

Getting to the end of Ourselves: Disqualified to be Chosen

This lesson today marks the 8th in a series about getting to the end of ourselves. After the introductory lesson the next four lessons were focused on four beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount. We discussed the concepts of:

1. Being broken to be whole (poor in spirit)
2. Mourning to be happy
3. Being humbled to be exalted (meek shall inherit the earth)
4. Being authentic to be accepted (pure in heart shall see God)

Those lessons were intended to help us see **that true blessings & true fulfillment is found at the end of ourselves**. And when we follow the teaching of Jesus our **lives are often countercultural & counterintuitive**.

The last two lessons in this series were intended to help us see that when we get to the end of ourselves and finally realize **we aren't strong enough, smart enough, or talented enough, then we are in the best position to be used by God in significant ways**. We discussed the concepts of:

5. Being empty to be filled (jars, better to be filled than full)
6. Being helpless to be empowered (self-reliance of men, lame man at the pool)

So, with the lesson today we will add another brick in the wall of getting to the end of ourselves. And after today I will plan to present two more lessons to conclude this series.

Have you ever had the uncomfortable, unpleasant experience of wanting to have a conversation with someone about spiritual things but you failed to get up the nerve to start the conversation **because you felt unqualified**? Maybe it was a co-worker that you could never find the right moment to talk to about their soul before they left for another job or retired.

Or have you felt the need to get out of your comfort zone and try to do some spiritual work you've never tried? (bible study, follow-up w/visitors, check on members who haven't been seen in a while, participate in leading worship, etc) **But again, you felt unqualified so you didn't follow through.**

Most likely we've all had these kind of experiences where we felt unqualified because we didn't have enough knowledge of the Bible, or we felt unqualified because we didn't have any experience in these areas. Essentially what we do is disqualify ourselves.

In all of the lessons in this series we have read about encounters Jesus had with people who were at the end of themselves and who felt unqualified to be used for God in significant ways.

The book of Acts has a well-known & powerful story about an encounter with Jesus. In Acts 7:58 a young man named Saul is briefly mentioned as the one who watched after the coats of the people who stoned Stephen to death. Luke makes it clear which side Paul was on at this time (Acts 8:1). It is no surprise that Saul becomes more involved in the persecution of the church –Acts 8:3

As Acts 9 begins Luke records how Saul continued to persecute the church by taking things a step further. He asked the high priest for permission to go beyond Jerusalem to arrest Christians and bring them back for punishment. (Acts 9:1-2)

But as Luke records in Acts 9:3-9 there is a turning point moment, not just for Saul, but for the history of the world. In fact, the phrase “**on the road to Damascus**” has come to refer to a sudden turning point in one's life.

The journey from Jerusalem to Damascus was @ 135 miles and estimated to have been a 6-day trip on foot. Saul is almost there when a blinding light knocked him to the ground. Of course, God is the power behind the light and blinding of Saul. That is no surprise, but what might be surprising to us is that God doesn't finish him off. This guy has been responsible for some horrible things done to God's people.

And what's even more surprising is that God wants to forgive this guy! And even still, it doesn't stop there because God wants to change Saul's heart to make him a leader of the church.

Let's think about this. If anyone was disqualified for leadership, shouldn't it have been a man who murdered believers and organized search-and-destroy missions against the church?

Why was God interested in Saul? It's not like Jesus needed him to help his cause. The church was already winning converts and producing leaders. **Could something bigger be going on here? Was God sending a message to the world and even still to us today?**

We, nor anyone else would have ever selected a man like Saul to be a co-worker in the kingdom of God. We would likely reason that the standards for being a disciple of Christ are very high and someone like Saul is not qualified. While there is some truth to such reasoning, there is a corresponding consequence.

Many people, ourselves included, often come to the conclusion that we are not qualified to serve God because of our past. One of the saddest things you'll ever hear someone say is **"God doesn't want me. Not after what I've done"**. People assume that God is just like a lot of people they know. He writes us off. He holds grudges against us. And we can never meet His standards. We've made too many mistakes. Our failures are widely known and our reputation is ruined.

