

What is that in thine hand? The Shepherd's Rod Phenomenon

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[0:00] Looking at the subject of what is in thine hand and we could title it also the rod of God! The rod of Moses, of Aaron, but more especially the rod of God.

So we're going to go to Exodus 4 from verse 1 through 5 and the word of God says, Exodus 4 verse 1, and Moses answered and said, and the occasion here is when the Lord's challenging him, calling him, addressing him, to call him to serve. And Moses answered and said, but behold they will not believe me nor hearken unto my voice for they will say the Lord hath not appeared unto thee. And the Lord said unto him, what is that in thine hand? And he said, a rod.

And he said, cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground and it became a serpent. And Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said unto Moses, put forth thine hand and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand and caught it. And it became a rod in his hand that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob have appeared unto thee. What is in thine hand? Now Moses just had this simple shepherd's rod in his hand.

Wasn't anything special. Just a rod, a staff. And here is Moses. God chose Moses, a man who stuttered.

[1:56] He had some impediment of his voice. And God chose this man, this limited capacity man, to lead the people of God out of Egypt. Here's Moses. He's 80 years old.

There's lots of lessons we could pick up from this account. I put to you that God uses whatever person he chooses. Whatever a person is and has, God chooses and uses such that would simply yield unto him. God uses simple, ordinary things. A shepherd's staff. And it's like that with you and me, with each one of us, that God can use each one of us, can't he? Despite our own limitations, despite all the reasons why we can think we're not worthy, we're not able.

When we see through the word of God, God uses a stick, this shepherd's rod. He uses a coat, a fish, a couple of pennies, a slingshot, a jawbone, a rock, some loaves of bread, simple, everyday, ordinary things. We can see many accounts of how God uses things that we would count as inadequate, insufficient, the impossible that God would use such a thing. We see that, for example, in the conquest of Jericho, Joshua 6. God instructs Joshua to have the Israelites march around the city for seven days and then simply to give a shout.

Joshua 6, verse 16, and it came to pass at the seventh time, they've been around seven times, when the priest blew with the trumpets, the shofar, Joshua said unto the people, shout, for the Lord have given you the city. And the victory came from not some human wisdom or strategy or military might. It was simple faith to act on that, that God had said to do, to act on God's word. It wasn't man's weaponry or wisdom, it was a shout, something simple.

The most unlikely thing you could think of, God said to do it, and that brought the victory. It was a shout. God uses the most unlikely things to bring him glory. Amen. To bring him glory.

[4:36] The most unlikely people. Look at Paul. Who would have thought Paul, as he was Saul, as he was one who was full of anger and ferocity and violence towards the people of God.

Who would have thought of him? Him of all people, this arch enemy of the church. Yet God turned Paul around completely to then become a blessing to the church of God. And so back to Moses. Moses was really another unlikely one. Such an unlikely one for God to use him. Weak, inadequate. He had some impediment such that he could not speak well enough as he thought. Yet God used him. God chose him.

All Moses had to do was come to that place of humble obedience. When Moses receives God's call, he gives excuse after excuse. Why? You got the wrong guy. It's not me. You must be looking for someone else. To try to get out of what God had wanted and called him to do. What God has for him to do. He says that he doesn't feel worthy. We could think that, couldn't we, if we feel challenged to do something for God. Oh, look, I've got so many reasons why some other people are better than me. And here he says in Exodus 3.11, Moses said unto God, who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh, that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? Who am I? You know, I'm not worthy. I'm not able. I'm not capable.

And he says, the people won't believe me. And he says that he's not good with words. So then the Lord addresses that in Exodus 4.10-11, And Moses said unto the Lord, O Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore nor since.

Thou hast spoken unto thy servant, but I'm slow of speech and of a slow tongue. And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth?

[6:52] Or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? God puts his hand on you to do something.

He knows what you're capable of. He's made your mouth. He's made you. Who you are. Moses then, he says in chapter 4.13, He says, send somebody else.

