

God's calling. . .

Have you ever encountered God until you weren't able to doubt it? I don't think any of us have been in Moses shoes. (no pun intended) He was formidable Old Testament character and you can read his story in the book of Exodus.

*One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God.<sup>2</sup> There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up.<sup>3</sup> "This is amazing," Moses said to himself. "Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go see it."*

*<sup>4</sup> When the LORD saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!" "Here I am!" Moses replied.*

*<sup>5</sup> "Do not come any closer," the LORD warned. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground."<sup>6</sup> I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." When Moses heard this, he covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.*  
Exodus 3:1-6 NLT

Study the life of this man Moses and you will find that he has already lived a long life at the time of this encounter. He was divinely protected at birth and although Jewish was raised by Pharaoh's daughter in Egypt. He was groomed to be a leader and everything was going well until he defended one man by killing another and became a fugitive from Egypt. He was forty years old when he ran to the backside of the dessert and for the last forty years of his life he had been tending sheep for his father-in-law. He was 80 years old when God overtook him and found him.

Look at him with me for a moment. Maybe we can see ourselves in this man. He was supposed to be in the Lord's service but his life had borne no fruit for God. Moses is a picture of good intentions defeated by wrong methods. It is the story of a man who depended on himself instead of what only the power of God could do. It is a picture of failure, discouragement and complacency.

Then God called.

Then the bush caught on fire and out of the fire God spoke. Moses saw and listened. He was transformed and he found himself at last. More importantly he found God's will for his life. He found himself by losing himself in God.

Two things to think about today:

1. How God speaks when He calls
2. How we respond when God speaks

**How does God speak when He calls?**

**a. The fire symbolizes presence.**

The fire burning on this day symbolized the presence of God. Never after this encounter could you make Moses believe that God was just a theory or a noble concept or a happy ideal. You could not make him believe that God is untouchable and far away or that He doesn't know what is going on in your life. God had something for Moses to do and He called him to it.

When Moses questioned his own ability God said to Him, I Am that I Am. He is the beginning and the end. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is a real presence that we have to deal with in our lives. In fact, God's presence is the difference between success and failure. It is the presence of God in our lives that makes what we do effective in ways that matter most. His presence speaks to us.

God is the eternal yes! He's above all death, all times and seasons, and all the changes that come to our lives. When He spoke to Moses He was the "I Am who I Am" but when Jesus came to earth in the New Testament He became the personal I Am. Through His abiding presence we come to learn that He said, I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life; I Am the Bread of life; I Am the Water of life; I Am the Good Shepherd."

God wanted to do through Moses what Moses had tried to do forty years before when he had tried to right a wrong done to a fellow Jew. But Moses was about to learn that you can do a whole lot more with God's presence than you can do without Him.

You and I need the presence of God in our lives or trying to live a Christian life is pretty useless. You can't do it on your own. If you try to do it just to look good or fit in but don't do the things that are necessary to be a real disciple of Jesus Christ then you will wind up making a big mess of things and in the end blame God for your mess when you never really followed His presence or listened to His voice on a daily basis.

Though no one can go back and make a new beginning - anyone can start from now and make a brand new end. -- Carl Brand

Start listening for God's voice. You know what I've learned? I've learned that if you are doing something that is not God's will you really don't want to hear His voice.

Standing at the burning bush it all becomes clear: Moses as Moses must die. He must die to himself and his wishes and wants and his plans and abilities. Out of that death comes a larger life – larger because its dimensions will not be of our selves but the dimensions of God.

Have you ever come to your burning encounter with God? His presence is so critical to our well-being.

**b. The fire symbolizes a persistency.**

*Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up.*

As Moses stood and watched the flames and this amazing spectacle it was as though God were saying to him, Moses this flaming bush has a quality that you have lacked. It doesn't flicker out; it blazes on and on and on. Once you started out to do my work with a flaming heart but you ended up with a flaming temper and now you've been tending sheep on the backside of the desert for forty years. I think I hear God saying: "But, Moses if you will surrender fully to the fire of my love, if you will identify yourself with the patient, faithful purpose which I have for My people Israel, you will be the man I can use."

