

The life of Moses

MOSES' BURNING BUSH

Exodus 3:11 - 4:17

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

MOSES' BURNING BUSH

“Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off the feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy 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. And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto 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 is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.” (Exodus 3: 1 – 10)

It is truly amazing how many life lessons we can learn by studying how God worked in the life of Moses. In the previous lessons we have seen how God placed Moses in Pharaoh’s house and prepared him to be the leader that would bring the Children of Israel out of Egypt. He was schooled in all the learning of Egypt. He was trained as a military leader and fully capable of leading the large nation that Israel had grown to be. The Scriptures teach us in Acts 7:23 that when, “he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.” He felt he was ready to lead his people out of bondage. He was completely shocked at how the next events unfolded. So many times we feel we know just what God is going to do in our lives and just what we will accomplish for Him. We are just as shocked when these wonderful things that we want to do for Him never transpire and our lives take an entirely different path. Some years ago the Lord led my family to the nation of Japan as

missionaries. I remember gathering with the other missionaries with whom we worked and we would plan how we would do this or that for the Lord over the next several years. We learned that God had other plans. Hardly any of the things that we planned came to pass the way we had planned, yet God has used each one of us in a unique way. Moses exposed his plan to lead the Children of Israel out of Egypt when he killed the guard that was mistreating a Hebrew slave. Now Moses was seen as a traitor to the throne and had to flee for his life. He ran into the desert and became a shepherd in the Land of Midian. This is where chapter three of the book of Exodus begins.

What I want for us to see in this passage is in the context of chapters three and four. This passage relates to us Moses' experience with the burning bush and what he learned from it.

When Moses left Egypt he was defeated, disgraced and disillusioned. He had been reduced from being the Prince of Egypt to being a lowly sheepherder. As he kept those sheep in Midian, I imagine that he was convinced that he would never again know the courts of Pharaoh. His dreams of being the deliverer of his people were dashed. He was just a useless, despised herder of sheep. Yet, he was exactly where God wanted him to be. You may be thinking, "How could this be? Wouldn't he have been in a much more useful place if he had stayed in the court?" We should never forget that man's reasoning and God's reasoning are not the same. We see a goal to be accomplished. God sees souls to be shaped after His image. Moses was exactly in

the place where God could mature him and teach him humility and perseverance. When God led the people of Israel out of Egypt it was obvious that Moses was only the instrument God used to accomplish this purpose. Moses was not the great deliverer, God was. God let Moses suffer the death of his vision so that he could learn a more important lesson. God was going to reveal Himself to the people of Israel, Pharaoh, the Egyptians and the rest of the world. Had Moses not been humbled in this way we would have remembered Moses the great leader of Israel. By doing it His way God insured that all would remember that it was the great God of Israel who had won the victory. They now knew who God was. They knew that He was concerned with the affairs of men. They would learn of His love and come to know His Son as their Savior.

Here in Exodus chapter three verse two and following Moses sees the burning bush. As he turns aside to see this strange sight several things happened to him. First of all he hears his name called. God had not forgotten him. Even after all those years in the wilderness God knew who he was and where he had been. Maybe you are reading this and you think that you have been forgotten by God. I remind you that God still knows your name and where you are. He still desires to use you if you will surrender all that you are to His care. Next Moses learns that he is standing on holy ground. As if to remind him of his humble place, God tells Moses to remove his shoes. That was when the most momentous even in Moses' life took place. God revealed Himself to Moses. God says in verse six,

