

Vayera And I Appeared Deliverance is Never Just a Quick Fix

Torah:	Ex. 6:2-9:35
Haftarah:	Ezek. 28:25-29:21
Brit Chadashah:	Rev. 16:1-21
Reading:	Donna p. 153 and Ps. 46.
Jewish Hero:	Hagar

L-rd's Table

This week's Torah portion deals with the initial confrontations with Pharaoh, where the battle lines are drawn in a year long struggle where all the spiritual resistance of Egypt is worn down until Pharaoh lets the people go. The Haftarah portion deals with the demolition of Egypt by the Babylonians and the New Testament portion speaks about the final plagues which will come upon the entire world as the wrath of G-d is poured out against those who resist His Word and persecute His people.

When Moses first gathered the elders, they were happy the L-rd was going to deliver them but mistook His great deliverance for a quick fix and were surprised that initially things got worse before they got better. A fascination with a quick fix often causes us to miss the point, because G-d's intervention in our lives and in the life of His people will always point to His final deliverance when we are all delivered from the Egypt of this world forever.

The portion opens with the L-rd reassuring Moses and the people that even though things were heating up and actually getting worse for the people, G-d would deliver them as He promised. The people are too discouraged to listen and Moses also expresses doubts in his speaking ability and may have been dismayed at the refusal of Pharaoh to take him seriously as an envoy of the L-rd.

A brief genealogy of Moses and Aaron is given, to connect them to the story of Jacob and Joseph and to indicate a transition where the final words of Joseph are going to be fulfilled. Moses regroups with his spokesman and the year long conflict between the gods of Egypt and YHVH begins. The plagues are divided between seven terrestrial signs and three celestial signs and this portion takes us through to the first celestial sign: Hail and fire.

There is an indication that none of the plagues impacted the children of Israel and G-d wanted to make sure that when Egypt eventually caved and let His people go it would be a demonstration of His power and not just a political move. Pharaoh played all kinds of tricks and tried to stall the process, hoping that one his false gods would defeat the G-d of Israel and he and his people paid a terrible price for their stubbornness.

Far too often, we consider our present condition as something we want to be delivered from and we forget that quick fixes don't deal with the real issues and if Pharaoh had let the people go before he and his gods were beaten into submission, he could have changed his mind and harassed the people all the way to Canaan. Egypt had to be left in so much chaos that Israel would not have to worry about an enemy at the rear as they headed to the Promised Land.

All and any spiritual claims Egypt had on Israel as well as all and any spiritual connections that existed between Egypt and Israel had to be broken to that Israel was truly set free and would not be leaving their captivity with any divided loyalties. The people had to see the mighty gods of Egypt crushed as they crumbled before the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They also had to see the high and

mighty Pharaoh, humbled, even humiliated before G-d, without the use of military force of any kind.

It was to be a battle with ten innings and G-d won each of them and all of them and left the people no doubt as to who was the ultimate champion and who was the only one worthy of their heart's allegiance and worship. Moses did not want to overthrow Pharaoh, nor did he want to take over the country. He wanted out of Egypt and it was not a quick fix, but a full redemption and a complete deliverance.

In our walk with the King, we need to be careful not to seek for a life long series of quick fixes, because His objective with us is just as clear as it was with Israel. He wants to deliver us out of bondage to the Egypt of this world and He wants to make sure that there are no spiritual ties between us and this fading world.

He does not just want to help us sort out our problems and give us an easier pilgrimage through this life. He wants us to come through this life spiritually intact and not with any divided loyalties or spiritual connections to this age.

When Moses showed up, the people did not understand how thorough the process of deliverance would be and sometimes we also forget that coming to faith is never a quick fix to enhance our personal portfolio and give us an edge as if success in this life were the goal of coming to faith in the King.

Sabbath observance and festival participation should be reminders that we will never belong to this age and have a different, higher destiny which we must never lose sight of. There is a colossal generational spiritual battle going on all around us as G-d sets things in place for the final deliverance of the righteous core.

This world has nothing to offer us which can do us any eternal good and the story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt should remind us that His intervention in our lives as people and as a community has a bigger agenda which will not be sidetracked into providing us with quick fixes.

Next week the final showdown occurs and our people are set free. I am living my life for the day when all the nations and generations of mankind can experience the final exodus from the Egypt of this world. Don't settle for quick fixes and only give your heart's allegiance to our final deliverance.

