

Exodus 3-4

Introduction

The Hebrew people, enslaved in Egypt, are in a hopeless state, wondering to themselves, “Where is God?” Jacob had led them down into Egypt to escape a famine, to save their lives and in Genesis 46:2-4 we read:

And God spoke to Israel (Jacob) in visions of the night and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.” **3** Then he said, “I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. **4** I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes.”

These are the last recorded words of God to his people for a very, very long time. As we've covered already in our Exodus series, the children of Israel, God's people, go from living in freedom in the land of Egypt to becoming slaves to the Egyptians. The beginning of Exodus says that the Egyptians were cruel to the Israelites, they were ruthless, oppressive, burdening them daily with hard, backbreaking work. Pharaoh even attempted to murder any male Israelite child that was born. It was a time of darkness, oppression, and hopelessness.

We understand chronologically that this time period lasted around 400 years. 400 years of suffering. In Exodus 2:23 it says:

“...the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God.”

The Israelites were asking the same fundamental question that you and I may sometimes ask. Perhaps you have already asked it today! Where is God? Why is he allowing this to happen? When will we be delivered?

If we keep reading in Exodus 2, moving to verse 24 we finally see a dramatically hopeful sign that perhaps something is happening.

24 And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. **25** God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.

These two verses are a glimmer of hope in the darkest time of the history of God's people. God has not forgotten his covenant with his people, God is not blind to their suffering, and after 400 years of oppression, suffering, and cruelty, after countless of cries for rescue and deliverance - God is on the move.

As we move into Exodus 3 we must not miss the significance of what we are about to witness. The children of Israel are in a dire, hopeless situation. God is moving, but we cannot see how yet. Moses, who had been raised in Pharaoh's house and was perhaps the Hebrews' best hope of some kind of deliverance, has had to flee Egypt after killing an Egyptian for beating a slave. He flees to the land of Midian and settles down, marries, and starts a family. Acts 7:30 says that Moses lived here for 40 years. Perhaps he had even started to forget about his old life and the sufferings of his people. But God has not forgotten.

Let's read in Exodus chapter 3, starting in verse 1.

3 Now 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. **2** And 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. **3** And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned."

Let's pause for just a moment. The last time we have God recorded speaking to his people is in Genesis 46. Let's reread verse 2 of Genesis 46 which says: And God spoke to Israel (Jacob) in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am."

Fast forward over 400 years. God is now breaking his silence and here is what he says:

4 When 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." **5** Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." **6** And 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.

In these first 6 verses, we see God introducing himself in a dramatic fashion. Before we move on it is worth making a couple of observations on God's introduction:

I. God's Introduction (3:1-6)

A. The significance of Mount Horeb

1. Later known as Mount Sinai
2. This is the same mountain that Moses will return to with the children of Israel, and where God will give him the 10 commandments

B. The angel of the Lord

1. Angel of the Lord speaking *as* God (Ryken)
2. Don't get hung up on the details. God is speaking to Moses.

C. Moses does not appear to know who God was

1. What was Moses thinking at this moment?
 - a) If you ever see a bush on fire, do not start talking to it. Call the fire department. If it starts talking to you, call a psychiatrist.
2. He does not know how to approach God
 - a) "Take your sandals off your feet"
3. Imagine God having to introduce himself
 - a) "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."
 - b) A threefold reminder of the covenant

Having established with Moses who he is, God continues in verse 7...

7 Then 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." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" 12 He 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."

After introducing himself to Moses, and making sure that Moses knew who he was, God wastes no time in declaring...

II. God's Plan of Deliverance (3:7-12)

A. God's striking statements

1. Seen the affliction
2. Heard their cry
3. Remembered his covenant
4. Know their sufferings
5. He has an intimate knowledge of what his people are going through

B. God's response to his people's suffering

1. "I have come down"
 - a) Consider the power of this statement
2. Almighty God has seen enough of his people being oppressed and has roused himself from his throne to enact justice
3. Milk and honey
 - a) Not just delivering them but delivering them *to* something
 - b) Image of peace, fruitfulness, and abundance
4. God reveals his plan of deliverance for his people

C. Moses' involvement

1. God's sudden transition
2. Moses has been listening now basically says "hold up, say what?"
3. "Who am I?"
 - a) This seems like an overwhelming task that God has given him
 - b) Something that he is not able to handle
4. God's response: I will be with you
 - a) God indicates that Moses is right, he cannot do it, but because of God's presence he will be able
 - b) A further sign is the promise that they will return to this same mountain, which we know to be true

Moses continues his resistance:

13 Then 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?"

14 God 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.'" **15** God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

16 Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, **17** and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.”’