Moses got it eventually and he stepped up to the challenge. Listen to Moses commendation in the faith walk of fame found in Hebrews 11:

*It was by faith that Moses' parents hid him for three months when he was born. They saw that God had given them an unusual child, and they were not afraid to disobey the king's command.*

*<sup>24</sup> It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. <sup>25</sup> He chose to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin. <sup>26</sup> He thought it was better to suffer for the sake of Christ than to own the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to his great reward. <sup>27</sup> It was by faith that Moses left the land of Egypt, not fearing the king's anger. **He kept right on going because he kept his eyes on the one who is invisible.** <sup>28</sup> It was by faith that Moses commanded the people of Israel to keep the Passover and to sprinkle blood on the doorposts so that the angel of death would not kill their firstborn sons. Hebrews 11:23-28 NLT*

The bush that would not quit burning and that called out to Moses, taught him that persistence and perseverance was the way to go. Never give up. Never quit. Keep your eyes on the One who is invisible.

Many years ago a young Midwestern lawyer suffered from such deep depression that his friends thought it best to keep all knives and razors out of his reach. He questioned his life's calling and the prudence of even attempting to follow it through. During this time he wrote, "I am now the most miserable man living. Whether I shall ever be better, I cannot tell. I awfully forebode I shall not." But somehow, from somewhere, Abraham Lincoln received the encouragement he needed, and the achievements of his life thoroughly vindicated his bout with discouragement.

Listen I know too well what we tend to do when things get out of control or we take a wrong turn. We blame others instead of looking deep into our own souls and we spend our days wallowing in the self-pity of it all. Matter of fact there are a lot of people in churches that are moping around the corners of something that did or didn't happen the way they thought it should and now they are on the fringe instead of leading the way at the front lines of the battle.

Wouldn't it be great if we could just believe that God is for us? Wouldn't it be life changing if we could see the power of the persistency of the burning bush that Moses saw?

G.K. Chesterton wrote the following poetic lines:

Though giant rains put out the sun, Here stand I for a sign.  
Though earth be filled with waters dark, My cup is filled with wine.  
Tell to the trembling priests that here Under the deluge rod,  
One nameless, tattered, broken man Stood up, and drank to God.

Sun has been where the rain is now, Bees in the heat to hum,  
Haply a humming maiden came, Now let the deluge come:  
Brown of aureole, green of garb, Straight as a golden rod,  
Drink to the throne of thunder now! Drink to the wrath of God.

High in the wreck I held the cup, I clutched my rusty sword,  
I cocked my tattered feather To the glory of the Lord.  
Not undone were the heaven and earth, This hollow world thrown up,  
Before one man had stood up straight, And drained it like a cup.  
May God raise us up with courage to do the right thing in spite of our feelings and faltering faith.

But there is one more thing Moses saw in the call that came from the fire:

**c. The fire symbolized possibilities.**

It was just a common bush in the middle of the desert but when set ablaze with the presence of God it came to symbolize the possibilities that God can work through us. It wasn't the bush that made it notable it was the fire. It wasn't that it was any different than any other Achaia bush on the floor of that desert except that God had set it on fire.

What God is saying to Moses and to us is "don't undersell my usage of you in ways that you can't even comprehend." Moses could not even believe for a second that he would be able to march into the Pharaoh of Egypt's palace and demand that he let about a million Jewish slaves go free. Can you just think about that for a minute with me? God brought a shepherd from the backside of the desert to life and filled this doubting farmer with possibilities; things beyond his own imagination.