Egypt always runs out of steam, sooner or later. The sooner we live for the final later, the less time we will spend asking for quick fixes and the more time we will spend on Kingdom priorities, because in the long run, nothing else matters. How much do final things matter to you in your life and how much do they matter to us in the life of our congregation?

Torah carrier: Julie

Sermon: Renewal as a Means of Recharging With Regular Maintenance

Last week, I spoke about maintaining authentic Jewish space and doing all that we do in order to make sure that we maintain a firm grip on the truths of G-d's Word so that it translates into a vigorous biblical spirituality as we wander through this life on our way home to our Father's home in glory. Jewish space involves being persistently Sabbath powered and steadfastly festival driven as we celebrate both what our beloved Messiah accomplished for us by His death and resurrection and what He will do for us when His Kingdom finally comes and all the fading folly of this darkening world finally

dissipates forever.

As the L-rd moves to bring about the final victory of Messiah's kingdom, authentic Jewish space also means we understand that this will always be a two-pronged initiative. G-d will always work through His great nation, even as we wander through the nations and generations of this world, because in the Messiah, we will be a blessing to all the nations and generations of mankind as stewards of His Word.

This has never been an easy task and can only be accomplished if we hold the line and constantly come back to the Book and do not become distracted or disturbed by the carnal noise of this life and learn to recharge and perform regular maintenance so that we do not run out of gas along the way.

The key to renewal and to recharging and especially to regular maintenance is learning to rest and to put to rest any disturbances or distractions which would have us run with the world instead of walking with the L-rd and learning to rest in Him.

Recharging is the point of our Sabbath observance as we remind ourselves who He is, what He has done and what He wants us to do in response to our commitment to Him and to His coming kingdom. The Sabbath is a time when we unplug from the cares and toil of the week and rest and worship and focus on spiritual things as we study His Word. During the week, we may end up working like Martha, but on the Sabbath, we need to rest like Mary.

Now I get up very early on the Sabbath to pull my sermon together and to prepare to lead the service and I enjoy this time as I let the echoes of the week die down and listen for the sound of His Word and the voice of His Spirit. We do a lot in our lives by force of habit and I want to make sure that resting in the L-rd remains the biggest force of habit in my life. How about you? Resting in Him on the Sabbath plugs my spiritual battery in and recharges my life.

Now, most certainly, I want to be diligent as I go about the business of living so that I conduct my affairs decently, and in order. But this is not the point of our lives and it is not enough of a reason to give durable meaning to our lives. As believers, we want to make sure that we give first priority to the things which should come first in our lives and setting this special day aside every week for recharging keeps our focus sharp and fresh so that we do not stall spiritually.

It is not easy to live by spiritual priorities which we constantly refresh and recharge, but if we ever get too busy to recharge spiritually we will lose our spiritual balance and our authentic Jewish space will begin to evaporate because we are letting the things of world crowd out the things of the L-rd. Today is His time and we need to make the best of this special time.

We do this by gathering to worship and fellowship and pray and study as a means of unplugging from the six days where we labour, but which should never be the place where we live. The Sabbath should be the place where we live and truly come alive. We may not always be able to escape from some of the unforeseen eventualities of life, where we pull our neighbour's donkey out of the ditch or get called in to work at the last minute, but the discipline of rest on a weekly basis is the key to regular recharging and can often be a measure of how effective we are in giving the things of the L-rd the primary place in our lives.

Maintaining spiritual staples and making time to come apart from the business of life to rest in the L-rd, will mean that we will not come apart or fall apart by allowing lesser things to crowd out the most important things in our lives. Family does matter and there are any number of other valid demands which can be made on our time and our energy and personal resources, but if we understand that the L-rd enshrined a weekly day of rest so that we would always put Him first in our lives, we will not let

Him or His Word be crowded out of our lives.

Life is also composed of seasons and stages which we all have to manoeuvre through on our pilgrimage through this life to our final, permanent home in glory. Some of us come to faith early in our pilgrimage; others wander in the wilderness before they find deliverance which sets them on the right path.

Sometimes along the way, we may encounter crises or conundrums which will temporarily stall our lives, but if we still give the L-rd first place and rest and recharge in Him, the Sabbath can be a sanctuary for us in the L-rd whether things are going well or not in our lives.

The world to come should always matter more to us than the fading glory of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. In the Torah portion, I spoke about quick fixes where we look at our spirituality as a means of improving other areas of our lives, instead of being the point of our lives.