Don't you think Peter must have felt that way?

- Personally chosen by Jesus to be one of His 12 disciples
- Spent 3 yrs with Jesus being taught
- Jesus nicknamed him the Rock

But after Peter did the very thing Jesus told him he would do when he denied Jesus, he retreated to his old life and probably figured he was disqualified. He could have thought about what happened and remembered that Jesus told him he was going to screw up and viewed that as Jesus telling him he wasn't good enough to be one of His disciples.

Can you envision Peter talking to himself and saying, "I don't know what I was thinking by believing that I could be a disciple of Jesus. I was only fooling myself. I've wasted the last 3 years of my life." **Peter didn't feel very qualified to be a disciple of Jesus.**

Then on the day Jesus was resurrected an angel appeared to Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. The angel told them to go tell the

disciples about the resurrection, **but Peter is specifically mentioned in Mark's account** –Mk.16:7

John records that Peter and another disciple ran to the tomb of Jesus after hearing it was empty. Then after seeing the tomb they went to their own homes. Later that day Jesus appeared to 10 of the 11 disciples, then 8 days later He appeared to all 11 disciples. (Jn.20)

John also records in Jn 21 that Peter told some of his friends that he was going fishing (21:3). I don't want to read too much into the text, but maybe Peter went fishing **because that is what he felt qualified to do.** He didn't see himself as having the ability to serve Jesus.

After fishing all night and catching nothing, Jesus called to Peter and his friends from the shore. Jesus told them to cast their net on the other side of the boat if they wanted to catch some fish. When they tried it their net was so full they couldn't pull it in. One of the disciples told Peter it was Jesus on the shore and he jumped in the water and swam to shore. **After they ate Jesus had a conversation with Peter to tell him that he is still qualified.** Jn.20:15-19

Peter needed to know that his past didn't have to disqualify him from serving God. Jesus didn't write him off or hold a grudge against him. He said "follow me".

But it would be up to Peter to understand that while he wasn't strong enough, smart enough, or talented enough to serve God in significant ways, he could be used by God in significant ways if he was willing to get to the end of himself and let God display His power in him.

Or consider Moses. He had been raised like a prince and had the "world by the tail". But he lost his temper and in defense of his people, killed an Egyptian, and fled into exile in the desert. He went from being a prince of Egypt to the leader of a flock of sheep in the snap of a finger. Over the next 40 years he lived an entirely different life.

He had moved on from trying to help the Israelite people, and he probably figured that God had moved on too and found someone else to lead the Israelites. Then

he saw the bush on fire and when he approached it he heard the voice of God who told him that he would lead the Israelites out of Egypt. (Exo.3)

Do you see that Moses was still useful to God and that he would do significant things for Israel? He had disqualified himself for 40 years but God never gave up on him.

I'm sure that Peter & Moses had naysayers around them ready to bring up their past. "What were you thinking, Peter?" "I can't believe you threw Jesus under the bus." "And you, Moses. You're a has-been. And you smell like dirty sheep."

People love reminding others of their failures don't they. It makes them feel better about their own failures if they can magnify the failures of others and minimize their own.

Here's the thing. It's going to happen to us. It only becomes a problem if we listen to the naysayers. Our instinct is to allow our past failures to disqualify us from serving God. But we can learn from Peter & Moses that once we get to the end of ourselves and **surrender ourselves to God** the guilt and shame of our past is wiped away from our record.

We must admit this is a hard sell for many people. We have a hard time letting people off the hook for their failures. And as hard as it is to forgive, it's even harder to forget.

Let's consider Saul again. He came from a culture where memories went back many generations. His people remembered everything about their history. The good and the bad. No culture anywhere placed more stock in the past. See **Philippians 3** for an example.

Unfortunately, for Saul, it meant that people recalled what he had been up to recently. We see their response to Saul in **Acts 9:21, 26**.