We will stop there, but reference some of chapter 4 in a moment. The big picture we need to see here is that God has introduced himself, he has laid out of his plan of deliverance, and Moses has immediately begun to resist God.

III. Moses’ Resistance (3:13-4:25)

A. Moses immediately begins to resist

1. Moses’ response to God’s miraculous plan of how is going to deliver his people
2. List of excuses
 - a) Who am I?
 - (1) “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (3:11)
 - b) They won’t listen
 - (1) “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?” (3:13)
 - (2) “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you.’” (4:1)
 - c) I can’t do it
 - (1) “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.” (4:10)
 - d) I just don’t want to
 - (1) “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.” (4:13)
 - (2) Have you ever just run out of excuses?

B. God’s response to Moses’ resistance

1. God’s response is rooted in who he is
 - a) Yahweh - I am who I am
 - b) God repeats this phrase, declaring his name four times
 - (1) “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”
 - (2) It is a continual reminder of the covenant

- c) **God's primary response is to remind Moses of who he is**
 - d) Exodus 4:11-12 **11**“Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? **12** Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.”
 - e) God gives signs for Moses to do
 - (1) These are intended to display God's power both to the children of Israel and to the Egyptians
 - f) Moses says “I cannot do this.” Yahweh responds, “You're not, I am” (Ryken)
- C. God's anger
- 1. The real issue is that Moses refused to trust and obey (Ryken)
 - a) “Oh, my Lord”
 - (1) Moses does not use God's divine name that had just been revealed to him.
 - 2. God moves from being gentle with Moses to giving him a glimpse of his anger, and Moses finally appears to submit to God
 - 3. The rest of chapter 4 describes Moses' journey back to Egypt
 - a) There are some strange things there we cannot cover right now
 - b) Understand that the big point is that Moses continues an implicit resistance to God's plan and direction

Every time a human makes an excuse to God, there is a heart issue behind that excuse. Whenever we resist what God has asked of us, there is something going on in our hearts that is causing that resistance. What we see here revealed in Moses' heart is relatable to us because we experience the same things ourselves.

Application

Three observations about why Moses' heart did not appear ready to submit to the Lord:

- I. Moses misunderstood the assignment
 - A. Moses heard, I want *you* to go set my people free. I'll be here when you get back.
 - B. But God was not calling Moses to do this by himself
 - C. God was calling Moses primarily into a relationship, not a task. I want a relationship with you, now let's go rescue my people.
- II. Moses was self-focused, not God focused
 - A. I am not able to do this
 - 1. Physical limitations

2. It was as if he didn't realize he was speaking with the one who created him
- B. As Moses' view of himself increased, his view of God decreased
 1. The name he uses for God, which is not the name by which God has introduced himself

III. Moses did not want to give up control

- A. It had been 40 years
- B. He had moved on, had a new life, family, job, community
- C. Going back to Egypt would mean giving up all of that
- D. It is hard to remember those being oppressed when you yourself are not experiencing oppression

It is easy to critique biblical characters, when their whole lives (including all their mistakes) are laid out in front of us. But what about you? I know that you and I often behave the exact same way. We have been in the same position, and maybe we are right now, where we feel like what God is calling us to is just too difficult, whether it is a specific task or just walking with the Lord day in and day out.

I. **Remind** yourself of the assignment

- A. A relationship, not a task
- B. If you view what God has called you to as primarily a list of rules, or a list of tasks that you have to accomplish, you will never be able to walk joyfully with him

II. **Refocus** away from yourself

- A. He must increase, but I must decrease - John 3:30
- B. As your view of yourself increases, your view of God will decrease
 1. Your desires
 2. Your abilities
 3. Your limitations
 - a) False humility

III. **Relinquish** your control to the Lord

- A. The need for control indicates a wrong view of God and a self-focus
 1. Matthew **6:25** "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? **26** Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? **27** And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"

- a) What do we seek to control that goes beyond the basics?
- B. This is impossible if you misunderstand the assignment, and if your view of yourself is too high.
- C. Trying to relinquish control without understanding God's call on your life, and having an accurate view of yourself, will only result in frustration and failure.