No wonder Paul included this classic prayer of praise in his letter to the Ephesians:

*Now all glory to God, who is able, through His mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.* Ephesians 3:20 NLT

Moses had all the confidence sucked out of him from 40 years of living on his father in laws farm. Remember he was raised in the palace of Pharaoh and given all the formal education you could get at that time. He lived in that environment until he was about forty years of age when he killed someone defending the life of another but if you read between the lines he was throwing his weight around in the process. When challenged and called a murderer he headed for isolation and disappeared off the scene of action. It was there that God found him. He had no self-confidence left. When God told him what He wanted him to do Moses protested loudly and long enough that God thought about killing him. (Exodus 4:24)

Finally God got it through his head to just trust Him with His life and His future. God's been doing this kind of thing ever since He got Moses to listen. All He needs is a shepherd's sling and a trusting heart. All He needs is a willingness to not bow the knee and walk into the fiery furnace. All He needs is a trust that enables us to be willing to spend a night in the lion's den like Daniel, or to forsake all like Peter, James and John. Or maybe it's like Levi or Matthew sitting at the tax collector's table when Jesus walked by who heard the call and followed. Or maybe we are like Zacchaeus sitting up in a tree just to see Jesus but who heard His voice and followed.

Oh the possibilities for those who follow God with pure hearts and trusting childlike faith.

### **How did Moses respond and what does that mean for us?**

#### **a. He paid attention.**

*There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up.*

I pray for all of us that somehow we can learn to pay attention. It was the hardest thing about school for me as a child and it's even harder as an adult if you put me in the wrong setting. But somehow we need to focus. Somehow we need to see God and hear God and listen to God. If you don't think this is real, I am sitting here typing this sermon with tears of hunger streaming involuntarily down my face. Are you hungry for a new life, a better way, a new day? I think our only hope is to pay attention to what God is trying to get through our heads and into our hearts.

#### **b. He went into action.**

<sup>3</sup> *"This is amazing," Moses said to himself. "Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go see it."*<sup>4</sup> *When the LORD saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!" "Here I am!" Moses replied.*

Yes, Moses had some work to do before he could totally go into action but at first encounter he was willing and said, "Here I am." It's the same emotion that Isaiah felt in Isaiah 6 when he encountered God and said, "Here am I send me." It is the same response that the father of the possessed son felt when Jesus said, "Anything is possible if a person believes." He replied, Lord I believe but help my unbelief."

There are moments when you and I may struggle to believe but if we can always come back to believing God will enable us to move forward with His presence.

#### **c. He experienced the arrival of God on the scene.**

<sup>5</sup> *"Do not come any closer," the LORD warned. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground."* <sup>6</sup> *I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."*

You really don't want anything more than God's presence in your life. Friends may come and go. Relationships change for the better or for the worse but God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

When God shows up we see ourselves as we really are and it humbles us and moves us to be in awe of His presence.

Seth Cook Rees, founder of the Pilgrim Holiness Church which later became the Wesleyan Church had a very dear friend. The man was forty years old and plodding along in life as a storekeeper in a quiet little town in eastern Ohio. He had become a Christian when he was a young man and now at 40 he was a quiet and much respected Quaker. He opened his home for what was then called "cottage prayer meetings" and during one of those meetings a visitor began to share of attending a camp meeting in New York State where Christians were being urged to make full surrenders to God. This man's report of people seeking to encounter God became a powerful challenge to this normal, everyday storekeeper. It drove him to confession of a deep lack in his own life. God met him with an experience of His presence and he was never to be the same. The next Sunday at the Quaker meeting although it was customary to wait in silence for the Spirit of God to move someone to speak, this business man was soon on his feet giving a testimony to what had happened in his life. He did it with such simple eloquence that even the old timers were amazed, but it wasn't the speech it was what God did with him next.

He left the store business and answered the call of God with his life. For the next thirty years he traveled over much of the nation leading people to Christ and to full surrender. David Updegraff was his name and he became an author as well as a much loved speaker. He was very successful at leading young men and women into full time ministry. At the time of his death it was a known fact that over 1000 men and women had been called into full-time ministry. All this happened because he had an encounter with God that turned his life upside down. At forty he never dreamed that he would come out from behind the counter of his little country store and change the world.

Do you know God's presence? Have you felt the persistence of His call? Dare you dream of the possibilities?

God is looking for a few surrendered men and women through which He might do His work on the earth. It's most likely that he will let you stay right where you are everyday doing what you do but adding His presence in to it will make all the difference in the world. God is calling. . . are you listening?