

bush league (part 1)

exodus 3.1-4.17

We're going to take a look at Moses' encounter with the burning bush this morning, starting in Exodus chapter 3. So find your way there.

We're going to take this story in 2 parts. It would be a little too long to look at all in one sitting. In the first section Moses encounters the Lord and is given a calling. In the second section which we'll see next week the Lord lays out His development plan for the extraction of the Israelites from Egypt.

Let's see what we see starting in verse 1.

Exodus 3.1 - Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

When you look back on Moses' life you see how long the Lord had been training and preparing him for the task of leading the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. He had been trained in the administration of law and in national leadership. He'd been reared with the knowledge of God and the testimonies of what He had done. He had experience in cities among foreign people and in the desert wilderness. And here we see him having learned the skills of shepherding a flock on behalf of their true owner, understanding not only how to care for the group, but also how to watch out for the individual lambs.

Your life is not a now-and-then encounter with God, it's an ongoing training and growing as the Lord readies you for what He has next.

And the specific place God has planted you is part of that process.

The text points out that Moses was on the back of the desert, at Mount Horeb, the mountain of God. This region (and this mountain in particular) was going to be a key part of Moses' life. Later in verse 12 the Lord says He's going to use that very mountain as a significant part of Moses' testimony before the people of Israel. God is intentional about the places He plants us.

In our area we seem to have a culture of getting away. Young people want to get away from this area for college. And grown ups seem to be excited about getting away from here to some other place with greener pastures. I understand that, but we need to temper those plans and desires with an acknowledgment that God plants us in specific places on purpose. He has *reasons* for putting you in a particular pasture. So, if you come to a point in life where you can relocate, be sure that you're being sent with God's blessing and by His direction, rather than just running away for other reasons.

Exodus 3.2 - And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed.

This was quite a sight. More and more I've been thinking of the burning bush as a picture of what my life in Christ should be like. I am a vessel that He fills up, setting fire to every branch and blossom, so that people in the wilderness are drawn to see the Lord. We're meant to beacons of God's presence and His power, ablaze yet not consumed.

Exodus 3.3-4 - Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn."

So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!"

And he said, "Here I am."

God is interested in people who are interested. The Lord draws all mankind to Himself through various means. He loves all of the people of the earth, but it's those who come to inquire who receive additional revelation. It's like when Jesus taught in parables. The story went out to everyone, but only those who followed up with interest were given the real meaning and understanding of what He was trying to say.

When we show interest to God manifesting Himself to us, He responds by calling us to something. A task or an opportunity or a ministry. Just like He did when Moses turned aside to look.

Exodus 3.5-6 - Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." Moreover He said, "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.

When we draw near to God and approach Him, He responds by sanctifying us. God is holy, so we must be holy. But the Lord also uses that holiness to change our lives so that everyone around us will recognize that our choices are being dictated not by ourselves, but by our Master. That's the whole point of the Levitical law. To highlight a person's need for God and to demonstrate who God is to people who would see the unusual things that God's people were doing.

God wants people to take notice of what He's doing and sanctification is one of the ways He uses to proclaim Himself, because it makes us conspicuous to the world around us and it makes God's control of our lives conspicuous.

Exodus 3.7-10 - And the Lord said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel

has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”

Here as Moses and the Lord continue to chat we see that God responds to oppression by sending *us* to act on it. What did Jesus say to the disciples when the hungry crowds were there in the wilderness? “*YOU* give them something to eat.” Now, of course we can’t do those sorts of things on our own - we need God’s power and provision. But that’s the point: We act in the power of God in the face of oppression because God’s love is *active*. Real love doesn’t just feel things, it *does* things. So, the Lord will send us to do things in His power and provision because of His love that has filled up our lives. And when we deny the oppressed help and assistance, we sin against them and against the Lord.

Exodus 3.11-14a - But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

So He said, “I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

Then Moses said to God, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?”

And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.”

As the Lord speaks to us and shows us things and calls us to action, we’re going to have a lot of questions, just like Moses did, and that’s fine. Questions aren’t bad. The Lord wants us to be open with Him and not trying to hide our thoughts or our concerns away from Him.

So, when something’s going on in your life, whether a struggle or an opportunity or a moment of calling or whatever, you should bring your questions to the Lord. Because the Lord responds to our inquiries with answers and revelation. He has a plan and He wants us to be a part of carrying out that plan, so naturally He’s going to want to explain what He’s doing.

And that’s where we’re at in the text - God shifts to laying out His plan and calling to Moses, which we’re going to look at next time we’re together.

But as we wrap up this morning, let’s take away a few ideas.

First of all, notice the back and forth between God and Moses. The Lord is very open and very responsive to Moses’ interest.

I think sometimes we get into a mentality where we are waiting for God to dial our number but in the mean time we slip into inactivity. The problem with inactivity is that it eventually leads to disinterest. So we can’t always just sit by the proverbial phone and wait for God to call. We see here and elsewhere in Scripture that the Lord responds to interest. So, we should go and seek out the Lord and seek out opportunities to serve Him.

Right now in your life there's some flickering light off in the distance like the burning bush on the mountain. Rather than shrug it off, remember that God is always wanting to speak and manifest Himself in your life. Go and take a look. Seek out the Lord in the situations of your life and see where He might meet with you.

Second, get fully on board with the Lord's sanctification. Back when Moses first fled to Midian after murdering the Egyptian, he had thought he was going to be the great deliverer, but he was doing things all the wrong way. What's interesting to me is that when he shows up to the well the daughters of Jethro identify him as an Egyptian. They told their dad, "An Egyptian saved us from the shepherds."

If we look like the world and smell like the world and act like the world, then despite our spiritual intentions, people are going to identify us not by the all-consuming power and holiness of God, but instead we'll be known for those worldly things we've let define our lives.

Sanctification is essential. And being holy means that there are going to be actual things that we have to strip away from our lives the way Moses took off his sandals.

Third, being used by God is not centered around becoming great, it's centered around salvation. Bringing God's love to those who are lost and oppressed both in the physical world, and those held captive by the Devil. By definition it means we're going to be inserted into places and situations where the Gospel is needed and people are struggling. Moses was going to be sent back to the palace, but he was being sent there as an abolitionist, not a guest.

What we'll see next week is that Moses tries as hard as he can to say no, but the Lord won't take 'No' for an answer.

And that's something interesting to meditate upon. When we think of Moses or Jonah not wanting to go to Nineveh or Jeremiah trying to keep the message inside himself, we find that once you're a believer, once you belong to the Lord and are a part of His household, He doesn't really take 'no' for an answer.

We may resist and harden ourselves, but God won't leave us to waste. The production of fruit and growth in our lives is going to get decimated, but the Lord will continue the work of remodeling His child.

Why kick against the goads and spend time in the belly of the fish when the Lord is ready to ignite our lives with His strength and provision?

We're going to see the way God works next week as He lays out His plan for the Israelites in chapter 4. But for today, let's turn aside and give our attention to God so we can hear what sort of callings He's been preparing us for.