Life everlasting is what we have received from the L-rd and maintaining Sabbath observance allows us to recharge and not become so spiritually distracted that we have no time for the L-rd. Determining to eventually get around to the things of the L-rd is a precarious spiritual position.

Making the Sabbath the place where we recharge spiritually means that we will not spin out of control spiritually and lose touch with things that are really important, both in the short term and in the long term. Where we are in the L-rd is more important than where we are in the world at any stage of our lives and this is a life long discipline which will not always be easy to maintain.

Learning to be festival driven is an extension of dynamic Sabbath observance where we celebrate the passing seasons of the year and remember what the L-rd has done for us in the past and what He will continue to do for us until the Kingdom finally comes. If we live lives where the things of the L-rd are showcased and with the Sabbath and the festivals are the centre around which we make our lives turn, then we will be constantly renewed and recharged.

Spiritual maintenance means that we remove anything which tries to occupy the central place which the L-rd should occupy in our lives and in our time. With the festivals, it also means we make our years revolve around the L-rd and keep our lives focused on the coming Kingdom.

Renewal comes when we look at where we should be in the L-rd and take practical steps to return our use of time to weekly rest and annual celebrations of His purposes and His provision.

Today we are observing the L-rd's Table as part of our Sabbath observance and it is a way we can perform regular spiritual maintenance by examining ourselves and our lives and making sure that the things of the world are not crowding out the things of the L-rd in our life.

It is a monthly observance where we remind ourselves about who G-d is and what He wants from us and how we can find healing, forgiveness and renewal and come again to His mercy seat (sometimes also called the throne of Grace) to find mercy and grace to help in times of need.

Life in our world tends towards spiritual disorder because the enemy of our souls wants us to give our lives to things which do not satisfy, as we entertain ourselves to death and neglect to give our spirituality the central position it deserves.

The L-rd's Table is not a time where we check in, ask for forgiveness and put the things of the L-rd away for another month and go back to our spiritually muddled lives where the things of this world take

first place.

It is a time where we are lifted into the upper room and leave the turmoil of life behind and renew our surrender to Him and ask Him to look for three things.

We ask Him to see if there is any wicked way in us.

We ask Him to see if there are things we should be doing which we are neglecting.

We ask Him to help us to see that we are forgiven every time we ask for it and instead of trying to feel as bad as we can in order to be forgiven, we realize that He loves us and remembers that we are dust and will once again, both cast our sins into the depths of the sea and tread them underfoot.

His blood was shed once, but the power of the forgiveness which it accomplished can be accessed daily and constantly until the arrival of His Kingdom. On that day and at that time, the L-rd's Table which we partake in monthly shall become the wedding supper of the Lamb – a cosmic Passover Seder.

All tears will be wiped away and all brokenness will be made whole and sin shall no more seek to ravage and destroy because the enemy of our souls will no longer be allowed to prowl the earth, seeking for new victims to devour.

Daily, weekly, monthly, annually we are called to renewal where our faith in the Messiah and our obedience to His Word keep us walking in the light to be cleansed and strengthened and even repaired and healed and recharged.

This is the goal of authentic Jewish space, where we firmly grasp the truths of His word and allow them to be so integrated into our lives that they remain our greatest force of habit. Sabbath observance recharges our lives as we rest in what he has done, what He is doing and what is yet to come.

Let us prepare our hearts and let Him both renew us and recharge us so that we shine with His light and rest in His love and grace and discover all the peace and protection we need, time and time again.

There is nothing magical about the ceremony, but there is great power in confession and repentance as we seek His face and are renewed in the spirit of mind.

Are you certain that He loves you? Are you certain that He forgives you?

Are you certain that He is able to deliver you out of all tribulation and keep you from being snared and taken by the enemy, the flesh and the world?

Is the way you are living Kingdom centered?

Are you being renewed in Him?

Are you being recharged in Him?

Are you allowing His Spirit and His Word to perform regular maintenance?

Does your Sabbath observance need some attention?

Are you letting Him show you how to be Sabbath powered and festival driven?

Does His peace and joy reign in your heart and life because you are resting in Him?

Have you learned the discipline of spiritual rest?

Are you going to spend the rest of the day resting in Him?

Are you going to spend the week which is to come walking with Him?

Has it been good to be in the House of the L-rd?

Have you been fed? How is your spiritual diet doing?

Let's pray and then we will observe the L-rd's Table.