Send another. It's like as if God's saying, Who shall I send? Who will go for us? Here am I. Send somebody else. Isn't that? That's what Moses said.

Send Aaron. Send someone. Send anyone but me. God uses the unlikely, doesn't he? That's what happened with David too. Think of David. He was the least likely to be a king.

The youngest son of Jesse. He was just a humble shepherd boy. David. Who would have picked David? This little lad. He wasn't even the strongest or the tallest or the best of the family.

[7:57] He was just a little runt, you could say. David was the least likely to be chosen to be king of the family. Samuel anointed David to be the future king over Israel.

Despite his lowly position, God chose David. God saw his heart. And God used David to defeat that huge giant, Goliath. As we read later in 1 Samuel 17, verse 42.

And when the Philistine, Goliath, looked and he saw David and he laughed. He disdained him. He mocked him. He scorned this, who are you sending out to fight me, this giant of a man?

They send out this young David. He's but a youth. He was ruddy. He had this reddish complexion. And he was of a fair countenance. But Goliath disdained him.

He said, what's this, this young lad? What a joke. He's not going to last against me. But David was the one that God used to bring the giant down.

[9:07] Gideon is another in the Bible. He was humanly weak. Gideon. He was from the weakest clan of Manasseh. And he considered himself the least in his family.

Again, a bit like David. He wasn't the pick of the crop. He wasn't the top of the shelf. Here is Gideon. A man at the time is doing a servant's work.

He's there on the threshing floor doing this servant's kind of work, this humble work. And he's trying to do it in a quiet, secret place, working away to thresh the wheat, to do it as quietly as possible, hoping that what he was doing wouldn't be found, hoping that his food would not be stolen by the enemy.

And the angel of the Lord appears unto Gideon and says unto him, the Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor. It's almost an irony here.

It's like, it's almost sarcastic. Here is Gideon. He's not only hiding when he's called. And he keeps on with his hesitation, with his insecurity, even as God continues to call Gideon to action.

[10:23] Yet the Lord addresses him and says, the Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor. God chose Gideon to lead the Israelites to battle against the Midianites.

And Gideon initially doubted. He was reluctant. But eventually he did obey God's call. And he led this small army as God whittled it down to the 300.

He led this small army to a great victory through God's power, not human strength. Another example, God uses the insignificant, the small, the weak, the unlikely.

You look at the simple fishermen like Peter and the others called the disciples. They were unlearned, they were called. Unlearned, ignorant. The disciples, the church of God, the foundational apostles of the church of God, the ones the Lord left his work with when he ascended, the disciples.

And they were looked upon as weak, inadequate men. And when the religious leaders looked at them, it says, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, Acts 4.13, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.

[11:53] They took knowledge of them. They perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant. Unlearned and ignorant men. They lacked status as the world would reckon it.

It's again another example that God chooses and uses the ordinary. Don't think of yourself as not able. Think of the God who is able, who will enable you to do what he's called you to do. And God chooses often such ordinary, inadequate men, as the world would reckon it. Unlearned, untrained, humble. God uses the humble beginnings of weak men to be his missionary force, to be the church.

Such a weak outfit of unlearned and ignorant men. Some of them just fishermen, ordinary people, not particularly astonishing, astounding people, not particularly accredited kind of people.

[13:09] And yet God uses them to do extraordinary things for his kingdom. And really it's all glory to God, isn't it? When you think that God chose such to be his church, it shows God's power and his overshadowing sovereignty over human limitations, human limitations.

And it's like Paul puts it in this one, of the people of God, of God's glory that resides in us. It says, Paul says of you and me, that we are, as it were, earthen vessels.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels. So like clay pots. And that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. We're just clay pots, but what matters is what's inside of us.

It's the excellency of the power may be of God, not of us. So we see right through the word of God, this recurring theme. God uses the small, the insignificant, the lowly to accomplish great things for his glory, that he would get the glory because the excellency of the power is not of us, it's of him.

