

Sermon: The Call of Moses and the Nature of Divine Calling

Bible Verses Mentioned: Exodus 3:1-15, Matthew 16:21-23, Isaiah 6:1-8

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we ask that You would pour out Your love into our hearts, and we do indeed know that You love us because of the ministry of Your Word and what You speak to us therein. We ask that You would illumine our minds, enlighten our hearts in order to perceive what You're saying to us today. May the ministry and preaching of Your Word be Your Word for the sake and glory of Your Son, Jesus, in His name we pray. Amen.

Every single thing in the pages of the Bible have a purpose. There's not one thing here that doesn't have some significance or importance that we can glean. And so, whenever we come to a passage of Scripture, one of the most important things that we can ask is, well, why is it there? Why did God put that particular story in the Bible?

And so, when we're approaching our passage for today, which is Exodus chapter 3, where we read about Moses and the burning bush and his great hesitations that he has there. We have to wonder, we puzzle, you know, why did God put that in there? What is the significance of that story? And scholars recognize that story along with many others throughout the pages of Scripture, and they are referred to as call narratives.

They're the story of where significant individuals were specifically called by God for particular tasks and important assignments to be ambassadors. You have something similar happening in our gospel passage today where Peter is called to be the rock upon which God will build His church. And oftentimes in the call narratives, they tend to have a similar flow.

You kind of see the glory of God manifesting, and then all of a sudden you see the inadequacies of the human being that's being called for the task. And so, Peter has his moment of inadequacy where Jesus begins to explain the nature of His call to go to Jerusalem to die on the cross. And Peter says, "No, Lord, that should never happen to you." And of course, Jesus famously says, "Get behind me, Satan.

You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." So here Peter was called by God to be the rock upon which he would build his church, who was going to become this incredible prime ambassador of Jesus, but he still had his inadequacies and his weakness that manifest there. So, one purpose of a call narrative, and this is definitely the case of Moses' call at the burning bush, is to show the reader of Scripture, the receiver of Scripture, that these people are not just coming up with this stuff on their own.

You know, like the Ten Commandments were not deep thoughts by Moses. I mean, that's not the way that we ought to look at it. But when Moses speaks, or when Peter speaks in his letters, or when the Apostle Paul writes the Romans chapter 12 that we read today, this is the Word of God. Why do we know that? Because God called these people.

He specifically, at a particular point in time, divinely authorized them to be His spokespeople. So when they speak, they speak as divine ambassadors of the king of kings and the Lord of lords. So that's one purpose as we start to think about, well, why are these call narratives in here? And there's a bunch of them.

But the other thing that we ought to think about, well, how am I called by God to be His divine ambassador? And maybe you might start to think about, well, you know, when was the event that the Lord called me? What was the occasion that I particularly heard His voice or felt the sense of His purpose for my life and the direction that He was inviting me to tackle or to be for Him.

And so, these call narratives are very important for us to reflect on our own sense of vocation under the Kingdom of God and our own sense of vocation of what God is calling us specifically to do. You know, Peter was being challenged by Jesus. If anyone would be my disciple, he must be willing to pick up his cross and follow me. The calling of God is a serious call, and it's one that is of tremendous importance to the Lord for each and every one of our lives.

So, let's think about the call narrative of Moses, and the first thing to notice is that very often, when the Lord is calling His ambassadors, and this goes for us too, He often does it in the context of a revelation of His divine holiness. There are lots of attributes of God, and we like a lot of them more than we may like other ones. Like, we love mercy, we love grace, we love love.

Justice is one that we like for other people, but we don't necessarily like that one for us. We love God's kind and gentle characteristics, but His holiness is one that would strike terror in our hearts when we come across it. It's the one that gets our attention, and wakes us up, and makes us have our eyes open to the presence of the *mysterium tremendum* of God.

And so, Moses is, at first, captivated by a sight that he sees, a bush that appears to be burning but not burning up. And so, he's out pasturing some flocks, and all of a sudden he sees this bush on fire, and the Lord uses this, and there's a beauty to holiness. There's an attractivity to it. But Moses is attracted to this glory of God manifest in this bush, but as he comes upon the bush, the Lord begins to address him.

God calls to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses," and he says, "Here I am." That, by the way, is what you are supposed to say when you're being called by God. It's a Hebrew phrase. It's kind of fun to say. It's *he nae*. Here I am. He *nae* knee. Want to say it with me? Say it. He *nae* knee. Yeah, it's fun. It means I'm listening. Here I am.

Moses, Moses, *he nae*, here I am. Then He said, "Do not come near. Take the sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And He said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, and Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God." The encounter with the divine holiness of God is one that should strike fear in our hearts.

You see this with lots of the call narratives of the Bible. One of the famous ones in another place where you have this, "Here I am, Lord," is the calling of Isaiah, which we celebrate every single Sunday when we come into the holy presence of the Holy Communion. We have an opportunity every single week to have an encounter with the holiness of God.

And we come up to this altar and we sing the very song that Isaiah saw in his vision when he saw the Lord seated on his throne, high and exalted in the cherubim of God with their different sets of wings. Three, they covered their face. Three, they covered their feet, and three, they were flying, and they cried out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." Heaven and earth is full of His glory.

And like so many things, you know, when Moses comes into the holiness of God, when we come into the holiness of God, we see our sin, we see our inadequacy, we see our failings, because who are we to stand in such perfection? And that is the movement that we are supposed to be experiencing every single Sunday when we come in to worship the living God. But the Lord doesn't stop there. He sees our inadequacies.

