



Series: FOUNDATIONS:
Standing Firm – Moving Forward
Sermon: “Doing the Gospel – When?”
Scripture: James 1:19-27
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We are bringing to an end the summer long series called “Foundations.” As you recall, this summer series has been intended to remind and instruct the church on matters that are crucial for our life and future. We try to convey the need to stand firm – being deeply rooted in God’s mission for the church to develop fully-devoted followers of Jesus – while at the same time, encouraging one another to move forward to stretch and pursue God’s great dream for the church to glorify God and change the world one person at a time. During the last four weeks of this series, we have been centering in on this passage in James – especially these last couple of weeks – in the 22nd verse where James said, “Don’t just listen to the word, do what it says.” Doing the Gospel is a mandate of Jesus. We are aware that it is an essential theme of the Scriptures. We have learned that it is a central focus of a vital church, and many of us believe that it is an essential component of dynamic discipleship. We know WHY we are supposed to do the Gospel – faith in Jesus without works is dead, and works without saving faith in Jesus is nothing more than hollow religion. We know we are to begin to learn HOW to do the Gospel – by praying, looking and listening to the needs of our community, and developing a plan and then acting. We know that we can pray, look, listen and plan; but if we don’t take action to make God’s love real, it is a folly. We have also discussed WHERE we ought to do the Gospel – in our homes, in our church, and in our community. The question for this weekend is ...WHEN? When should we do the Gospel? The answer is really easy – do it now!

An excuse we commonly use to prevent ourselves from doing the Gospel here and now is the excuse of retirement. This is a fairly common excuse, especially among those of us who have raised their children and now live in the extended bliss of the empty nest. When our kids were living at home, and we were concerned about their spiritual development, doing the Gospel was often on our radar screen; but once they were gone, our minds begin to tend to other things, and we can lull ourselves into saying, “I have done my part, it’s somebody else’s turn – I’m retired!” Another group in this excuse category are the folks who have been around the church for a long time. They have been around since Jesus was a boy. They have seen and done it all. They have held every position that is possible to hold inside the church; and when they ran out of those, they made up a few other ones. Over time, something has kicked it, and the assumption has been made that it is time to ease into retirement and let other folks do the work.

How many of us have heard someone use this excuse? I find it interesting that there is no mention of retirement in the Bible. When it comes to doing the will of God and God’s work in your life in doing the Gospel, there is no retirement age. You have heard the old axiom that Christians have a retirement plan that is out of this world. It is true – but we only get to retire when we expire. As long as we live and breathe, we should be finding some way to be involved with doing the Gospel. Retirement is not a legitimate excuse. I have been looking through the Bible at some of the great characters of the Bible and some of the great characters of our faith. None of them retired; Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, Peter and Mary,

James and John, Paul – even Jesus – never retired when they had breath in their lungs.

One of my favorite Biblical figures is Moses. Chapter three in Exodus captures the story of God's call upon his life. This call came when he was eighty years old. He spent the next forty years until he was 120 responding to God's call upon his life. Moses spent the first forty years of his life as a 'somebody.' He was a prince in the court of Pharaoh in Egypt. He was a person who, when he walked into a room, the lights went on and the people did what he asked them to do. Actually, he probably did not ask them very much – he just told them and they would snap to attention. One day, after Moses had remembered his heritage, he saw an Egyptian slave driver beating a Hebrew slave and took matters into his own hands by killing the Egyptian slave driver. All of a sudden, Moses became a 'wanted man' and went on the run. He spent the next forty years of his life as a 'nobody,' hiding and trying to be inconspicuous. He got married and began to tend sheep in the middle of the desert of the Sinai peninsula. When this call of God comes upon his life, he spends the last forty years being obedient to God's calling and teaching that God can change the world by using a 'nobody.' Once Moses was God's person, retirement was out of the question. He walked in obedient response until the day he died.

