



Deut. 3:23-29
When God says No

23 " Then I pleaded with the LORD at that time, saying:

24 'O Lord GOD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand, for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do anything like Your works and Your mighty deeds?

25 'I pray, let me cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, those pleasant mountains, and Lebanon.'

26 "But the LORD was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me. So the LORD said to me: 'Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter.

27 'Go up to the top of Pisgah, and lift your eyes toward the west, the north, the south, and the east; behold it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan.

28 'But command Joshua, and encourage him and strengthen him; for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which you will see.'

29 "So we stayed in the valley opposite Beth Peor.

I often talk about how hard it is for children to hear the answer “no” to anything that they have their heart set on and how angry and hurt they can be when they hear that, how they often feel unloved in that moment. But if we are honest, we would have to admit that it is not only children who hate to hear the word no, it is adults as well, and the more you have your heart set on something, the less happy you are with no as an answer.

I tend to think that a great mark of our growth in spiritual maturity, is our ability to hear the answer “no” without grumbling and rebelling. Certainly the fact that Moses is able to bear the answer of the Lord in these verses without rebelling, tends to confirm what is said of him in Numbers 12:3 that he was the humblest man on the face of the earth at the time.

Because you will remember that the life work of Moses, and that which God had been preparing him for throughout his whole life, was to lead the people of Israel out of bondage in Egypt and into the promised land. He had spent 40 years with them wandering in the wilderness and now they were on the very borders of Canaan. He had seen the Lord begin to bring about the conquest he had promised with the defeat of Sihon and Og, these two kingdoms on the east side of the Jordan, and now it is his heart’s desire to cross over the Jordan with his people. To stand on the land that was promised to Abraham and to see the wonders of the Lord as he defeated of the Canaanites.

Now it is not wrong, for him to ask the Lord for this privilege even though the Lord had said earlier that it would not happen. He is not after all asking for something that is in itself sinful, there is nothing inherently wrong with wanting to cross over the Jordan into the promised land. Now that may seem like an obvious point, but many is the time that Christians do desire things that are sinful and which we we would be ashamed to ask God to give us. In fact Brownlow North in his Six Simple Rules For Christians lists as number 4: ***If you are in doubt as to a thing being right or wrong, go to your room and kneel down and ask God’s blessing on it. (Col. 3:17). If you cannot do this, it is wrong. (Roms. 16:23).***

So the thing is not sinful, and his asking for it in prayer is not sinful either. In fact if something is our hearts desire and it is innocent, then we should carry it to the Lord in prayer. As James reminds us James 4:2 ***“Yet you do not have because you do not ask.”***

Also, Moses is merely asking to go over and see the land and the work of the Lord, he isn't asking to continue to be the leader of the people, he accepts that the leadership is now in Joshua's hands. So it isn't a pride issue.

But is he being presumptuous in this? After all, sometimes we get very angry with our own children when they ask us for something, not because what they are asking for is wrong, but because we have already said NO to the request. God had already said, you won't enter to Moses.

But we remember that God had also told Moses on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 32 that he was going to destroy Israel for breaking the covenant in the sin of the Golden Calf, and the intercession and prayer of Moses on their behalf was the means that God used to spare them. He withdrew his command, that time, Moses probably thought maybe he would withdraw it again this time.

But it was not to be, while God listened to Moses when he interceded on the behalf of Israel, he is not going to listen to Moses in this circumstance. He does not change his command, and his anger abides.

Now when Moses says in verse 26, "the LORD was angry with me on your account" there are two ways of understanding that, the first is that the Lord was angry with Moses because of the sin which their rebellion had provoked him to. You remember that when the people of Israel had grumbled for about the 9,000 time at Kadesh over the fact that there was no water, and saying yet again that it was better in Egypt, and he had become exasperated and said to them: "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" and contrary to the commands of the Lord he had struck the rock instead of speaking to it: the Psalmist says in Psalm 106:32

Psalm 106:32 They angered Him also at the waters of strife, So that it went ill with Moses on account of them;

33 Because they rebelled against His Spirit, So that he spoke rashly with his lips.

The other possibility on what he means lays the emphasis on "for your sakes" in that he means the Lord was using him as example to the people of what would happen if they themselves disobeyed the commands of the Lord and spoke blasphemously.

Regardless, the Lord says not to bring this before him again, he does however say that he may go up to the mountain and see afar off the land that the Lord will give to the people. He also tells Moses his responsibility now is not to continue to ask to go over, but instead to strengthen Joshua.

Now I want to suggest that we can learn several things from this,

1) ***The first is that we ourselves should be importunate in our prayers.*** We should be crying out to the Lord regularly offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ.

2) But we should also be reconciled to the fact that sometimes, when it is best, the Lord may answer No to our requests.

a) For instance, the Lord will sometimes answer NO when we ask him for relief when it is His purpose to cause us to depend upon him more, or to show that instead of taking us out of the valley of the shadow of death, he will be with us, and can sustain us there. Often the result of that will be that he is magnified in our eyes or the eyes of others. A famous example of that came when Paul asked for the thorn in his flesh to be removed:

2 Cor. 12:8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

In those situations, we must learn not to rebel but to be content with the portion God has given to us. As Matthew Henry puts it: **"If God does not by his providence give us what we desire, yet, if by his grace he makes us content without it, it comes much to one. "Let it suffice thee to have God for thy father, and heaven for thy portion, though thou hast not every thing thou wouldst have in this world. Be satisfied with this, God is all-sufficient."**

b) Sometimes he will answer our request NO because it is his desire that our brothers and sisters might grow and know him better, and even have the honor that we desired for ourselves. That too can be hard because it strikes at our pride, and asks us to die to self and rejoice for another.

It is hard sometimes to see God advancing his church through the hand of another, I'm sure it was no easy thing for Moses to have to hand over the reigns to Joshua on the very edge of the promised land. Sometimes a faithful minister went away after faithful and hard labor and while he was away, God caused a revival to break out under someone else's ministry. For instance that happened to McCheyne, he handed over his ministry at St. Peter's in Dundee and went to Europe to see if he couldn't be used to start a mission work to the Jews. While he was there, he became very ill and spent many weeks in bed, during that time he cried out to the Lord for his congregation back home in Dundee

The Lord in that time caused a revival to break out under William Burns and when he returned

"When Mr. McCheyne arrived at the conclusion of his trip through Europe, the blessing was still continuing. He saw such evidence of the revival for which he had been praying as to make his heart rejoice. He had no envy because another instrument was so honored in the place where he himself had labored with many tears and trials. In true Christian magnanimity, he rejoiced that the work of the Lord was done, by whatever hand."

In those moments we need to remember that the honor is not ours but the Lord's and that we are all instruments in his hands:

1 Cor. 3:5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?

6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

3) Sometimes we need to remember that God will say no for His own redemptive purposes, and that sometimes NO is the best of all answers. God often heard Moses for the sake of Israel, but in this case he didn't hear him for Himself. There is a parallel here God always hears Christ when he cries out for His people, but in order that we might be redeemed he had to say no to his one request he offered up on his own behalf:

Luke 22:41 And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, 42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."

43 Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him.

44 And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.