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RECEIVING AND FACING GOD'S CALL

Got it made! That's how many people would have described the young man Moses. You've probably known people who have started out in life with all the advantages and by the time they reach adulthood, they have thrown it all away or something weird happens to derail their life plan. Many times people go through a series of successes and failures as life is lived out in this earthly framework. Success or failure of a person's life cannot be judged by what is happening to them at any one point in time. Some of the people that are recognized from a historical perspective as being great people have had many significant failures at various points in their lives.

When Moses was born, it was hard times – worse than anything we have lived through. It was worse than the Great Depression that we hear so much about. It was not that his parents didn't have a job, they had a job but just didn't get paid. You see, they were slaves. To make matters worse, the leader of the nation decided that all male children of the slaves in Egypt should be killed as they were born. Moses didn't have a very high probability of success when he was born.

You know the story, how his mother hid Moses for three months and then arranged for him to be found by an Egyptian princess. This princess adopted the baby and he grew up in the courts of Pharaoh having the best of everything. Sounds as if he is a great success. He lived this kind of life for about forty years.

Moses knew that he was related to the Israelites and as he tried to identify with these people and help them in their oppression he killed an Egyptian and was forced to flee for his life into the Sinai Peninsula back country. Sounds as if he has really made a mess of things. In fact, if we had checked in on Moses every ten years or so, we would find that he was growing to be a senior citizen and was not amounting to much despite his great opportunity that he had earlier in life. He had a family and tended sheep for his father-in-law out in the desert. If people had known his background, then they would have commented about his life having been wasted. However, God was not through with this man.

The Medium

¹Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." Exodus 3:1-3 (ESV)

It was common for a shepherd to be leading his sheep out in the "backside of the desert." There was a need to move the sheep from place to place to find good pasture and Moses was going about this everyday task. This turned out to be no ordinary day. As he came upon Mt. Horeb, he saw something that he had never seen before: a bush that burned but did not burn up. Being a curious person, Moses approached the bush to check it out.

We are told that this burning bush was the angel of the Lord. The word angel literally means **messenger**. Moses did not see a winged creature that we typically think of when we see or hear the word "angel." Moses identified this place as the "mountain of God;" however, it came to be known that because of what **was** to happen when Moses revisited this place as he led the Children of Israel out of Egypt.

The Messenger Identified

⁴When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶And 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 at God. Exodus 3:4-6 (ESV)

As Moses approached the bush, he heard his name being called. It could be a rather awesome experience to have your name being called out from some supernatural experience. It is sobering to realize that God knows our names. What do you do when someone calls your name? You usually answer, and this was what Moses did.

People try to describe God with a variety of attributes such as "God is love" and God is a consuming fire," which sort of gives the range of how God might be viewed under different circumstances. However, whatever the situation, God is always Holy. Any place that God chooses to inhabit become holy also. The ground near the burning bush was declared to be holy. This word "holy" carries with it the idea of something special and good and perfect. It demands respect and a sense of awe toward that which is holy and causes us to have a sense of humility about ourselves. Taking off one's shoes was an acceptable way of showing humility in those days and it still is in the East and Middle East. In those days, wearing shoes was an honor and in many cases slaves went barefoot. Knowing this background helps us to see why removing ones shoes is an act of humility.

The next thing that Moses heard was the voice of God describing Himself and identifying Himself with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God describes Himself in term of the way He deals with people. In Abraham, we see God as the Initiator of relationships, as the God of Grace. Abraham is made to experience the kind of sacrifice that God would experience in sacrificing His Son for the sins of the world. In Isaac, we see the son of promise, a miracle child to whom everything is given. Isaac would inherit all his father had. Again we see the sovereignty of God in choosing Isaac rather than Ishmael. In Jacob we see God exercising His right to choose regardless of man's rules. Jacob was not the firstborn and yet he was preferred over Esau. Jacob also found that God is the ultimate change agent in a life. Jacob, the strong willed person, had to have his natural strength broken so that he could become a prince among men rather than the schemer that he naturally was.

The Message

⁷Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings,⁸ and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.⁹ And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.¹⁰ Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." Exodus 3:7-10 (ESV)

Did you ever think that God didn't know nor care what was happening in your life? The Israelites must have felt abandoned; however, God was watching and waiting for the right time. Several things had to happen before the promise to make them a great nation could be fulfilled. They had to increase in number and they had grown. The people of Canaan had become more and more wicked and this wickedness was justification to disenfranchise them from the land. Also, the situation in Egypt needed to become intolerable so that the people of God would be willing to leave Egypt and go to the promised land. The final thing was that the person chosen to lead the Israelites out of Egypt had to come to the point that he would not rely on himself for wisdom and strength but would look only to God for these. Moses was at such a point in his life.

The Misgivings and the Sign

¹¹But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” ¹²He said, “But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.” Exodus 3:11-12 (ESV)

Moses may have been looking for an excuse to avoid this assignment that God had for him. He realized how insignificant he had become and how little influence he would have in confronting a king or pharaoh. When we think that we can do it rather than looking to God, then we are not in position to be useful to Him. When we realize that we can do nothing without God but that through Him we can do all things, then we are at the point of service.

The Messenger Revealed

¹³Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” ¹⁴God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” Exodus 3:13-14 (ESV)

Why should the Israelites follow this man they had not seen for forty years? What was the basis for his authority? These are some of the practical questions that Moses had swirling through his mind. The way he put the question to God was, "In Whose name am I acting?" God's answer to Moses was I AM THAT I AM. What-ever that means we can know that God is the God of the NOW. He WAS and He WILL BE; however, the most important thing for us to realize in our present situation is that He IS.