



Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text

Exodus 2:23-3:10

Topic

Moses approaches the burning bush
and hears God calling him

Title

"Bush, Bush, I Thought I Heard Him Calling My Name"

With another blockbuster installment coming next month, it's timely to use an illustration from one of the well-known moments in *Star Wars*.

In Episode IV, Obi-Won Kenobi, sensing Alderaan's complete destruction, said, "I felt a great disturbance in the Force, as if millions of voices suddenly cried out in terror, and were suddenly silenced. I fear something terrible has happened."

According to *Wookieepedia*, Alderaan had a population of 2 billion.

There are currently 7½ billion people on our planet. At any one moment, terrible things are happening.

Can you imagine the billions of voices groaning on account of the suffering they are enduring?

I can't hear them; but God can, and He does.

“Wait a minute,” people object, “if God hears them, *why doesn't He do something to respond to their cries?*”

He has done something. He is doing something.

To help us get a handle on what He has done and is doing, we can take a look at the children of Israel prior to their exodus from Egypt.

We're reading history; it really happened. But it's also for our learning about how God works in the world to deliver lost men and women.

Terrible things were happening. We read, “The children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. **So God heard their groaning**” (2:23-24).

As the story unfolds, we read in chapter three that “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...” (3:7-8).

God heard their cries... And He came down to deliver them.

Does that sound familiar?

It's a foreshadowing of God *coming down* to earth in the person of Jesus Christ, Who by dying on the Cross and rising from the dead, delivered mankind from sin and death.

Suddenly this story isn't so ancient.

Next we read, “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” (3:9-10).

God sent Moses to deliver them. Does that sound familiar?

Jesus *sends out His followers* into the world with the Gospel, to proclaim deliverance.

It's all a microcosm of God's plan to save the world: He heard... He came... He sends. It's what God has done, and is doing, to respond to the cries of mankind.

Keep that in mind as we work through these verses. I'll organize my comments around the following two points: #1 It's Good To Be Reminded That God Hears You, and #2 It's Good To Be Reminded That God Sends You.

#1 It's Good To Be Reminded
That God Hears You

(2:23-25)

A common plot point in stories is for the characters to send for help, but not know if their requests are being received. There's no response until, at the last minute, help comes.

When we pray, if the specific help we are requesting doesn't come, we feel as though we're not being heard.

Have you ever heard the expression, "the heavens became like brass?" It's not used much in modern preaching, but it commonly occurs in older Christian works to describe the feeling that our prayers are not getting through.

There are a few things that can hinder our praying:

- 1Pe 3:7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with *them* with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as *being* heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.
- Jas 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.
- Pro 28:9 One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer *is* an abomination.

I'm talking about the times none of those things is hindering your prayers, but it seems as though the heavens have turned to brass.

In those times, you can be confident God has heard you, and is working all things together for the good. It's just that you can't see everything happening behind the scenes.

We tend to forget that there is always more going on, behind the scenes, than we have been made privilege to. That certainly was the case in Goshen, where the Israelites were crying-out.

For example in the Book of Genesis we read,

Gen 15:13 Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is* not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.

Gen 15:14 And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions...

Gen 15:16 But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet complete."

Well before the Israelites were in Egypt, God predicted their four hundred years of affliction. One result was that they would "come out with great possessions." After the series of plagues, the Egyptians were happy to see the Israelites go, and they gave them tremendous wealth upon their leaving.

Had Moses delivered them militarily, they may never have left Egypt. Or never have been showered upon with riches.

Simultaneously, God was giving the squatters in the Promised Land, the Amorites, time to repent, and turn to Him. They wouldn't, and God would use the Israelites as His instrument of judgment against them.

A lot was going on behind the scenes. The Israelites knew some of it, by oral tradition; but they probably did not comprehend it. They must simply trust that God heard their constant cries.

A lot is always going on behind the scenes of your life. God is making moves, and counter moves, to insure that all things work together for the good, ultimately. Along the way you won't be able to see everything; you're to trust, and in your crying, learn that God's grace is sufficient for you even when circumstances worsen.

Exo 2:23 Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage.

The death of the Pharaoh set things in motion. It reminds us how important timing can be. We have an idiom, "Timing is everything." Well, it may not be everything, but in God's providence, it's critical. For example, the Pharaoh died just as Moses was done with his training in the desert. Perfect timing.

Exo 2:24 So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

The Israelites had been crying-out all along, but now was the time that their groaning was going to be alleviated.

The mention of "His covenant" is significant to our discussion because it reminds us that God has made promises and He will keep them.

God told Abraham He was going to make of him a great nation that would possess a great land. The promises were unconditional - meaning God would keep them no matter what.

