



Exodus 3:1-15
 Journey to Freedom: Exodus
 "I Am"

Rev. Brian North
 July 18th, 2021

Today we continue our summer series of messages in Exodus as we look at some of the significant themes and lessons of this book. The early part focuses heavily on Moses and God's miraculous work in his life, and then as things progress we'll see God work through Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, organize a leadership structure for the nation, establish worship practices in their relationship with God, and more. But today's passage continues our focus on Moses, as we look at the famous encounter he has with God. Let's turn to Exodus 3, as we look at the first 15 verses. This is God's Word to you and me today...Read, Pray.

So, I need to begin by letting you know that when Brian and I decided, along with the doctor, that surgery was needed in order for his knee to get healthy, one of Brian's concerns was, of course, worship. He asked the doctor how likely it was he could be in church today, preaching and leading. The doctor advised him not to count on it. But, I told Brian I'd be happy to preach for him if he'd like, if he could write the sermon. So, today's sermon was written by pastor Brian and is being delivered by me. As a result, he's put in all kinds of things that he'd *like* to say to the Rose Hill family, but didn't really *want* to say them himself. 😊 Just kidding. And to be honest, I did go through and made some edits and changed some illustrations. So now it's a *way* better sermon.

Now, for just a moment I want to back up to near the end of chapter two, where there's an interesting piece of information in verse 23. It reads, **"During that long period [meaning, during Moses' 40 years in Midian that we talked about last week] the king of**

Egypt died” (Exodus 2:23). We’re not used to this word “King” when speaking of Egypt’s leader in this time period. But the king of Egypt is the same as Pharaoh. The word “Pharaoh” originally referred to the palace that the King or Queen lived in, but over time came to refer to the person herself or himself.¹

And after the king died, the transfer of power was not smooth. In fact, for as long as a couple hundred years there’s a period of time in Egypt’s history that scholars call, “The Second Intermediate Period.” It was this “in between dynasties” period of time. So, life in Egypt was not as organized or running as smoothly as it once was, with challenges for power and political leadership, and so forth. And the events recorded here in Exodus line up with that time period in Egypt’s history, with this note that “the king of Egypt died” being a clue that this particular king’s death was noteworthy.

This kind of “sets the table” for God to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, because Egypt’s leadership is a little topsy-turvey for a time. But: who’s going to lead this endeavor to bring the Israelites out? Well, that’s where today’s passage comes in.

Verse 1 tells us that Moses led the flock “beyond the wilderness.” So, he’s a long way out there. And as Moses is out beyond the wilderness, tending to this flock, a strange thing happens in verse 2: there’s a bush that is on fire, but it’s not actually burning up. We’re told that this phenomenon is an angel of the Lord appearing to him, and God speaks to him out of the bush. The messenger, the symbol, and God himself are fluidly exchanged in this event, as often happens in the Old Testament.

So, God speaks to Moses out of this bush. He says that he has heard the cries of his people, he’s seen the oppression, the mis-treatment,

and so forth...and God says in verse 8 that he's come down to rescue them. Then in verse 10 he says, "**So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.**" Did you catch what happened there? God says *he's* come down to rescue them, and then he doesn't *ask* Moses, but *tells* Moses to go and do what God just said *He* has come to do.

Now, Moses puts up a bunch of arguments about why he shouldn't do this. He gives a couple of them here, but then there are more. Pastor Brian will speak on that next Sunday if he's not still on pain medications.

In spite of his objections: Moses is uniquely qualified to do this job. He's Hebrew by birth so he has a heart for the people. Even though he grew up as adopted Egyptian royalty, he was cared for by his birth mother at first and for who knows how long, so he has a deep connection to those people, certainly speaks the Hebrew language, and so forth. But because he grew up in an Egyptian home, he's intimately familiar with their ways of doing things, their language, customs, and power structures – even if things are a bit unsettled politically – and so forth. So, God reaches out to Moses because he's the guy for the job.