Amen? The excellency of the power is of God. And he fills us like just a vessel, just to be such a vessel. As we see the kind of things God used, this recurring theme, as we could reckon of David's stone, a simple stone in a simple sling, a simple stone in a simple sling.

[14:38] God used that through David to defeat Goliath with a slingshot and a stone. We see the widow's jar of oil. Elisha multiplied this jar of oil such that it kept refilling this jar of oil, just a jar.

It was all she had. It was something insignificant. But God used it to sustain her, to provide for her and for her sons in time of famine. The widow's jar, we see, of Samson.

He just picked up this jawbone. It must have been just lying there on the ground. And what did he do? He stooped down and he picked up that jawbone of this donkey. He picked up this jawbone and used it as a weapon against a thousand Philistines and defeated them.

Just a simple piece of bone of the jaw, of the ass, of the donkey, used it as this weapon to defeat a thousand Philistines, God's enemies.

Then we see the boy's lunch as the Lord Jesus fed a multitude. And here's a boy who comes with five loaves and two fish.

[15:50] Just the little boy's lunch as he yielded into the Saviour's hands. God demonstrated his provision and abundance.

Something little, something insignificant. A little boy's lunch. We see the piece of cloth that Paul used these handkerchiefs. Probably not one that looks as bad as this one, but just a handkerchief. The fact that he had touched this cloth, a piece of cloth, and these handkerchiefs that he touched were used to heal the sick and drive out evil spirits. We see a simple thing of a bronze snake as God instructed Moses to make a bronze snake, this brazen serpent, that whosoever looked upon, after being bitten by a snake, would live, they'd be healed as the picture of Christ.

Again, something simple, isn't it? Something simple, a simple object, something insignificant. And it's the same for you and me, brothers and sisters, that the mighty maker of the universe can use you, can use you for his glory.

That he's able to use the common, the average, ordinary garden variety, the ordinary people of God, that we all are in ourselves, yielded to him in faith.

[17:08] He can use you. God can use the small. God can use the humble. God can use the weak. It's the same process with you and me. It is, brother, sister, that's you, that's me.

It includes you. And God says, cast it on the ground. Moses' rod, he says, cast it on the ground. It's a picture of how we can give ourselves to God.

As Moses simply cast that stick, that rod, as he cast that shepherd's staff onto the ground in obedience to God, you could reflect how it pictures how we can simply yield ourselves as a stick thrown on the ground.

In obeying God, God used this stick, a stick. We don't have to be something grand or mighty. We don't have to be something more than what we are. We just have to be ourselves, just to be a simple, ordinary human vessel that he can fill.

Whoever you are, yield it to God. That is enough for God to do something amazing. Let God have your life. Let God use you. And it's about getting out of the way.

[18:22] He says, cast it on the ground such that it was yielded. It was given. And Moses trusted God with that stick. And it's the same for you and me.

As you yield to God, as he urges you to serve, to do something that he puts on your heart to do, and that could be all kinds of different things, simply trust him.

You might feel small and ineffective, inadequate. It's a common theme. As we've read, it's Moses, it's David, it's Gideon, inadequate, unworthy, limited, as the world would see them.

you might feel small and ineffective. When you look at it as our theme here of increase our faith, we see of Luke 17, the apostle said unto the Lord, increase our faith, increase our faith.

And the Lord pictures their faith as being this insignificant, this tiny, almost imperceptible, little grain of mustard seed.

[19:31] And he says, if you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you might say unto this sycamine tree, be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the midst of the sea, and it should obey you.

Increase our faith. All you need is this much. It's what he's saying, isn't it? All you need is this much. Now, I picked up an object lesson on the way to church tonight. I thought, I've got to bring this to church tonight so you get a very graphic picture. What?

What is that? What is that in thine hand? Amen? What is that in thine hand? I found quite a good, I thought it was a pretty good looking rod as I was driving to church tonight and I had to pull over.

