

The Burning Bush

Exodus 3:1-15

3 One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. ²There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up. ³"This is amazing," Moses said to himself. "Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go see it."

⁴When the Lord saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

"Here I am!" Moses replied.

⁵"Do not come any closer," the Lord warned. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. ⁶I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." When Moses heard this, he covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷Then the Lord told him, "I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. ⁸So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey—the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live. ⁹Look! The cry of the people of Israel has reached me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse them. ¹⁰Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt."

¹¹But Moses protested to God, "Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?"

¹²God answered, "I will be with you. And this is your sign that I am the one who has sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain."

¹³But Moses protested, “If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ they will ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what should I tell them?”

¹⁴God replied to Moses, “I am who I am. Say this to the people of Israel: I am has sent me to you.” ¹⁵God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: Yahweh, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.

This is my eternal name, my name to remember for all generations.

An interesting biblical narrative to be sure, but one must ask oneself, what is God trying to teach us here? Let’s start with some background observations on this passage.

Here we see Moses, the same Hebrew Moses who was fished out of the river by Pharaoh’s daughter and raised in the palace as her son. One could say in modern terms that this was Prince Moses. And yet, when we read this passage for some reason he has assumed the identity of an ordinary shepherd who worked for Jethro his father-in-law. Now ask yourself... Why?

Next we see that he led the flock to the back of the wilderness, this would imply that he went beyond the typical grazing range. Then it says he came to God’s mountain, to Horeb. It is interesting to note here that Horeb in Hebrew means a desolate region or ruin. In fact Sinai and Horeb are different names for the same mountain. To be specific Sinai refers to the mountain itself and Horeb refers to the surrounding wilderness area.

I find it somewhat prophetic that we see Moses leading the sheep to the wilderness. It is almost a foreshadowing of what is to come. There was however no indication that Moses was actually seeking the mountain of God. Actually, we see that he is surprised when he sees a burning bush. It is apparent in the narrative that he is just looking for good grazing ground for his Father-in-laws sheep. We don’t know how old Moses is here but he seems rooted and grounded in shepherding well before he and Aaron get to that historic meeting with Pharaoh when he is eighty years old.

I would like to note here that God prepares us for our journeys. There is a modern presupposition that ministers over 60 are no longer relevant. I find it significant here that God uses Moses at 80.

Now we read that the angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush. (The word Angel is actually Mal'ak which means messenger) This is significant because his appearance is like that of a herald. If you study this scripture diligently you will find that there is no record of the Mal'ak giving a message to Moses. What we do see in verse 4 is that God will address Moses directly. Either this Mal'ak was a herald bringing Moses attention to God or God himself was in fact the messenger.

The burning bush draws Moses attention. Why would a burning bush draw the attention of a shepherd? Let's say you were watching cows free ranging in a field next to a burning bush. Would you be afraid the fire would startle your charges or that it would spread and put them in danger? Isn't the shepherd's job to watch out for dangers to his sheep? So we see that Moses is diligent and sees the fire, but what keeps his attention is that the bush although burning is not consumed by the fire. Anyone who has been to the desert knows that dry bush catches fire and is consumed very quickly.

It becomes apparent that this burning bush is not a regular fire but a theophany (manifestation of God). In short, God put the bush in Moses path to get his attention and it does. As we inspect the narrative further we see that when Yahweh saw that he turned aside to see the burning bush that God called to him out of the midst of the bush and said: "Moses! Moses!"

Isn't it interesting that God get's the mans attention, just as he does in various circumstances of our lives, but then he calls out to the shepherd by name. It is also interesting to note here that he said Moses name twice. This is consistent with God addressing others in scripture. For example: we see Jacob, Jacob in Genesis 46:2. Samuel, Samuel in 1 Samuel 3:10 Simon, Simon in Luke 22:31, Saul, Saul in Acts 9:4... It becomes significant when we understand that the doubling of a name in the culture of the time was used to express endearment.

This morning when things seem out of the ordinary and God grabs our attention, do we respond like Moses? Instead of just Yeah or Hello he states: "Here I am" meaning that God has his full attention. He is presenting himself for his marching orders. He stands ready to listen (See Isaiah 6:8 53:6 and Luke 1:38)

Next God issues two commands:

- 1) Come no closer
- 2) Take off your shoes

When God spoke to Moses he was on Holy Ground, because wherever God is it is Holy. God wants Moses to respect and reverence the moment. This place and this time are full of awe and Holiness because God is present. We also know that no man has seen God's face and lived. One may speculate that to come closer would be to court danger (33:20) and God had a plan for Moses.

