

MOSES: The Servant of God

F. B. Meyer, B.A

No Copyright

~ out-of-print and in the public domain ~

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

NOBLE TO THE CORE

“And Moses said, Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets” (Numbers 11:29).

UNINTERRUPTED success is hard to bear, much more so than perpetual trial. This was the moral of the story of the plains of Capua, where the demoralization, wrought in the troops of Hannibal by the enervating climate, wrought more havoc than the prowess of the legions of Rome. Many who were vigorous and energetic when climbing the steep cliffs of adversity, have succumbed to petty temptations in days of sunny prosperity.

If it should be debated as to whether sunshine or storm, success or trial, were the severer test for character, the shrewdest observers of human nature would probably answer that nothing so clearly shows the real stuff of which we are made as prosperity; because this of all tests is the severest. When the younger son came to possess the portion of goods that fell to him, he went down to feed swine.

For some two years Moses had been borne along on a flowing tide. Through faith in the living Lord, he had vanquished the proudest monarch of his time; had conducted nearly three millions of people through the wilderness wastes without a settled commissariat; had disciplined an unorganized multitude into a mighty host, with a code of legislation and ritual which is the admiration of all thoughtful men. This was success enough to turn the head of any ordinary man; nor could we have wondered if he had shown signs of undue elation and pride.

But the two incidents which we are now to consider show how absolutely simple and humble he had remained amid a very summer of success.

ELDAD AND MEDAD

In condescension to his weakness, his Almighty Friend appointed seventy colleagues to bear with him the burden of the people; and concerning them the somewhat ominous announcement is made that **“the Lord came down in a cloud, and took of the spirit that was upon him and gave it unto them”** (Numbers 11:25).

I do not agree with those who think that there was any diminution of the spirit that rested upon Moses. It is very difficult to speak of the sub-division of spirit.

You cannot draw it off from one man to others, as you draw off water. The whole Spirit of God is in each man, waiting to fill him to the uttermost of his capacity. It seems to me, therefore, that nothing more is intended than to affirm that the seventy were “**clothed upon**” with the same kind of spiritual force as that which rested upon Moses.

In each case of those thus anointed, the accession of spiritual force was marked by the sudden breaking forth of prophecy; reminding us of that memorable day, of which this was a miniature, when “**they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance**” (Acts 2:4). May we not say that the entrance of the Holy Ghost in fulness to the heart of man will always lead to the utterance of thoughts that strive for expression, as the ocean wave sweeps along the sea wall seeking for the inlet where it may expend itself!

For sixty-eight of them the power of utterance was only spasmodic and temporary. “**They prophesied**”. Emblems are they of those who, beneath some special influence like that which cast Saul down among the prophets suddenly break out into speech and act, and give promises not destined to be fulfilled.

Two, however, of the selected number, who, for some reason, had remained in the camp, suddenly became conscious of their reception of that same spirit, and they, too, broke out into prophecy, and appear to have continued to do so. Instantly a young man, jealous for the honour of Moses, carried to him the startling tidings, “**Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp;**” and as he heard the announcement, Joshua, equally chivalrous, exclaimed, “**My lord Moses, forbid them!**” eliciting the magnificent answer, “**Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD’S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!**”

It was as if he said, “Do you think that I alone am the channel through which the Divine influences can pour? Do you suppose that the supplies in the being of God are so meager, that He must stint what He gives through me, when He gives through others? If it should please Him to create new stars, must He rob the sun of its light to give them brilliance? Is the gratification of a mean motive of vanity a matter of any moment to me, who have gazed on the face of God? Besides, what am I, or what is my position, amongst this people, compared with the benefit which would accrue to them, and the glory which would redound to God, if He did for each of them all that He has done for me?”

This is the spirit of true magnanimity.