Julie was a bit worried, but I had to pull over. I thought, this is a great specimen of just what Moses had. Now, Moses might have had one, might have been a bit more polished or would have maybe had some wood stain on it or I don't know, might have been sculptured or sanded down or shaped in some fashion.

[20:47] Maybe it had a curl on the top like a shepherd's staff that would hook the sheep and such, but I'm not meaning to be flippant about it, but it's just a stick. That's what it is, isn't it?

That is what it is. It's just a stick. What is it in thine hand? It's the rod. It represents Moses' work and we see that rod, what was the meaning of the rod?

The rod identified Moses as a shepherd and when the people saw the rod in Moses' hand, people would have immediately known who he was.

He's a shepherd. He's got the shepherd's staff. This rod, really, it represented all that Moses had. He didn't even own the sheep that he was looking after.

The sheep that he was keeping were those of his father-in-law, Jethro. All that Moses possessed was the rod. This was everything.

[21:48] This was all that he had. It represented his life, his identity, his livelihood, his personality. Moses must have remembered at some time, likely when he was younger as he was brought up in Pharaoh's court that his hand held a scepter instead.

It wasn't just a humble shepherd's rod, a shepherd's staff, that Moses would have been brought up back in those days in the palace where perhaps he had opportunity to hold a scepter, a scepter of

the king, of the Pharaoh in his hand instead.

Perhaps his mind would have gone back to those days in the palace when he was being trained and educated to become potentially a Pharaoh. He may have remembered a time when he held the world in his hand.

Now all he had was nothing but a dry, dead stick. He once was a prince, now he's a nobody. And the rod reminded him that he was just a simple, humble servant, a lowly shepherd.

He was poor, he owed nothing, a nobody with nothing. And when that stick was given over to the Lord, it became a living thing. The rod became a thing of power.

[23:04] God used the rod to defeat Israel's enemies, to glorify God. And God took that insignificant stick and worked wonders with it. And friends, think of it for you and for me.

We might feel small and insignificant just like a piece of wood, a stick. We might feel that the little that we bring is nothing to him. God says, cast it on the ground.

Cast it on the ground. You'll lie. Think of other occasions where God used the little things to make such a big message.

We look back at our Lord's account of the widow giving her tiny offering, two little pieces of coin, a widow's mite.

And yet, the Lord looked at her, this poor widow, as she threw in these two little coins. The Lord smiled on her for giving her tiny offering.

[24:10] The Lord praised the sacrificial giving of this poor widow. It was just two coins. People would have maybe looked at that and thought, that's nothing. But, it was everything for her.

As she cast those two small coins in the treasury, the Lord contrasted her giving with the ostentatious giving of the wealthy. As we read here, Mark 12, and there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.

And he called unto him, his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily, I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury.

Something small is something big with God. Amen. Your little is big with God. Amen. All Moses had in his hand was just this dry, dead stick.

All he had. a dry, dead stick. Just like God used what was in Moses' hands for his glory, he desires to use you.

[25:31] To use you for his work, for him to do a work in you and through you. It was a shepherd's staff, a crew. So, as I say, it probably had a curly bit that was used to get the sheep and to draw them out of danger.

It was from three to six foot in length and the shepherd would lean upon the staff as they watched over the sheep. Maybe they would kind of just have a little rest there.

I don't know, just however they leaned on it. Some may look at us, we may look at ourselves and think about it too and wonder, how could God use me? How could God use me?

I'm nothing. And the shepherds, they were despised by the Egyptians. We see that there, it tells us of the perception of shepherds of Genesis 46, 34, the shepherds were despised by the Egyptians. They hated them, for every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians. So shepherds were loathsome, they were hated, looked down upon, thought to be, you know, less, thought to be, to be avoided, shepherds.

[26:49] And so the rod, again, it represented that too, something to be despised, something to be looked down on, discounted. And we think about it, our Lord was despised and rejected of man, wasn't he?

The Lord uses the despised things, the despised shepherd, to do a work for him. And Moses will carry this stuff with him into Egypt and before Pharaoh.

