The Call of Moses: Exodus Chapter 3

Moses name means **"drawn from the water"**. His life of 120 years divides nicely into 3 blocks of 40:

- 40 years in Egypt as the adopted son of Queen Hatshepsut – Pharaoh's daughter
- 40 years in the desert of Midian looking after the flock of Jethro his father-in-law
- 40 years shaping tens of thousands of people into a disciplined army ready to enter the land God had promised to give them.

In chapters one and two we see:

- Moses early life in the palace
- His decision to identify with the People of God
- His violent temper as he killed the Egyptian and then had to flee the wrath of Pharaoh
- His life as a shepherd in the desert of Midian – a simple home in a strange land – Midian was about 500 miles from Egypt

Now in chapter 3 **God enters the scene**.

Moses was now 80 years old! He was born to be Israel's deliverer, but God didn't speak to him about it until he was 80 years old. He had to learn the important lesson that spiritual battles can't be won by human means – by things such as:

- ✓ Egyptian privilege and learning
- ✓ A fine physique
- ✓ Confidence in his own strength
- ✓ A conviction that nothing can stand in his way

God knew that after 40 years spent quietly in the desert Moses was now ready to listen to what He had to say.

Verse 2 tells us that he came to the far side of the desert – to Horeb. Most scholars, as well as rabbinical literature, think that Horeb and Sinai refer to the same mountain. There is some dispute as to whether this mountain was in Sinai (Egypt) or in Midian (Saudi Arabia).

This is the first time in Scripture that Horeb is called 'The Mountain of God'. This must surely be the name that Moses gave it. We see in the book of Exodus that Moses has more experiences with God on this mountain.

So Moses is enjoying a quiet day much like any other day and suddenly he notices a bush burning. This isn't unusual. The dry acacia bushes can spontaneously ignite in the blazing sun, but in a few moments they are a pile of ashes. What arrested Moses' attention was that **the bush didn't burn up**.

We read in verse 3, ***"So Moses thought, 'I will go over and see this strange site – why the bush doesn't burn up! When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush."***

Notice 3 things:

1. God doesn't speak until He has Moses attention.

2. The spectacle of the burning bush meant nothing until God spoke from the midst of it.

God spoke to Moses many times during his life but by far the most dramatic was this first time. In Deut. 33:16, at the end of Moses life when he is praying God's blessing on the tribes of Israel, Moses prays for Joseph to be blessed with, ***"The favour of Him who dwelt in the burning bush."*** This first encounter with God remained vivid and impacted him for the rest of his life.

3. God called Moses by name.

Moses saw himself as an obscure shepherd. 40 years earlier he had failed and made a mess of his life. Suddenly he heard God call his name. It was a call back to hope – to his life's work. It was a second chance.

God's call to us is always personal. God knew all about Moses. He was important to God. He had always been important to God.

Moses responded, ***"Here I am"***. God warns him not to come any closer and to take off his sandals because he is standing on holy ground – i.e. in the presence of God.

We see this same command again later in Scripture in the story of Joshua and the Fall of Jericho. The Commander of the Lord's army tells Joshua, ***"Take off your sandals because the place where you are standing is holy."*** (Joshua 5:15)

Removing sandals was then and still is today a sign of **reverence** common to many cultures and religions. It was common in the Egyptian culture of Moses time. It shows **humility**. Usually the poorest servants didn't have any sandals. Their feet were bare. It also has the thought of **laying aside the pollution of the journey**. It was a common practice to wash the feet of guests.

Now God identifies Himself:

"I am the God of <u>your father</u>, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."

Perhaps Moses thought God had broken or forgotten His covenant with the People of Israel during the 400 years of Israel's slavery in Egypt. Yet all the time God was at work preserving and multiplying a nation.

What was Moses reaction? He hid his face. He was afraid to look at God. Sin causes man to fear God's justice. God wanted Moses to recognise His holiness.

God said:

- ***"I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt."***
- ***"I have heard them crying out"***
- ***"I have come down to rescue them"***
- God had a plan, ***"I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring My people the Israelites out of Egypt."***

Notice that this wasn't a new plan. It was the fulfilment of God's promise to the patriarchs.

How was this to come about?

It wasn't a case of **Moses to accomplish the task with God's help.**
But **God to accomplish the task by the hand of Moses!**

So often we plunge ourselves into a task and ask God to help us. A better thing is to know the task God wants to accomplish and be willing workers with Him.

2 Cor. 6:11 talks about the believers as ***"fellow workers"*** with God.

Moses didn't question God's plan but he did question his fitness to take part in it. In verse 11 we read, ***"Who am I?"*** God never answers this question! He simply promises to be with Moses.

40 years had passed by and people in Egypt had forgotten that Moses was brought up in the royal household. All Moses could see was:

One man

No resources

No influence

No means

No co-worker

He knew the tyranny of the Pharaoh.

But God didn't want Moses to go in the strength of any personal power or authority.
He was to go in the power of God alone.

Moses felt he needed credentials. He wanted to be able to tell them the name of the God who had sent him. In Hebrew the idea behind, ***"What is His name?"*** (v. 13) is literally, "What is His disposition towards us? What does He think of us? What is His heart towards us?" Names were usually given to describe the person's character etc.

What was God's answer?

"I am who I am (or I will be what I will be). ***Say to the Israelites, 'I am has sent me to you' "***

God has no equal. This clearly refers to YHWH which may have been a shortening of the phrase.