A spirit of self-aggrandizement is set on retaining its exclusive position as the sole depository of the Divine blessing; though this has the certain effect of forfeiting it, so that fresh supplies cease to pass through. But whenever the eye is single for the glory of God, and position is looked upon only as his gift to be used for his glory, and when the spirit is concentrated in one eager and intense desire to see his will done, the glory of that light extinguishes the fires of ambition, and the faithful servant is willing to be anything or nothing, if only the Divine purpose is accomplished.

There is no test more searching than this. Am I as eager for God's kingdom to come through others as through myself? In my private intercessions can I pray as heartily and earnestly for the success of my competitors as for my own? Can I see with equanimity other and younger men coming to the front, and showing themselves possessed of gifts which I always considered to be my special province? Am I conscious of the rising of jealousy or envy when my leadership is subordinated to the claims of rivals? Should I be willing that the will of God should be done through another, if he suited God's purpose better than myself? Few of us could answer these questions without the sense of almost insuperable difficulty in assuming the position taken up by Moses when he heard that Eldad and Medad prophesied in the camp.

And yet, in so far as we fall short of that position, do we not betray the earthly ingredients which have mingled, and mingle still, in our holy service? Yes; it is ourselves that we serve our schemes, and plans, and selfhood. And if we were to eliminate from Christian service all that has emanated from these sources, what a scanty handful of gold-dust would be left!

Oh, when shall we be able to say, "**Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets,**" and view with thankful joy the leveling up of all Christians to the table-land of our gifts and grace?

This, however, can never come till we have learnt to spend long hours with God; till we have been taken into his secret place; till we have come to care for his honour more than for our own; till we have become absorbed in the one consuming passion to see Him glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe. "**The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.**"

Thus does the herald star, which on the fringe of night has told weary eyes that the dawn is near, sink contentedly into a very ocean of light; though not itself less bright because every inch of space is illuminated with a luster like its own.

MIRIAM

We remember her as the little black-eyed, watchful maiden who stood beneath the tall palm-trees of the river's brink to watch the bulrush ark; and again as the heroic woman who answered the deep bass of the delivered hosts by leading the women's chorus on the shores of the Red Sea. What did she not owe to Moses? But for him she must have been an unknown slave girl, mated to a toiler in Pharaoh's brickfields, the mother of slaves. But now she was free, and the representative woman of an emancipated race, through the brother whom she had rocked in her arms.

Ah, it was sad, indeed, that, at the age of ninety, she should turn against him whom she had tended and loved; and that she should poison the mind of the elder brother who had been his spokesman and right hand.

They spoke against him because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married. Some have thought that Moses had married a second time; but it seems wiser, since the death of Zipporah is not mentioned, to consider the reproach as applicable to her, especially as she probably bore in her complexion the brand of another race.

“**Cushite** “ means *black, or dark-complexioned*. She had comparatively recently come to the camp; and for some time Miriam may have been carefully watching her, with the result, that her whole woman’s nature revolted from the thought of having to resign her primacy to such as she was. It is always difficult to see another filling the place which we have looked upon as ours, especially if we are conscious of being able to fulfil its duties better.

How well we can imagine her talking to Aaron and to the women with whom she was intimate, about these “Cushites,” until she had raised quite a storm of feeling. This was bad enough in her; but how much worse in Aaron, who held the proudest position in the camp?

The function of Moses was temporary, and would pass away with his life; whereas that of Aaron was permanent to himself and his heirs. Yet Aaron could not but feel how vast was the gulf between him and his brother. And out of this there sprang the jealousy which made Zipporah its excuse.

“And they said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses; hath He not spoken also by us?”

How easy it is to disguise jealousy beneath the cloak of zeal for the law of God; and to think ourselves immaculate when rebuking the faults of others.

But how did Moses act he who, years before, had felled an Egyptian with one blow of his fist? Did he pour out a torrent of indignation, assuring himself that he had just cause to be angry? Did he show them the door of the tent, and bid them mind their own affairs? Did he call on God to strike them down in his anger? Nothing of the sort. He answered not a word; for **“the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth”** (Numbers 12:3).