We read that there, Exodus 4, 17, and thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs. So Moses thought, well, it's just a rod, that's all I've got, that's all I can offer, just this stick. God says, take it with you, take it with you. God commands Moses to take the rod, as he goes to confront Pharaoh.

It shows the significance here, this is something important. And this rod, this staff in Moses' hand, just this dry, dead piece of wood, this old piece of wood, was of little or no value of itself.

[27:58] I mean, you could go down and get another piece of wood just as good as this one. Yet, when that staff was cast down before God, cast down and taken up, that staff was really the greatest force that the world could see.

This staff represented God's redeeming of Israel from bondage through judgment and deliverance. This rod would smite the rock and provide the water of life.

This rod would gain the victory over Amalek as Moses held it aloft. God. This staff was powerful because God, God was in it.

In itself, it was nothing but a dead, lifeless branch. Not that you would, if you could find Moses' rod, you wouldn't bow down and worship it because it's just a stick. That's all it is.

If we had the relics of Moses' day, we wouldn't worship it. It's just a stick. But what matters is that God used it. And it's the same with you and me, isn't it?

[29:04] We're not anything to be credited for any merit. But if God can use you, just like God used the stick, amen, that's what matters. And so the Lord can take at His command that which is nothing.

If we cast it down before Him at His command, He can use it for His service, for victory over the enemy, for Moses, it was just a staff, used to move the stubborn sheep.

But to God, it was His instrument. The same for you and me, people, people of God. You might say, who am I? Moses said, who am I? But to God, it was His instrument. God would work miracles, as we know, through the account of Scripture.

God instructed Moses to take His shepherd's rod, throw it on the ground, where it transforms into a serpent, then to take it up by the tail. That would have been scary. But God enabled Moses to do that.

And so, the rod was kind of effectually given power. And the simple shepherd's staff, under God's authority, was used mightily.

[30:17] I love this Scripture too. Exodus 4, verse 20, it reads, And Moses took his wife and sons and set them upon an house, and he returned to the land of Egypt.

So they're heading back to Pharaoh to confront Pharaoh. And Moses took the rod of God in his hand. Wasn't it Moses' rod?

Now it's called the rod of God. It's the rod of God. More than magic, it's the power of God. That God would use such a simple, ordinary stick, was Moses' staff, Moses' rod, now it's called the rod of God.

The rod of God. That's the same for you and me, isn't it? As you might be a humble man, a humble woman, now you're a man of God. You're a woman of God. God fills you and uses you such that you, you're not the same old, ordinary person anymore, because God is filling your life and using you.

Look at what God did with the rod. He used it to confront the magicians, the soothsayers of Pharaoh's court, as we see it transformed into a serpent, and God demonstrated the superiority of his power over the pagan magic and sorcery of Pharaoh's magicians.

[31:41] And we see the sign of God's presence with Moses, this warning to Pharaoh, these constant warnings and the plagues, and the rod became this powerful instrument, demonstrating not that there was anything of the rod, but that it was God's power, God's authority at work.

So we see as God used the rod, turning the waters of Egypt into blood, bringing frogs upon the land, causing lice, bringing thunder and hail, the east wind that brought the locusts, causing the waters of the Red Sea to stand up like a wall, to cause the bottom of the sea to be as dry land so they could pass over, to cause the waters of the Red Sea to come crashing down back upon Pharaoh's armies.

God used the same rod to separate the waters of the Red Sea, some 12 miles across they reckon, and three or four million people went over, and God held the waters back.

God held the rod of God, waters parted, and then the Lord separated the waters with the breath of his nostrils, Exodus 15 verse 8.

So the rod really, a simple rod was a picture, a sign, a symbol of God's power and authority, and it destroyed the most powerful army in the world at that time.

[33:06] These ones that had held Israel in bondage for over 400 years, and God's deliverance was there, and then God's provision in the wilderness wanderings as God miraculously brings forth water to quench the thirst of the Israelites in Exodus 17 verse 5.

