

Well, due to a very bad head-cold during the week, and nearly no voice, today's going to be a very short message...

Today I'm going to be talking about how God builds our faith, when we recognise the activity of God, that is already at work in our lives...

Righto:

In the Gospel of Mark, it's come time for the Passover. And it's become pretty obvious to the Disciples that nothing's prepared for it – what are we going to do??? They're leaving their run a bit late... *I mean, finding a place in Jerusalem (on the night of the event) to celebrate the Passover, would be a bit like:*

- *Trying to book a room in Toowoomba during the Carnival of Flowers;*
- *Trying to book a unit at the Gold Coast when the Indi's on;*
- *Or trying to book a flight to Sydney on the night of the State of Origin decider...*

It's Passover time. Jerusalem's bursting at the seams – She's chockers...

But God's obviously been doing something in the background, that the disciples don't know about... Somehow this unnamed bloke has a large upper room (a mega-room), that's not only still available – it's all set up, ready for them...

Now, we don't know how this came about,, (an angel?; a dream?) But somehow, God had organised it...

And Jesus says to 2 of His disciples:

- Just go into the city;
- And you'll run into a bloke carrying a jar of water;
- Follow him.
- And when he gets to where he's going, you say to the bloke who owns the place, **"The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"**
(in your dreams)..
- **¹⁵ And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready;**
- **there prepare for us."**

And it all happened, just like Jesus said...

Now, reading the commentaries, some of them try to explain it by saying that Jesus must've already met this bloke, and arranged it all, so that the man with the jar of water to be there as the guide... But to me, that isn't at all how this Gospel reads...

- Is this the result of a prior online booking??? I don't think so.
- Is this coincidence? I don't think so.
- It's what I like to call, "a **God**-incident".
- God has been doing something behind the scenes, and He prepared for it to happen

In our daily lives, yes there are coincidences... **But** for a Christian, it's really important that we don't miss the times when something is **more** than a coincidence – it's important that we don't miss the **God**-incidents...

1.

So, the first lesson for us today, is to have our spiritual eyes open, to recognise the difference between a **coincidence**, and a **God**-incident...

When we pray; and we're seeking God's will; and we're seeking God's direction for our lives,, God doesn't usually respond by saying "Right now, I want you to do this..."

But when we pray, we should expect that God's going to **answer** that prayer, and so we pray, "Lord, what are You doing here, and how do You want us to join You in it???"... And then, we just open our eyes, to see what happens next..."

God might be answering your prayer, with something that seems like a coincidence, but it's not a coincidence at all – it's a **God** incident...

And a God-incident, is something that can build our faith...

There have been times in my life, when God has done something amazing... And it's really important that we remember these things...

Some of us here have done the Bible Study series – Experiencing God – Knowing and Doing the will of God...

And in that Bible Study, Henry Blackaby gets us to identify Spiritual Markers in our lives – Times where you know that God has acted, and you know it's real. And it's really important that we remember these times, because **these** spiritual markers build our faith...

But I wonder how many times God has done something (in answer to our prayers) (or even without us praying), and we've dismissed it as a coincidence... And it wasn't a coincidence at all...

So, the first challenge, is to not just dismiss something as a coincidence, when it could very well be a **God-incident**... God does these things sometimes, to build our faith... But when we dismiss what God is doing, as a "coincidence", it effectively undoes the faith-building work that God is trying to do...

2.

And the second lesson for today, is God builds our faith, so we can endure the tough times.

Obedience to God, is rarely easy...

You see, sometimes God might be calling us to serve Him in a particular way, but:

- It all gets really hard;
- It seems like the whole world's against us;

- It's like we're going against the tide;
- People might even turn on us;
- Even other Christians might turn on us...

And there's a very real tendency for many people (at that point), to come to the conclusion "Oh, It can't be God's will after all. It's all too hard..."

Really??? What version of Christianity are we living in, where Christians think that if we're obediently following Jesus, it's all going to be easy???