Now the shoes thing is very interesting because it is reverent of the holy place on which he stands. I know several ministers who preach in their bare feet. I think it may be taking it a bit far, but the respect for God is evident. But I digress, I want to enlighten those who may not know that in the culture of the day a guest would take off their shoes when coming into the domain of their host. They did this to show the host that they accepted the Hosts welcome and hospitality.

That said we can infer that God was welcoming Moses into conversation and fellowship with him and that Moses was accepting that welcome.

Why is this so important... This is a pivotal moment in Moses life. Moses had been leading his life in a humble and simple way in accordance with his will and his desires. After all he was a Prince who chose to live his life this way... After this moment in Moses life; after his conversation with God, his life changes and from that point forward he lives a God-directed, God empowered life that God had planned for him. A life that would in fact, change the history of the Hebrew people. He did not seek it. In fact, he tried to refuse what God had in store for him 5 times. (3:11,13, 4:1,10,13)

This is pivotal for all of us. Moses was looking out for his sheep, just as church leaders and ministers care for the sheep of the church. He was, as we all have, tried to live his life according to his plan, his wishes and his desires. And yet God calls and empowers according to his will and his plan.

Perhaps this morning God has a call on your life. Perhaps you have had experiences beyond the norm. Perhaps God has been speaking to you. It may not be as flamboyant as in this narrative, but it does happen.

I was working in North Vancouver when I heard the voice of God and he called me. I had a choice, just as each of us do. How will we respond?

God has the big picture in mind but he is also very personal. Did you notice that he says: "I am the God of your Father (Singular – not fathers) He mentions Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who are some of the renowned figures of the bible of whom Moses would be very familiar, but he mentions Amram, Moses father first. Amram who would bring Moses into the world. What a touching and powerful thing to have God acknowledge this.

Imagine if you will... If you saw a burning bush that was not consumed today and the voice of God came forth. Would you feel worthy? Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God (verse 6) I know that any remaining un-holiness in my life in the presence of the almighty would probably cause me to do the same. At least until I remembered that Christ has made me worthy. Would we recognize the seminal moment? Would we see that it would have implications for our future? Would we fear what was coming next?

Bible history makes for great narratives, but they really open things up when we look at them in the light of their impact on our lives.

God hears and so he uses his servants to change the world. That is where Moses came in with the children of Israel and their slavery to Egypt. God hears and so he uses his servants to change the world. That is where you come in from your servitude to this world to make a difference in the kingdom of God.

In verses 7-12 we see that God sees the afflictions of his people, we see that he has heard their cries for help and that he knows the sorrows that they are suffering.

Today God knows the afflictions and suffering of every person here and outside in our community. He hears their cries for help and he knows their sorrows.

This morning, I desire that you take away this...

Your God

- Has seen your sorrow
- Has heard your prayers and your petitions
- Has known and knows your circumstance
 - And he knows the same of those around you.

God sent Moses to deliver his chosen people from Egypt's tyranny

Who is God sending to deliver people from their sorrow and circumstances today?

God promised Israel fruitfulness and abundance.

What is he promising today?

2 Chronicles 7:14

If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

This morning, are we as Christians afraid to do what God is calling us to do? If we are we are not alone. Moses, a Prince of Egypt, said to God almighty: "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the people out of Israel" (verse 11)

Moses wasn't stupid he saw how big the task was. He saw the impossibility of the challenge. He saw himself as that simple shepherd, not as a Child of the King of Kings. In chapter 4:13 he even says to God: "O Lord, please send someone else"

Moses was afraid and insecure in his ability to deliver. He was looking at his frailties; he was letting his fear keep him from what God had for him and by extension the entire nation of Israel.

Regardless, of how Moses felt about himself, God expected obedience. Moses had a choice. He could choose fear or faith. When God comes to you, will you choose fear or faith?

The Mal'ek, the messenger sent a world-changing message. God's message was the man who was obedient to his calling and to the voice of God.

Moses like each of us, was flawed and afraid yet we see God simply reminding Moses of the pivotal moment of the burning bush...

God said I am who I am and he said you shall tell the children of Israel this: "I AM has sent me to you."

It is interesting also to note that God is known in the original Hebrew as YHWH or Yahweh. This means: The self-existent, He who becometh or the becoming one. So in Exodus 3:14 where it says: "I am that I am". (the original is "ehyeh asher ehyeh") This phrase translates as I will become whatsoever I may become. God is assuring Moses that he will be to them whatever they need. In other words: Jehovah Jireh their provider. In short, it is a promise that he will see to their needs.

When God says I am that "I am" he is referring to the same God who set him on this path. He is expecting faith, for without faith it is impossible to please God. But more importantly it was to remind Moses of a promise and pledge found in his name. That he would be what they needed.