In his bearing he reminds us of Christ in the judgment-hall, who, **“when He was reviled, reviled not again.”**

Was this weakness, as some would say? Nay, verily; it was the exhibition of colossal spiritual strength. Only a Samson with unshorn locks could have acted thus. It is the weak man who gives blow for blow; who blurts out his wrath; who cannot control the passion of his spirit. Only the strong man can be perfectly still under provocation, holding himself in, and turning the vehemence of his soul into the heat of an intense love.

It may be well to give some closing rules as to the attainment of this meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price.

First; let us claim the meekness of Christ.

This, of course, was not possible for Moses in the direct way in which it is for us. And yet doubtless, in his case also there was a constant appeal for heavenly grace. The humility of JESUS did not forbid his proposing Himself as our model for meekness.

“Learn of Me,” He said; **“for I am meek and lowly in heart.”**

The likeness of the dove that rested on his head, and the lamb to which he was compared, were the sweet emblems of his heart. And in moments of provocation there is nothing better than to turn to Him and claim his calm, sweet silence, his patience and meekness, saying, “I claim all these, my Lord, for the bitter need of my spirit.”

Let us cultivate the habit of silence.

Express a thought, and you give it strength and permanence; repress it, and it will wither and die. Wisely did the Apostle James lay such stress on the use of the tongue, as the rudder and bit of the whole body; for its use will instantly determine whether the heart is filled with evil or peace. You will often hear it said that the best way of getting rid of an importunate passion is to let it out and have done with it. It is, however, a very mistaken policy. Utterance will give it vigor, and will sow another crop that will soon fruit again. Silence will kill it; as ice kills fish when there are no vent-holes by which they can come up to breathe.

Learn to be still; to keep the door of the lips closed; to give, indeed, an answer when it is asked, and an explanation when it is needed to correct a misapprehension. But for the most part imitate the example of David, who was prepared for his victory over Goliath by the previous victory which he won over his elder brother in the soft answer returned to his insulting questions. **“Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath”** (James 1:19).

Next, consider the harm done by the aggressors to themselves.

The cloud removed from over the tent, as if it must leave the very spot where the culprits stood; and behold, Miriam was leprous, white as snow.

There is a piece of profound instruction here; you cannot say unkind or bitter things about another, without hurting yourself more than you hurt him. Like the boomerang of the savage, curses come back to the spot from which they start. And the wronged one may well forget his own anguish as he pours out his soul in pity and prayer for those who, in dealing out their bitter words, have contracted the blot of leprosy on themselves.

Let us leave God to vindicate our cause.

Moses trusted God to vindicate him; and the Almighty God **“rode upon a cherub and did fly; yea, He did fly upon the wings of the wind.”**

The Lord heard all that was said, and spake suddenly to the three, and told them that whilst He would speak to others in visions and dreams, it was to Moses only that he would speak face to face, so that he might behold the Lord’s form.

“Wherefore then,” said He, **“were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?”**
(Numbers 12:8)

This is the secret of rest to cultivate the habit of handing all over to God; as Hezekiah did, when he spread out Sennacherib's letter in the house of the Lord.

Commit yourself to Him that judgeth righteously, in sure certainty that He will vindicate you, and bring out your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday.

Let us give ourselves to intercessory prayer.

Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, "**Heal her now, O God, I beseech Thee**" (ver. 13).

When we pray for those who have spitefully used and persecuted us, it is marvellous how soon the soul gets calm and tender. We may begin to do it as a duty, in obedience to the command; we soon discover it to be as snow on a fevered forehead, cooling and soothing the soul.

Do not wait to feel an inspiration - act on the sense of what your Lord requires; and as you pray, in the calm and holy presence of God, in the secret where your Father is found, you will find that unworthy thoughts will sink, as silt is precipitated to the river-bed, leaving the stream pellucid and clear.

And the Lord heard his servant's prayer, and healed Miriam; but the whole host was delayed a week through her sin. We may be forgiven; but these outbreaks of sin always entail disaster and delay. Neither we nor others can be where we might have been had they not occurred.

~ end of chapter 23 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