We see the rod of God. It's a reminder of God's presence, of God's faithfulness, of God's power to deliver his people, and of God's call. So the rod, we see many times these repeated occasions where God demonstrated his power.

It was just a stick. It's the same for you and me, people. You might think, what am I? I'm just like this stick. There's nothing about me that's of anything to be praiseworthy about.

It's being available as you cast it on the ground. Let God have you. Let God take you. Yield to God. As the rod was used as this symbol of authority and power and wonder, and then as victory came over the Amalekites in chapter 17, number 17, 9 through 14.

In the battle against the Amalekites, Moses stood on the hill with the staff of God in his hand. And as long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites prevailed. But when he grew tired and lowered his hands, the Amalekites gained the upper hand.

[34:34] We need some Aaron and Hur come and help me. Aaron and Hur could get some other guys to kind of join the demonstration here to hold up the rod. Aaron and Hur came and held up the rod so that the victory was won.

Amen. It wasn't the rod. It was God using the rod as a sign of his power, really, isn't it? And then we see later just further that the rod had a special place in that they kept it in the Ark of the Covenant as a sign.

In Numbers 17 there was a dispute about who was the rightful priest and they tested the staff from each tribe and it was Aaron's rod that budded and produced blossoms and almonds.

It showed God's choice of Aaron and his descendants as priests. So it was a sign of Aaron's priesthood. So there's many signs and wonders about just the simple stick.

And the point I think we can all hopefully take a challenge from, this truth that the rod of Moses and of Aaron became the rod of God.

[35:49] It's the same for you and me. Who am I? I'm just like Moses. I've got so many reasons why would God even think of choosing me or using me. I've got so many reasons why others are better than who I am.

But God chooses human vessels. God chooses a shepherd's rod. God uses the ordinary, the simple to show his great power.

Just a last scripture here. It's 1 Corinthians 1 verse 26 we see of Paul's recording here, of Paul saying here, for you see your calling brethren.

How that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.

God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty and the base things of the world and the things which are despised have God chosen.

[36:50] Yea, and things which are not to bring to naught things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence. What's that in your hand?

And Moses said, look, this is all I've got. This is it. This is, this is my job. This is my life. This is my occupation. This is who I am.

I'm just a shepherd. I'm just a nobody in the backside of the desert. It's just a stick. God says, cast it down. Give it to me.

Give it to me. And he says that to you and me. Who am I? I'm just like that stick. It's nothing fancy or flash about just a stick. I'm just an ordinary, simple, ordinary kind of guy, just an ordinary kind of person.

If you yield yourself into God's hand, if you let him have you, cast yourself on the ground, come to him. Let him use you tonight. Lord, we know you put on each one of our hearts something that we can do.

[37:58] Help us, Lord, not to resist but to say, yes, Lord, I'm going to cast myself down at your feet. I'm going to obey your call and use me, Lord.

Use me despite all my lack, all my inadequacy. Thank you, Lord, for choosing the foolish things, the things that are despised and the base things, things that are nothing, nobodies.

Just as you chose Moses, Lord, you've chosen each one of us for something that we can do. And we pray each one might know, firstly and most importantly, how to be saved, to know, Lord, you paid for my sin and I can know your saving power as I trust you as my saviour.

Lord, help us to have that heart, to know you can forgive sin, you can cleanse and wash and take our sin, you can remove our sin, our guilt, our shame, and even such unworthy ones can become fitted vessels filled with you, all for your glory and praise as human vessels, earthen vessels of clay, yet filled with your glory, that all the glory shall be yours, all the praise shall be yours, the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.

It's not that stick, it's about you're taking that and using that and it's the same for every human person, who can be as a yielded stick laid down, given over to you, as we cast ourselves as it were on the ground and say Lord, here am I, use me, send me, fill me, save me, help me to serve, in Jesus name, amen.

[40:10] Amen. Amen.