When Moses objects, God promises him in verse 12 "I will be with you." God's presence going with him is enough. When God is with you, that is enough. If God has called you to do something, God will not leave you to your own devices, and He is enough. So that's his promise.

Then, Moses wants to confirm which God this is. Last week Pastor Brian talked about how Moses and Reuel, who became his father-in-law and is also known as Jethro...Pastor Brian talked about how the

two of them have common ancestry – they trace their lineage back to Abraham. So, they’ve got a common denominator in their faith. But Moses isn’t sure who this God is in the burning bush. Why? Well, probably it’s because Moses grew up in Egypt, in an Egyptian home, and would have been exposed to Egyptian gods, worship practices, and so forth.

So, Moses needed some clarity on which God is speaking to him. **And God responds with this name, “Yahweh asher Yahweh” – “I am that I am” is essentially how it’s translated, though that doesn’t really do it justice.** “I am eternally “I exist as the existing one”. Something like that. We looked at this name in depth one Sunday last fall in our Names of God sermon series, so you can check that out for more.² But this clarifies for Moses that is the God above all gods, the God of his ancestors, the God of Jacob, the God of Creation. The upshot of all of this is that Moses, in spite of his objections, ends up with a high calling for which he is uniquely qualified.

There are a few things that we can learn from this. **First, notice that when God taps him on the shoulder for this calling, Moses is out doing a fairly normal, everyday activity: tending to a flock of sheep.** He’s caring for his father-in-law’s sheep. A burning bush is not what Moses expected to find, out beyond the wilderness as he tended the sheep. He was not looking for a spiritual experience or an encounter with God. He was with the sheep, caring for them, leading them to green pastures and quiet waters. He’s doing what he probably did most days of the week.

Like Moses, we all get going with the everyday things of life, and we aren't necessarily looking for God's intervention, either. We're doing regular things like...well, nothing's been regular the last 16

months. But slowly we're returning, and you can remember regular life, right?: taking kids to school, watching the grandkids at a soccer game, going out to eat occasionally, taking the dog for a walk, getting the mail, and having surgeries. At least, for Pastor Brian, that's beginning to feel like an everyday thing. 😊 And it's easy to get caught up in all of that...to get busy with all the regular, routine stuff of life. **But like Moses, God may just be trying to get a hold of you when you're not really looking for Him.** God may be calling you to something that's outside the box of what is currently your routine, normal, everyday kind of thing, as well.

I'm not saying the way he calls you is going to be so evident. He may not audibly speak to you out of a modern-day burning bush – like a burning phone screen, or a boiling pot of water, or a fiery soccer ball as the grandkids are chasing it around the field. God may not come to you in an extraordinary way like that. But in the midst of the ordinary, God may very well give you an opportunity to serve and lead his people. Let's be alert for the opportunities God gives us to shepherd his people and bring the faith community forward. Life is an open opportunity moment-by-moment.

Second of all, the calling may disrupt some of the normalcy of life. Going back to Egypt to lead his people was not at all compatible with tending to the flocks of his father-in-law. There was no such thing as social-distanced shepherding. No shepherding via Zoom. He couldn't FaceTime his Hebrew relatives and tell them to meet him in Midian. He had to up and leave in order to live into God's calling. That was disruptive. That was a significant change. There was nothing comfortable about it, even if it's returning to where he grew up. Life was totally turned upside down.

And we should expect nothing less. I don't know about you but that makes me nervous at first. I like comfort and predictability. Change is scary. Collectively as a church, we believe God has called us to be generationally-balanced. We are seeking to be a flourishing church that makes disciples of Jesus. Guess what? That's disruptive. Our mission is not affirmed by the world around us. It's an uphill, disruptive battle right there. And then there's also our own internal issues where we might like things a certain way but if we're going to be a generationally balanced church and reflect the community around us – which also means being an ethnically diverse church – if we're going to reach people with the gospel message of Jesus Christ, then that's going to **disrupt us** even more.