Billy Graham is closer to Jesus now than he is to preaching in world-wide crusades. Billy Graham has said, "God's people never retire from doing God's work." Lyle Schaller has said, "The greatest untapped resource for the Kingdom in many churches are followers of Jesus who have retired from the secular workplace." They now have more time to invest doing God's work in their home, church, community and world. Bob Buford has written a book entitled "Halftime." The thesis of the book is that most of us spend the first half of our lives searching for success; and then, when we begin to capture those things we have searched for, we realize that does not fill the hole in our soul. Something switches inside of us, and we spend the last half of our lives searching for significance. Have you come to that place where you realize that success is not the goal, and have you started searching for significance? The other night, I was in Pittsburgh with several people from our congregation. Over the dinner conversations, one of the lay leaders of our congregation said, "My wife and I are asking ourselves what's next..." – what a great question. They are beginning to talk about significance. We should do the Gospel now in God's kingdom. What are you doing with your life that will have lasting significance?

The second excuse that I often hear when it comes to doing the Gospel here and now is the excuse of procrastination. People will say, "I will do my part someday – maybe tomorrow when I get around to it." In my first congregation, the favorite Sunday school class I had in that church was a class of people who were my age who used to carry a wooden coin in their pockets. The Sunday school class was called the 'Roundtuit's.' The wooden coin in their pocket had the word "tuit" (i.e., to it) on the side. It was a reminder that they carried in their pocket not to put off until tomorrow the things they could do for God today. They didn't want to wait until they got around to it – they wanted to be responsive to the call of God upon their lives.

Putting things off until tomorrow is a common excuse for many of God's children. Tomorrow is never found on God's calendar. Tomorrow sounds so innocent, but it can be life's most dangerous word. Tomorrow is a road that leads to a place called 'never' because tomorrow never comes. Tomorrow is the barred and bolted door that shuts people out of heaven. Tomorrow is the Devil's world. Those who expect to repent tomorrow usually die today. Do not count on tomorrow.

How many of us have procrastinated with God before? "I will accept Jesus when I get around to it." I have a clue for you – those who expect to wait until the eleventh hour to make things right with God often die at 10:30. "I will invest in my family's spiritual life when I get around to it." I want to warn you not to wait so long. "I will do such and such in the church. I will help the hurting. I will go to work camp. I will volunteer to teach. I will volunteer at the prison. I will serve at the shelter. I will give this. I will put off until I get around to it." When it comes to doing the Gospel, postponed obedience is disobedience, and tomorrow never comes.

Do you recall the story of Jesus talking with the people that were following him about the cost of discipleship? Jesus said, "Follow me." One of them said, "Let me go back and take care of my Dad until he dies." The loose translation of that is, "I will follow you someday, Jesus." Jesus said, "Let the dead bury the dead." The loose translation of that is, "Friend, tomorrow never comes." Another person said, "Let me go and say goodbye to my family." The loose translation is, "I will come tomorrow." Jesus said, "If one puts his hand to the plow and looks back, he is not fit for service in the Kingdom." The loose translation is, "Don't put off until tomorrow the things that you should today." Procrastination is soul-suicide on the installment plan. If we put off doing the Gospel time after time, it will end up costing us more than we can imagine – and for some of us, it may cost us our soul. We know that we should do the Gospel now in God's kingdom, and we need to know it is a dangerous thing to procrastinate on God's call. Do not put off until tomorrow the obedience of what God lays on your heart today.

The third excuse when it comes to doing the Gospel here and now is that some of us say, "Yabudi" (trans. "Yeah but I..."). Yeah but I this, yeah but I that – excuses, excuses and excuses. Excuses have been described as the skin of reason stuffed with a lie. I like the story about a farmer who wanted to borrow a rope from his neighbor and the neighbor said, "I am sorry, I am using the rope to tie up my milk." To that the farmer replied, "You can't use a rope to tie up your milk." To which the neighbor said, "I know, but when a man doesn't want to do something, one excuse is as good as the other." How many of us have used the "Yeah but I..." excuse with God? In other arenas of our lives, some of our excuses can be pretty humorous. I read this week a series of actual excuse quotes from people who have been involved in automobile accidents that they gave to the officers on the scene – such as: "An invisible car came out of no where and it struck my car and then vanished"; "I have been driving in my car for forty years when I fell asleep and had the accident"; "I pulled away from the side of the road, glanced at my mother-in-law and drove over the embankment"; "The guy was all over the road and I swerved several times before I hit him." Can you imagine how ridiculous some of our "Yeah but I..." excuses sound to God? When God calls us to do the Gospel, are we more likely to say, "Yeah but I..." or, "Here am I"?