“I am the God of thy 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.” God, the Father, is saying to Moses, “I am the God you have always heard of but have never known.” So many people today have known about God since they were children, but have never really known Him. God wants to have a personal relationship with every one of His creation. When we receive His Son, the Lord Jesus as our Savior, He makes us His child. His Holy Spirit comes to live in our hearts and He establishes a close personal relationship with us. Our sin can interrupt this communion. How foolish we can be. We can have a close, loving relationship with the God who created all things and we cling to our sin like a child clinging to a broken toy. God revealed that He existed, that He was concerned about His children, and that He was going to enter again into their lives. In verse seven through ten God reveals His plan to Moses. God says, “I have seen the affliction of my people.” In verse eight He says that He is, “Come down to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land.” Then in verse ten He says to Moses, “Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.” I think that this is the place where a lot of people today would balk. We are glad that God has seen the problems of this world. We are thrilled that God is going to intervene in the problems and solve them for us. However, we draw the line when we learn

that he plans to use us to accomplish this noble purpose. Perhaps there is a Sunday school class in your church and there is no one to teach it. Your pastor says from the pulpit that he believes that God is going to touch the heart of someone to take on that responsibility. Your heart is blessed to know that God is going to meet the need in the church. Then the pastor looks at you and asks you to consider doing this great work. Are you willing to be used of God in this manner?

Now, at this point there begins a question and answer dialogue between Moses and God. As we read it we are tempted to criticize Moses for a lack of faith. Yet, it is a good thing to have these objections and questions answered before we commit to a course of action.

First, Moses asks the question, “Who am I?” this noble, brilliant, arrogant, Prince of Egypt now realizes that he is just a man. He sees himself in a very different light that he had forty years earlier. Now he sees himself:

As a shepherd (He is despised by many)

As a man capable of murder (He is suffering the guilt of the past)

As an exile (He is humbled by the sorry circumstances of the present.)

As an orphan (Neither Egypt nor Israel would claim him. He had no right to go in unto Pharaoh)

I am very thankful that God had an answer for each of these objections. In verse twelve he says that, “I

will be with thee.” “I will be with thee even though you are despised of men, you are my ambassador.” When God is with us He will overcome our past. God can forgive all of the sins of our past. When God is with us he will overcome the less than favorable circumstances of our lives. When God is with us He promises us His presence, and that gives us the right we need to stand before Kings and to do His will.

Moses’ next question is also important. In verse thirteen he asks what shall he tell the people of Israel when they ask him who sent him to do this thing? Here God gives the answer that has had theologians and philosophers thinking and studying for many years. Scripture reads, “And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.” This name, “I AM THAT I AM,” captures the nature of God. It means that He is the all self-existing one. He causes to be all that comes to pass. Someone has said, “The name expresses not abstract existence but an active manifestation of his existence. ... He will prove Himself to others. He will prove His existence by His active intervention into the affairs of men.” (Wycliffe p.55)

Notice next the promise that God wants Moses to give to the Children of Israel. In the next

several verses He makes several “I will” promises. In verse seventeen He tells them, “And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey.” He wanted Moses and the people to know that they would come to this land, not by the power of Moses and not by their own power, but by the power that God would give them. In verse twenty He says that He will overcome all the power of Egypt so that Pharaoh would let the people go and no one would doubt that it was God who had changed the heart of the King.

Thirdly, God promises to provide for their journey. In verse twenty – one it says, “And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty.” God promised to provide every need for His people while they were on the journey to the Promised Land. As we read about that in the book of Exodus we can see many instances where God kept this promise. Their clothes never wore out. God sent manna every day for their food. There was water from the rock. He gave them direction by the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day. He promises them that the Egyptians would repay their servitude before they left. God always provides what His children need. We simply need to leave the provision to Him.

Next, Moses objects that the people would not believe him. This really was his voice of unbelief. He had not yet learned that he could

depend on God to go before him and work out this kind of detail. In chapter four verse two we find God's answer. God asks Moses, "What is that in thy hand?" And Moses' answer was "A rod." This was the shepherd's rod that Moses used as he took care of the sheep. It was a common tool of his trade. God's command was to cast it to the ground where it became a serpent. Moses fled in fright from it. God's command was to pick it up and it once again when Moses picked it up again it became a rod. God demonstrates that he has power over the serpent. It reminds us that even Satan, that old serpent, is subject to the will of the Father. It tells us that God can take whatever ability we have and use it to His glory. God can use what we possess if we give it back to Him. What is in your hand? Give it to God and watch Him use it for his glory. God would use Moses' rod to teach His people, "that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, Hath appeared unto Moses." God was revealing Himself to his people.