Conclusion - God's plan of deliverance

The children of Israel desperately needed deliverance. Our passage today said they were crying out for deliverance from slavery. It says that they *groaned* in agony over their slavery. They were in a hopeless state. They needed a deliverer, and God enacted his plan of rescue.

This is not the only time that God has looked down and seen humanity in need of rescue. God saw that we were enslaved, but our enslavement was to sin. Romans 6:22-23 says "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Jesus himself said in John 8:34: "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin."

God saw that our sin had us in bondage, and he knew that we were helpless to rescue ourselves. He heard the cry for deliverance even though we didn't even know we were crying out. He knew that with no one to save us, we would be destined for eternal separation from him in everlasting torment and suffering. We could not save ourselves, and no other rescue was coming. And so, 2000 years ago, in a town called Bethlehem, a child was born. And he was called Emmanuel, God with us. This baby signified God saying, "I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them." Into the darkness of humanity's sin, Jesus came down, not just to teach us good things and help us live moral lives, but to rescue us. Make no mistake, Jesus was on a rescue mission.

Christian, when was the last time you dwelled on God's miraculous plan of deliverance? When have you taken time to consider where you would be, and where you would be headed if God had not rescued you? It can be hard to understand the value and worth of deliverance. We insulate ourselves from any sort of discomfort or need, so it is easy for us to not even understand the concept of what it means to be delivered from anything.

I am sure, however, that you have physical realities that trouble you, hurt you, and you feel the need to be delivered from. Do not miss that these needs for physical deliverance can illustrate your need for spiritual deliverance. The deliverance you seek from anything that is troubling you pales in comparison to the deliverance that you have found through Jesus Christ.

If you do not know Jesus, I know that it is hard to think of yourself as enslaved. Maybe you don't feel oppressed, or like you need deliverance. Some of you may reach a place in this life where you realize that you have been strung along by sin, but for many of you, that realization may come too late.

You may have had hell explained to you in a few different ways, but I am going to suggest one more. All that the Bible testifies about your slavery to sin, and sin being a cruel master is true, though at the moment it is hard to recognize. Hell may be many things, and there may be many different elements to it, but the chief of which is that you will be eternally separated from your Creator. But something else will happen. The veil over your eyes will be removed. During your life you may never felt as if you were being enslaved, oppressed, and may have resisted any thought of needing a deliverer. But when you die, the suffering, slavery, and oppression that you have been in your entire life will become devastatingly clear to you, and at that point there will be no escape from it. There will be no deliverance. Won't you respond to God's plan of deliverance before it is too late?

Invitation

As we close, here is God's invitation to you.

If you do not know Jesus, understand that *today* you can respond to God's call on your life, out of slavery and into eternal freedom with him. You can stop trying to run your own life and repent and turn in faith to Christ. You are not being called to have to do a bunch of things right, or to follow a bunch of rules, but into a *relationship* with the one that created you, who wants you to join him in this mission to reconcile our world to himself, and enjoy an eternity with him in heaven. That little twinge you have in your heart isn't just a silly emotion, or that carol lee donut stuck in your throat, it is the Holy Spirit calling you into relationship with God. Anyone here would be happy to talk with you.

Christian, it is so easy to forget the magnitude of what Christ has done for us. It is so easy to forget that we have been called into a *relationship*, not a task, so as our focus on the Lord grows our focus on ourselves can shrink, and that relinquishing control of our lives results in the greatest freedom that we can imagine. Perhaps you identify with Moses, who seemed to respond immediately with resistance to God's great plan. But listen to what we read in Deuteronomy 34 about Moses:

10 And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, **11** none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, **12** and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

Deuteronomy 34:10-12

As God inspired this postscript to Moses' life, I can't help but wonder if he thought back to the day that Moses met him, and all of Moses' excuses and fears. And I like to think that the Lord smiled as he saw how Moses had grown. Though Moses resisted, that was not the end of his story. The Lord worked patiently with Moses as he works patiently with all his people, gently drawing them out of their resistance and fear to a life of surrender and fulfillment in him. Will you, today, remind yourself of the Lord's deliverance, and allow that reality to shape how you view everything that you go through, including all of the things that you can't handle.