We can dive into a Bible Study. Invite a friend to church. Pray for our neighbors or prayer-walk the neighborhood. God may lead us to stop being so self centered and be like Jesus. Healing the sick and ministering to the broken. We might find our broken hearts healed in the process. Worship will bring God pleasure and church will be a wellspring for us. We will have our schedules disrupted, our bank accounts impacted, our energy levels tapped into as God breaks through the “normal” to do something extraordinary through us as he did with Moses in this community and in this world that we live in. If Moses had stayed in Midian, he never would have gotten to be a part of the amazing miracle of leading His people out of Egypt. Thank God that Moses was willing to get uncomfortable and get involved and listen to the leading of the Lord in his midst.

Lastly, there is incredible strength and comfort in knowing that God is who he is – that he's the great I am – and that He is with us. In fact, God being with us, is all we need. He is our sustenance, our protection, our best friend, our support system. When Moses' first objection, and really his main one, is when he said in verse 11,

“Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” His second question wasn’t as much of an objection – “Who are you?” – but this first one definitely is. In other words, he’s saying, “I’m not worthy.” And God says, “I am with you.”

That’s enough. God with us is enough. As many of you know, one of the names of God, specifically of Jesus, is “Emmanuel.” It means “God with us.” When we put our faith in Jesus, he is with us. He says in the Gospels that he sends the Comforter, which is a name for the Holy Spirit, to be with us. His Spirit dwells in us through faith in Jesus. Jesus said he is with us always, to the very end of the age. And his unfailing presence is enough for us to step into the calling that God has placed upon us, even when – like Moses – we have our doubts.

I want to close with a quote from an article Pastor Brian got in his inbox this week. It’s from Relevant Magazine, in an article titled, “Yes, You Are Called To Be A Leader” and it couldn’t fit better with today’s sermon. Here’s the opening few paragraphs: “The idea of being a leader in church can be daunting. **We may think of ourselves as leaders in other areas of our lives, but when it comes to church settings, we can find all sorts of reasons to avoid stepping up.** *I’m not sure I’m that committed to this church. I’m not spiritual enough. I don’t have time. Stop listening to that! Dive In! Get engaged. Give Jesus your all and all and experience the best life that Jesus has for you today.*

In many ways, the call to follow Christ is a call to discipleship. Get moving church. Get Jesus today and be filled with the Holy Spirit in faith.

“Faith isn’t a spectator sport. The influential Christians we remember throughout history were the men and women who would not wait on the sideline when there was work to be done. They realized that Jesus didn’t just save us from something. **“He saved us for something. He has a mission, and His church and His people are part of it”** (Yes, You Are Called To Be A Leader – Relevant Magazine, online).

Many of you, like Moses, have answered the call, and you’ve stepped out in faith and gotten engaged in the life of the church. Way to go! If you haven’t, there’s room for you to share your gifts and talents, the way God has uniquely equipped you – just as Moses was uniquely equipped for his calling. Learn to listen to God in the Bible instead of other voices in your head.

And all of us, when we step out like Moses did and answer that call, we will experience some disruption and our comfort levels may get pushed around some. But the presence of God, the great I am, and the thrill of serving him will bring your life to the next level. Jesus said that He has come that we may have life and have it to the fullest. Because he has a mission for us here – we are all invited to deeper intimacy - at Rose Hill, and you and I, his people, are part of this mission force of faith and devotion. Let’s pray...Amen.

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/pharaoh>

² From November 15. Here’s the link to the service videos: <https://www.rosehill.church/video-archive.html#20-11-15>

Here’s the link to the sermon audio: <http://www.rosehillpc.org/sermonaudio/20-11-15.mp3>

Here’s the link to the sermon text: <http://www.rosehillpc.org/sermonaudio/20-11-15%20Text.pdf>