Can you imagine their hesitation when Saul showed up the first time saying he was a Christian now? Do you think if he sat in someone else's seat that they had a problem with it? I'd say he had a pew all to himself.

To be fair this doesn't make sense to the human mind. This guy was a killer with blood still drying on his hands. **How is it possible that such a person could even be qualified to serve God?**

I think it is important to say that it would be irresponsible to accept someone into our midst without some kind of validation of legitimate repentance. With that being said we must understand the emphasis here is on the working of God to qualify people to be useful to Him. God had special plans for Saul and he knew his heart.

So, in Acts 9 we find Saul sitting quietly in Damascus, blind and confused about what has happened to him. At this point the Lord calls on Ananias to go see Saul and lay hands on him to restore his sight. The text indicates that Ananias had some reservations about going to talk to a man with a past like Saul's.

Do you recognize this as another way to disqualify ourselves from serving God in significant ways? Have you ever been afraid to put your life on the line in the service of God?

Saul, whose Gentile name was Paul, later wrote about numerous times that he could have allowed his fear to disqualify him from being useful to the cause of Christ – **2 Tim.4:14-18**

Let's get back to a point made earlier in the lesson about how we often allow our past to disqualify us from serving God.

What are you still carrying from your past that keeps you from greater service to God?

- Adultery? Study the scriptures about King David.
- Lying & deception? Abraham & Isaac knew a little about that.
- A sordid past? Rahab was once a harlot, but chosen by God.
- Anger & temper issues? James & John had that problem too.
- Ever dropped the ball at the worst time? John Mark did too.
- A string of bad relationships? Remember the woman at the well?

Maybe today it's your turn to face your obstacles. Jesus has a message just for you and it has nothing to do with your qualifications. It has to do with coming to the end of yourself, because that's when God can use you in the very best way.

By His grace, and by nothing you can offer, He chooses you!

It is fascinating that the very things that we think disqualify us are often the very things that God uses to qualify us. It's like Paul's thorn in the flesh. God told him "My strength is made perfect in weakness". 2 Cor. 12:9

And what was Paul's response? Thank you Lord for every obstacle in my life! When I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Cor. 12:9-10

The end of me is where I encounter the power and redemption of God, so that I can be used by God in significant ways. This is what allowed Peter to recover from denying Jesus. It is what allowed Moses to recover from running out on God's people. And it is what allowed Saul to forget about his past as a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man (1 Tim.1:13).

We hear all these things and nod our heads in agreement. We can't argue with the Scriptures and we recognize God has a perfect record of using anybody willing to be used. And we can agree that God can even use us, but we have one last excuse.

We say, "I'm just not ready". "I need to learn more first. I need to grow more. I don't want to jump into anything before I've done my homework".

It all sounds good, **but the problem is we don't ever graduate from the school of getting ready.** We need to participate in one more study group. We need to spend a little more time praying about it.

What did Saul do?

Ananias laid hands on him to restore his sight. He taught Saul the gospel of Christ and he was baptized. Then he spends a few days with the disciples in Damascus and starts preaching in the synagogues. Acts 9:17-20

Remember that this is just a few days after coming to Damascus with letters from the high priest allowing him to find and arrest Christians. And now he's preaching?

Don't say, "Yea, but this was Saul". He was on his way to learning and growing just like the rest of us. But God told him to get started, and he said yes. Saul didn't have all the information yet. He hadn't even made it home or told any of his friends about the changes in his life. But he was listening to God now.

Don't you think that somewhere inside Saul there was another voice that said, "Wait a minute! You're going way too fast here. There's so much you don't know yet. You're in over your head."

Friends, when God chooses you, He equips you! That is how the power of God shows through. He loves to take our messes and make them His masterpieces.

The biggest reason you can't get it done is the very reason He can –and maybe even the exact way He wants use you. What is it for you?

A limitation? A memory problem? An age? A fear? None of it matters.

Discard your disqualifications. Surrender them to God. Get to the end of yourself and you'll find you are in the right place to be used significantly by God.