The story of Moses helps us. If you look in Exodus chapter three, Moses had spent forty years as a 'somebody' and forty years as a 'nobody.' This call comes at the beginning of the next forty years of significance in his life. One day when he was tending the flocks of his father-in-law Jethro's sheep, at the foot of Mount Sinai, Moses saw something that was very interesting and curious up in the cleft of the rock. He saw a bush that was burning but was not consumed. As he drew closer, God called to him by name and said, "Moses." His first response was, "Here am I." Then God said, "Moses, the ground you are standing on is holy ground, you better take off your sandals." Moses takes off his sandals and finds himself face down on the ground in front of the God of Abraham, Isaac and of Jacob. Then God reveals to Moses the plan and purpose for his life. He says, "I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them cry because of their taskmasters. I grieve for their suffering. I have

come down to deliver them. And Moses, I am sending you to Pharaoh, back to the place you are running from. I am sending you back to the place where death could await you. I am sending you back to the very place that you least likely want to go in the world. I am sending you to lead my people out of Egypt." How would you have responded? We would like to think that we would have said, "Here am I;" but most likely, we would react like Moses. After all, his first response was, "Here am I." When the implications came, he started to say, "Yeah but I..." The excuses started flying.

There are five different excuses outlined in Exodus chapters three and four. Excuse number one is found in verse eleven: "Yeah, but I'm just a nobody. I used to be a somebody but I'm not anymore. I am just a shepherd." God responds to him, "Don't worry, I specialize in using nobodies to do my work." Excuse number two in verse thirteen says, "Yeah, but I really don't know who you are. What is your name anyway?" There is a long response from God and a long exchange from Moses, but the bottom line of God's response is this, "Don't worry – when it comes to facing the people, tell them that the God of their fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has sent you and they will listen to you." Excuse number three in chapter four verse one says, "Yeah, but what if they won't listen to me? What if they say, 'Moses you're nuts. We don't believe God has appeared to you.'" In the verses that follow, God gives Moses three miraculous signs – evidence that he was in the presence of God – and he uses those signs in the years that would unfold to prove to the people that God had called him to do what he had been called to do. Today, we would call that the presence and power of the Holy Spirit evidencing the call of God upon a person's life.

Excuse number four in chapter four and verse ten reads that Moses said, "Yeah, but I can't speak in front of people; in fact, I have a speech impediment." Moses was a handicapped person and God says, "I know, don't worry. Who made your mouth anyway? Wasn't it me? Moses, I will enable you to speak what I call you to say." God can use anyone to do the Gospel. He does not always call the qualified – but He always qualifies the called. It reminds me of what Paul wrote later in the New Testament when he said, "God chose the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, the weak things to shame the strong and the lowly things to nullify the things that are so that no one can boast before Him except in Christ."

God does His most profound work using unlikely, often broken people. You have no impediment in your life to prevent you from doing the Gospel. There is no condition in your body. There is no condition in your mind. There is nothing going on in your heart. There is nothing that has been done to you, nothing that you have done to somebody else, nothing that you can ever imagine that can separate you from God's call upon your life – if you will bring your life under the Lordship of Jesus. Jesus redeems anything. I have learned that God will take the broken, hurting, most unglamorous parts of my life and use them so that His glory comes. There is nothing that you have in your past that will separate you from God's call on your present and future – whether it is in faith or in practice – if you will bring it under the Lordship of Jesus.

You would think that Moses would have caught on by now. He has given four excuses and God answered all of his excuses; but Moses was just like us – he just did not get it. Then in chapter four and verse thirteen, the fifth excuse comes, "Yeah, but I don't really want to do this. Please send somebody else." Does that sound vaguely familiar? Any excuse will do when a person does not want to do what they are asked. If you think about it, this is really the first excuse. At this point, the Bible tells us that God gets angry with Moses. I do not know about you, but I do not want the Lord and Creator of the universe mad at me for very long. In the middle of that exchange, he said, "Moses, one last time – I am sending Aaron to go with you to be

your mouthpiece." He stopped saying, "Yeah, but I...", and started saying, "Here am I." The rest is history because God changed the history of the world with one obedient ex-murderer.

When God calls us to do the Gospel in our homes, church and community, how will you respond? Will you say, "Yeah, but I..." and put Him off? Or will you say, "Here am I, use me" and change the world. Don't just listen to the word – do what it says.