Next in verse six God tells Moses to put his hand inside his robe. When he pulled it out it was leprous. He put the hand back in the robe and when he pulled it out again it was healed. God was showing Moses that God can change what you are. He can overcome handicaps and inabilities to accomplish His plan through you. Maybe you feel that you have a disability that would limit your service to the Lord. God can take even your shortcomings and use them for His glory if we will let Him. God then tells Moses that if the people still

do not believe that he has been sent from God that he is to take water from the river and pour it out before them. It would become blood. By this He would show them that He has power over nature. The river Nile was a symbol of Egyptian power. By changing it to blood the message would be unmistakable. God would defeat Egypt and deliver His people.

Next, Moses objected that he was slow of speech. Verse ten reads, “LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.” God’s answer to this was “Who made man’s mouth?” He promised that, “I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what to say.” God made you just the way you are and knows all about what you can and cannot do. God knows our limitations. Sometimes, I think He chooses us because of those limitations so that he can demonstrate His ability. After all, when He calls us to do a task he is really saying that He wants to do it through us. He is not interested in our doing it in our strength. In the New Testament the apostle Paul tells us that God’s strength is perfected in our weakness.

Finally, Moses in total fear begs God to send someone else. God agrees to let Aaron, Moses’ brother be the speaker for Moses. It is interesting that in the rest of the story very little attention is paid to Aaron. I think that he began to be Moses’ voice but as things moved along Moses became more involved until Aaron was finally not needed in that role. Trust God that as he puts you in a position

of leadership, He will give you the ability to do things that you never knew you could do.

God placed Moses in the desert to mature him. He learned patience there. He learned maturity as he tended sheep every day. At the proper time God appeared to Moses and revealed Himself to this now humble servant of God. Moses probably had heard the stories of the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob all of his life. Yet, he never knew Him in a personal way. The greatest thought that can come into the mind of an individual is that God is a reality. Could it be that you have heard the stories of God from the Bible all of your life but it seemed to be for someone else but not for you. I can confidently tell you today that the God of the Bible is real and He is interested in your learning more about Him. He wants to make you to be like His Son, Jesus Christ. The thing that stands between you and your knowing God in a personal way is your sin. We were born with a sin nature that separates us from God. God wants to conquer that sin nature and make us His child. The law of God's holiness insists that the "wages of death is death." (Romans 6:23) The scripture teaches that the soul that sinneth shall die. God did not want us to die and spend eternity apart from Him. That is why the Lord Jesus came into the world to live a perfect, sinless life and then pay that wage for us. When He died on the cross He paid our sin debt and made it possible for us all to be forgiven and have a home in Heaven. He offers it to us as a gift. The Scriptures teach that the gift of God is eternal life. (Romans 6:23) We receive this gift by simply believing that

He is offering it to us. Will you not, in prayer, confess that you are a sinner and are separated from God by this sin? Tell Him that you believe that he died to forgive your sin and ask Him to come into your heart and make you His child. Scripture teaches, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” (John 1:12) Call upon Him today and you will be saved.

Child of God, are you willing to be used by Him in some undertaking. I challenge you to, as soon as you can, find your pastor and ask him how you can be used for the Lord in the church. You will be amazed and thrilled as you learn that yes, God can use you in His service.

To aid our learning:

1. How does Isaiah 55:8-9 apply to God’s placing Moses in the desert of Midian rather than leading the Children of Israel out at that time?
2. God asked Moses to surrender much to Him so he could be used by God. What is God asking you to surrender to Him?
3. Is your relationship with God only a memory from history. What is your relationship with Him like today?

4. When God asks us to serve Him, why is it a good thing to bring up objections before we agree to serve Him?

5. God is the Great I am. Do we really believe that he is real for us in our lives?

6. What lessons can we learn from Moses' rod?

7. Why does God choose to use us even though we have limitations?