Most of the things we pray for, especially in our sufferings, are not unconditional promises. If I'm sick, especially seriously, I pray for healing. God still heals; but it isn't an unconditional promise. He may choose to heal me. Or He may treat me like He did the apostle Paul, refusing to remove his thorn in the flesh because he needed it to remain humble and be able to sing, "Your grace is enough."

There are a great many unconditional promises that God has made and must keep. Sticking with the healing example, I can trust that if I am not healed, I'll be in Heaven the moment I die - absent from my body, but present with the Lord.

There are a bunch of unconditional promises like that, for the future. There are also a bunch for today. I know that Jesus cannot leave me or forsake me. I know that His Holy Spirit indwells me, and can infill me over-and-over.

In the end, the "light afflictions" that I prayed so much about are going to be completely overshadowed by God's unconditional promises to me... To us.

Exo 2:25 And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged *them*.

One version of the Bible translates that last phrase, "And He knew that He would help them."

These closing verses are the set-up for what's coming next. God heard their cries and the time had come for Him to act.

I'm hurting in some areas of my life; you are, too. It's not wrong to hope that today is the day that it is time for God to act, and to alleviate our suffering. It's great to see help on the horizon.

But if it isn't His timing, let's embrace the fact that His grace is sufficient. If need be, let's look past this life to His eternal promises.

Matthew Henry put it this way: “Let those that think themselves buried alive be content to shine like lamps in their sepulchers, and wait till God’s time come for setting them on a candlestick.”

He’ll make all things beautiful... In His time.

#2 It’s Good To Be Reminded That God Sends You

(3:1-10)

When we read the Old Testament, we are reading about how God’s plan to redeem and restore the human race, and His creation, unfolded. Adam and Eve sinned; but God immediately responded with His plan. He would come, as a man, born of a woman. As the God-man, having added humanity to His deity, He could take the place of mankind and die for our sins, saving us.

That’s one reason why the first thing you see in the next set of verses is that God came down, to earth, to meet with Moses. It captures the essence of His plan - God with us.

Exo 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.

We met Jethro in our last study. He was also called “Reuel”; not unusual for people in the Bible to have multiple names. He was a “priest,” and because of his descent from “Midian,” a son of Abraham, we say he was a true believer in God.

As chapter three opens, Moses had been shepherding in the desert the past forty years. We talked about God's timing with regard to there being a new Pharaoh, and the iniquity of the Amorites being full.

God also needed to prepare Moses to be the shepherd of His people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land.

And in His foreknowledge, God knew that the Jews would refuse to enter their land and spend forty years more wandering in the desert.

"Horeb" is another name for Mount Sinai. Moses, who is the author of Exodus, calls it "the mountain of God" looking back upon all the events that will take place there, e.g., his calling, and the giving of the Law to Israel.

Concerning Mount Sinai, one commentator said: "The name Sinai is probably hinted at by the designation of the burning bush in Hebrew as *sene*, as if Sinai meant *the mountain of the sene-bush*."

The exact location of Horeb is unknown to us today. It's probably just as well, otherwise folks would enshrine it, and worship it.

Exo 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.

The "Angel of the Lord" is an Old Testament appearance of Jesus. The technical term is theophany; or Christophany.

It's generally agreed that this was a thorn bush common in the desert. Hold that thought.

Better yet - think about the thorn bush and what things it might symbolize.

Exo 3:3 Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn."

Have you ever burned your dead Christmas tree in the fireplace? I don't recommend it. I almost burned-down our little cabin in Running Springs putting pieces of the tree in there.

A dry thorn bush that burned but wasn't consumed - that was worth seeing on the backside of the desert.

Isn't it amazing to think about the small details upon which human history advances? What if Moses had ignored the phenomena?

Things out of the ordinary may indicate God is trying to get your attention.

Exo 3:4 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."

Moses took a step towards God, and God then further revealed Himself to Moses. I often tell folks to do the next thing, then God will give instruction. Ours is a walk of faith - one step at a time.

Exo 3:5 Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand *is* holy ground."

God's presence made the mountain "holy ground," not anything about the place itself.

The removal of sandals was a common practice when you entered a house or a temple. It was a show of respect; and it anticipated relaxation and fellowship.

There's a debate about whether or not the Jewish priests served barefoot. The Bible doesn't say one way or the other, although barefoot advocates point out that in the extensive description of the outfit there is no mention of shoes (sandals).

Should we go barefoot today, in the church? No. Not unless you can't afford shoes. We shouldn't turn someone away because they can't afford shoes.

As for those of us who can afford shoes, we are told we worship God in spirit and in truth. One application I would make of that principle is that no object of clothing should make me feel *more* or *less* spiritual. Taking off my shoes is nothing; wearing my shoes is nothing.