I've heard many Christians say something along the lines of "If it's really God's will, it would be easier than this"... Really??? Where do we get that idea from??? Jesus told us "The whole world will hate you because of Me." And what about the troubles that the Apostles went through...

What about just the Apostle Paul:
2 Corinthians 11:23–28 (ESV)

- Imprisoned lots of times;
- Countless beatings
- Often nearly beaten to death
- 5 times he got 39 lashes
- Beaten with rods 3 times
- Stoned (not with marijuana)
- Shipwrecked 3 times
- A day and a night adrift at sea
- Dangerous journeys coping with flooded rivers & robbers &
- those who were trying to persecute him

- in danger from false Christians;

- It was really hard work
- Sleepless nights
- He didn't have enough to eat
- He had to sleep rough
- Didn't have enough warm clothes

- He felt daily pressure and deep anxiety

Did Paul come to the conclusion, "I must be on the wrong track"...? No!!!

So why do we, as soon as the going gets a bit tough, why do we start talking about open doors and closed doors – "Things are getting a bit tough... God must be closing the door here... Where God wants me to serve Him, it'll be easy..."

Why do we ever think that???

The purpose of God incidents, are not so that we can have a nice feeling in our place of comfort... God incidents build our faith enough, to help us to endure suffering and tough times..

Can you imagine how those disciples must have felt, as everything that Jesus said, unfolded before their eyes:

- There was the man with the jar.
- All they had to do was follow him... (a small step of faith)

- Now, wouldn't that have built their faith enough that they could then say to the owner of the house, "Ah, Jesus is ready to use your room"...
- And when the room was all ready for them, what would that have done for their faith???

Now, what was the purpose of that God-incident (do you think)? – To give those disciples a nice feeling in their place of comfort??? No... For them, it was a spiritual marker that they could look to, to know that God has everything in hand...

They didn't land in this place by chance. God led them to this place, and what's going to happen in this place???

Betrayal...

When Jesus and the other disciples arrive, and they're reclining around the food table, the **first** thing Jesus is recorded as saying, is "There's someone here – one of you 12, who's going to betray me..."

And this, is only the beginning of a night and day of great distress, as Jesus is arrested and tried. And crucified.

This God incident **wasn't** so they could have a nice feeling in a place of comfort. It was to build their faith, so their faith would endure, through the tough time ahead....

And that's the way that God uses God-incidents for us.

Let me give you an example from our life:

- Bush Disciples
- Scotty Brim

- Ian Hannah

These are reminders – **not** that it's easy, but that this is God's will and calling... And so when times get tough, Robyn and I just have to remember these God-incidents (spiritual markers), and we don't give up... We just press on in the direction God has set for us, until He re-deploys us in some other direction...

But the thing is, This is the way that God works with all of us... It's not just the domain of pastors and preachers and missionaries... This is the way that God works with you and me... We just have to open our spiritual eyes, to see what God is doing... And make the connection. It's not just a coincidence – it's a **God**-incident.

You know, some people say to me, "It's alright for you, but I don't get these God-incidents"...

Now, I don't want to offend anybody, but I'm good at it, and so I will... "I doubt that's true".

I reckon I can pretty much guarantee, that if you give not only your heart, but your whole life to Jesus, and say

“Lord, I am Your servant.
Take me and use me as you will.
Lord, show me what You are doing in this place,
And how You want me to join You in what you are
doing.”

And after praying that prayer, open your eyes. See what opportunities God puts in front of you... Have the expectation that it's **not** going to be a coincidence. Have the expectation that there will be God incidents...

And here's the key:
Don't write it off if you think it's all too hard... You see, God isn't interested in us doing stuff for Him... When God does something, He wants to do a God-sized work. And He does His work, through us...

And don't expect it to be easy... Obediently following Jesus, is a hard road... But I can promise you, it's the most amazing life experience you'll ever have.

God incidents build our faith, so we can endure.