YHWH wasn't a new name. It occurs 160 times in Genesis. The name of Moses' mother was Jocabed which means 'YHWH is my glory'. So God gave to Moses a name he knew well – not a new name.

God gives Moses this name ***"I am"*** because He is. There was never a time when He did not exist and He will never cease to exist.

When God revealed Himself to different people in the time of the patriarchs it was often together with a newly revealed name or title:

Gen. 14:22 In Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek he calls on **'God Most High'**

Gen. 17:1 To Abraham when confirming His Covenant God says, ***"I am God Almighty"***

Gen. 21:33 In Beersheba **Abraham** makes a treaty with Abimelech and calls on **– *"The Eternal God"***

Gen. 22:14 Abraham saw the ram in the thicket, he named the place ***"God will provide"***

Gen. 16:13 After Hagar met God in the desert she called him – ***"The God who sees"***.

There is also a sense that God is "the becoming one". He becomes what we need.

If we are in darkness – **He is the light**

If we are wounded and lost – **He is the Good Shepherd**

If we are hungry – **He is the Bread of Life**

When we doubt – **He is the Truth**

Jesus took this same title (I am) and so identified Himself with the God in the burning bush. Here are a few examples from John's Gospel:

John 8:24 (with the Pharisees) ***"If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be you will indeed die in your sins."***

" 8:58 (with the Jews) ***"Before Abraham was born I am."***

" 13:19 (predicting His betrayal) ***"I am He."***

" 18:4-8 (in Gethsemane) ***"I am He."*** (3 times)

Back to Exodus chapter 3

Moses had 3 objections to God's plan for him:

1. **Who am I? I have no authority.**
2. **They won't believe me.**
3. **I am not eloquent** – we will come to this in Chapter 4. Perhaps he was a man of few words after spending 40 years in the loneliness of the desert.

We will see that after the third objection God became angry with Moses.

It makes God angry when we evade responsibilities He has given to us because of feelings of inadequacy.

Moses was to tell the people of Israel it was God's time for them to leave Egypt, go to Canaan and possess the land God had promised to their fathers.

They probably didn't want to go!! What they wanted was to be made more comfortable in Egypt!!

Moses must first tell the elders of Israel God's plan and then go with them to the king to make their request. It is a simple request – just to go three days journey into the desert and offer sacrifices to God. It looked as if it would be easy for the king to grant such a request. But God knows that the king won't grant it. What can we learn from this?

- Often God won't speak to the wider world until He has first spoken to His People and has their full attention. What might this mean for us?
- Sometimes God sends us to people even when He knows they won't respond. He is beginning a work in them. It is dangerous to act on <u>our judgement</u> of whether or not person is likely to respond.

Hebrews 11 gives us a summary of the faith of Moses and his parents. We noted that when God reveals Himself in verse 6 of Exodus 3, He says, "***I am the God <u>of your father</u>*** (singular) ***…."***
We know that Moses father, Amram, was a godly person as was his mother Jocabed.

Heb. 11:23 says, ***"By faith Moses' parents hid him for 3 months … because they saw he was no ordinary child and they were not afraid of the king's edict."***

Moses learned from his parents:

- faith in God
- fearless courage

It is faith that ousts fear. In World War II, on a bombed church in London in the Blitz there was a large poster that read, **"If your knees are knocking, kneel on them."** In other words, 'When you are scared, pray!'

It was the faith of Amram and Jocabed that made possible God's later dealings with Moses. There is a real sense in which these two slaves can be said to have changed the course of world history!

Perhaps God has asked you to have faith in Him concerning His work in the life of someone in your family or that He has specially laid on your heart? We don't know when Amram and Jocabed died. We don't always see the results of our prayers and the things we are believing God for in this life.

Four verbs in Hebrews 11 sum up Moses decision:

- **"esteeming"** (the reproach of Christ)
- **"refusing"** (to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter)
- **"choosing"** (to suffer affliction)
- **"forsaking"** (Egypt)

In his early life Moses had been an activist.

In the desert he learned that **being** is more important than **doing**.

When he looked at the burning bush little did he realise that he stood at a crisis in his life.

Hearsay knowledge of God became **experiential knowledge** of God.

It was a common acacia bush. The only thing distinguishing it from the others all around was the presence of God.

Any greatness in Moses would be the result of the indwelling God.

When Moses fled after killing the Egyptian **he was afraid** of the wrath of Pharaoh.

When he led the people out, ***"He left <u>not fearing</u> the king's anger."*** (Heb. 11:27)

What made the difference? **FAITH**

Faith is only possible when we are **in God's plan** and **trusting in His promises**.

Both of these are necessary. If we are in God's plan but not fully trusting Him we are in trouble.

If we are trusting Him but have not discovered His plan for our lives we are also in trouble!!

There is no point in praying for more faith unless we fulfil the conditions of faith!

As God spoke from the burning bush we see His timing and God's timing is always vital!!

The past: ***"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."***

The present: ***"I have seen the affliction of my people. I know their sorrows. I have come to deliver them."***

The future*: "I will send you to Pharaoh."*

What can we learn from the call of Moses that we can put into practice in our lives today?

Here are a few thoughts. There may be other things that God has highlighted to you.

1. Spiritual battles aren't won by human effort.
2. God doesn't speak until He knows He has our attention.
3. Strange occurrences mean nothing until God speaks.
4. God's call to us is always personal.
5. God has promised to be with us always no matter what.
6. God can always supply **all** our needs.
7. We aren't "helping" God. He wants to work in and through us to touch His world if we will let Him.
8. Our faith in God's plan and our resulting actions may impact future generations.