himself glory in all circumstances. So serve him in your mediocrity, and he will glorify that service as he sees fit.”

Probably nowhere else in the Bible is that statement so well illustrated as it is in the life of Moses, and what an encouragement to us today. “The Lord is not constrained by the quality of our efforts...” But The Lord does have a requirement for you to at least put forth some effort.

Reality Check #4 - You're too comfortable where you are.

I know last Sunday seems so far away after a busy Christmas, but maybe you'll recall this sentence I ran past you in last week's message:

“This God you say you serve is calling you to action! He's asking you to herald his birth. It's not enough to just say you have faith, or to feel good about where you're at in your relationship with Jesus. There comes a time that after seeing Christ, we must be involved in sharing him.”

Sharing can be preaching, whether from a pulpit or on a sidewalk, but I'll tell you it's not the most effective method.

Sharing can be sitting down and having a one-on-one with someone. That's probably more effective than preaching, although again, depending on the context of the meeting probably only marginally more effective than standing up here.

But really, the best way to share Christ is to live a life of service to him. For a lot of people, that can actually be very uncomfortable. Good! To live life as a servant of Christ means he's present in everything you do. When you go to work, you serve him with your diligence, your timeliness, your effort in doing your work to the best of your ability, and stretching past that to continually learn more to increase your ability.

When you play, you play hard, but you do so in a way that shows that Christ is present in your life. I can be a little bit of a speed freak sometimes, but I know that when I'm around other bikers I need to keep that throttle hand under control. If I

rocket along disregarding the rules of the road, I'm damaging my ability to show people Jesus in the way I live. Our language, our choices in entertainment, all that comes into play.

I used to be a pretty big fan of the TV show "Sons of Anarchy". Some of you may be familiar with it. I started watching it mostly because I'm wrapped up in biker culture, and even though it's not entirely accurate, it's entertaining. But...it's a violent show. One night my daughter was stepping out to see a movie that I wasn't a fan of; I forget what it was...but I challenged her on her choice, asking her if she believed that Jesus was with her everywhere she went. If she believed that, was this something she'd be OK with Jesus watching?

And don't you know she threw that same thing back at me? "Does Jesus like Sons of Anarchy, cuz I notice you watch that quite a lot." It's tough to laugh something like that off. She went to the movie anyway, but I stopped watching the show and haven't since...partly just to prove a point to her, I guess.

But also because I think maybe that was really the first time that I realized that what I considered to be my personal choices...colored my ability to really live like Jesus was important to me. And it was uncomfortable to change. I didn't want to change. But change was needed.

Is God telling you to do something for his kingdom? Is he telling you that change is needed? Maybe he isn't talking to you through a burning bush in the desert, and maybe he isn't telling you to go lead several hundred thousand people out from under the thumb of a Pharaoh and into a new land.

But here's your Reality Check...he does have work that he has set aside for you to do. It's not about you and your abilities; it's about being humble and teachable and allowing him to empower you, to enable you and to equip you for that work. You were bought with a price, the blood of his son, whose birth we just celebrated! That price that was paid frees you from sin, and in that freedom you have become a slave to righteousness. So bust out of your comfort zone and live to serve him every day in this New Year. That's a New Year's resolution that is worth...not giving up on.

May God bless you and keep you in the coming year! Let's pray.