What is the deciding factor? I should be all things to all men:

- If I'm in a congregation that expects barefootedness, I kick-off the Sanuk's.
- If not, I stay covered, sparing everyone my hobbit feet.

Exo 3:6 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.

Just a final word about being barefoot. Moses also "hid his face." Should we therefore hide our faces in order to truly worship God?

Hide your face while barefoot and you're gonna have a lot of stubbed toes!

Mention of the patriarchs reminds us of at least two things:

1. God must keep His unconditional promises made to them.
2. The information God gave Moses was not new - it was a deeper, progressive revelation of His nature and His plan.

Exo 3:7 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.

The nonbeliever accuses God of not caring about human pain when, in truth, *He cares too much*. God's plan for redeeming and restoring will eventually end all suffering. There won't be so much as one tear in eternity.

But once the consummation of His plan comes, it will also mean the end of opportunity for the lost.

Taskmasters. We all have them. They're the people and things that are against us. They're the illnesses and conditions that lash us.

None of them can separate us from the love of God in Jesus.

Exo 3:8 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.

The phrase “a land flowing with milk and honey” means that Canaan was ideal for raising goats, sheep, and cows. Feeding on good pastureland the goats, sheep, and cows were full of milk.

Flowing with honey means that the bees were busy making honey. Milk and honey suggested agricultural prosperity. This is the first of numerous references in the Old Testament to the “land flowing with milk and honey.”

Something else about that land: It was full of enemies; fierce enemies, that would need to be overcome.

God wasn't going to deliver His children to a better, more comfortable life in Egypt. He was going to lead them into battle in the Promised Land.

The Christian life isn't a life of ease, having the best of this world. This world, and its god, are contrary to you; it needs to be overcome.

If you're not feeling spiritual warfare, maybe it's because you are AWOL, living a comfortable and secure life that doesn't include serving the Lord.

A key phrase is dropped here: “I have come down.” In context, God had come down to inhabit the burning bush. Prophetically it preaches to us of the incarnation - of God taking upon Himself human flesh.

Those who criticize God for not doing anything about human suffering... What is their solution? It's not that God became man to share our sufferings, and substitute Himself to save us.

Exo 3:9 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.

God keeps reiterating that He heard their cries. The Egyptians were oppressors. Nevertheless God waited.

Whenever God waits, we can be certain among His motives is that He is not willing any should perish, but rather that they would receive eternal life.

This is a dumb hypothetical, but here goes. If you could choose whether or not to endure some suffering, but knew that if you did it would result in even one person being saved for eternity - would you do it?

In the grace of God, of course you would.

Same scenario, only instead of the result being that the person gets saved, they perish, but God's longsuffering waiting for their decision shows His glory and mercy to all onlookers, both human and heavenly. Would you choose to suffer?

That's more like what is going on everyday that God's longsuffering waits.

Exo 3:10 Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

Bombshell. God heard... He came down... **And He was going to send Moses.** His plan was to send a shepherd to lead them - first away from Egypt, then into the Promised Land (with an extended stay in the desert by their choice).

Moses isn't going to like this plan; we'll see that in subsequent studies.

For now, we see God's mega-plan in micro: He personally comes down, commissions a believer, who He then sends with the authority to proclaim deliverance to the oppressed.

Earlier I pointed-out that the bush that was burning but not being consumed was a thorn bush.

Thorns came into creation after the fall of man; after Adam and Eve sinned. Thorns and thorn bushes are part of the curse.

Fire is a symbol of what in the Bible? (I should ask, "Of Who?," not what).

Fire is a representation of the Holy Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit coming upon the believers was represented by fire.

Fire in the midst of a thorn bush is a picture of God dwelling among the curse; among the thorns. He did it first as the God-man, Jesus Christ, Who was filled with the Holy Spirit.

He does it as He indwells each and every believer under the curse, in these bodies of flesh.

Puritan John Owen put it like this: "The eternal fire of the divine nature dwells in the bush of our frail nature, yet is it not consumed thereby. God thus dwells in this bush, with all his goodwill towards sinners."

This fire was not in a tall and stately cedar, but in a bush, a thorny bush, for God chooses the weak and despised things of the world (such as Moses, now a poor shepherd), with them to confound the wise.

The apostle Peter explained God's plan like this:

2Pe 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

2Pe 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

2Pe 3:11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,

2Pe 3:12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

2Pe 3:13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

You may not need to "go" anywhere, but you have nevertheless been sent to preach the Gospel. You have this treasure in earthen vessels.

The Holy Spirit is within your thorn bush.