You know, Isaiah said, "I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips and seen the Lord, and all of His glory and the angels of the Lord come and take a coal from the altar and purify Isaiah's lips so that he can be a divine ambassador of God." And that's what we have happened to us every single Sunday, is that we come into the presence of the holiness of God, to this burning bush, so to speak.

And the Lord is calling us so that we might be purified and made worthy and holy and dealing with all of our inadequacies so that we may then be sent out on mission and ministry for what He is specifically calling us to in that particular week. And it's really quite glorious when you think about it. So one of the things that we experience is the holiness of the calling, but also the heart of what God's calling is.

God helps Moses to see what is on his heart. And this is part of the nature of the calling of God for our lives as individuals as well, is the calling is not something that we make up. It's not something that we invent. It's what is God's specific assignment for us? What is He calling us to? When Jesus called the disciples to look out upon the crowds, He says, "I want you to look at it.

All these people that are harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. But what they need is somebody to go out like a great harvest field, harvest workers, to go out and harvest the souls of this world. And so I want you to get in touch with my heart for those people and pray to the Lord of the harvest that the Lord of the harvest would send workers out into the harvest field. See what the Lord did there? He gets them praying for his heart, his passion. Moses is challenged by the same thing.

He says, the Lord says to Moses, "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt. I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings. And so I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land, a good and broad land. So the Lord is the one who has a heart for His people. And so He hears their cry. He sees their affliction.

He knows their suffering. But what does he want? He wants Moses to hear it and to see it and to know it. And in investing that pathos into the heart of Moses, suddenly Moses can empathetically become the leader that God is calling him to be. And so, the Lord has His heart for our day and age.

What is the Lord's concern for this community of Ortega or the city of Jacksonville or this world in which we live? We start to get in touch with the heart of God, we start to get in touch with our particular calling. And then you find, lastly, is Moses has really a sense of hollowness apart from his calling.

He becomes, like all the other prophets, aware of his inadequacies when he is confronted with the magnitude of the task for which the Lord is calling him to do. You know, who here would love to go and confront the most powerful leader of the world?

Well, some of you might like to do that, but I mean, that would take some guts, wouldn't it, to go into Pharaoh's palace and say, "God sent me to tell you, 'Let my people go.'" All of a sudden, inadequacy to that task, which means, you know, I'm not equal to that.

I hear what you're saying, Lord, but are you sure you got the right guy? And one of the things about Moses was he had actually had an encounter where he became confronted with his inadequacy. We didn't read it this morning, but it's the chapter before chapter 3, where Moses, of course, was being raised in Pharaoh's household. He was a Prince of Egypt.

He was being raised by the Queen of Egypt and secretly being raised by his Hebrew mother. And so Moses was taught how to be a Pharaoh, basically, but he was also secretly being taught his Israelite identity. And so, while Moses grew up, one day he was out and he noticed, it says that he went to go check on his people, meaning the Israelites.

And as he was out there, there was an Egyptian that was being harsh and beating an Israelite. And Moses intervened, and he killed the Egyptian, and then he hid his body. A little bit later on, he saw two Israelites in a fight with one another. And he intervened in that one too.

And the Israelites said to him, not knowing that he was an Israelite, but assuming he's the Prince of Egypt, who made you prince and king over us? Are you going to kill us like you killed the Egyptian? Moses all of a sudden realized that others knew about his killing of that Egyptian, and that word had gotten out and word would get to Pharaoh.

And so all of a sudden, the insecurity of his lack of authority to lead those people became very much aware to him. And so what did he do? He ran. He ran out of the Egyptian and out into the wilderness into the land of Midian, where, you know, he just was wandering, lost. And he came up on one of the wells and met his wife at a town watering hole and, you know, started to have kids and became a pastoralist.

He started, you know, shepherding herds. Totally disconnected from his calling, or maybe a better way to think about it, is latently being prepared to herd the Israelites through the wilderness, but not fully living into what God has called him to do. I think a lot of people are like that, where, you know, maybe when they're young, they might have some idealism and they've got some sense of what they're going to do in life.

I look at my young children, and they're all filled with such passion and zeal, and then you start to get out there in life, and you have a few, you take a few licks and hard knocks, and all of a sudden you get humbled. But the other piece of it is, is so often when we're young, we're not in touch with what God's purpose is for our life. And a lot of times, we spend a lot of time just sort of wandering, not really knowing who we truly are, and what God has ultimately called us to do.

I'm reminded of T.S. Eliot's poem, "The Hollow Men." I don't know if you remember that poem, but T.S. Eliot wrote it right after a lot of the men were coming back from World War I. And he was just noticing that the men of that generation were very much lost. And this is the way I'll read a couple of verses of it. "We are the hollow men. We are the stuffed men, leaning together headpiece, filled with straw.

Alas, our dried voices, when we whisper together, are quiet and meaningless, as wind and dry grass. Shape without form, shade without color, paralyzed force, gesture without motion. Those who have crossed with direct eyes to death's other kingdom remember us. If at all, not as lost, violent souls, but only as the hollow men, the stuffed men.

The hollow men as a person who is spiritually dead inside, vacuous, doesn't really know his identity or his sense of purpose. He doesn't really have one. He's a broken and lost soul. Moses was a hollow man before he had his experience with the burning bush. And he asks himself and the Lord. He says, "Who am I?

Who am I that I should go and do such a thing?" The Lord reassures Moses, it's actually not you who will do it, but I will be with you. And there will come a moment where you're going to get these Israelites out of Egypt. Trust me, we're going to make it happen together.

And when you get them out, you're going to bring them right back to this very place, and I am going to reveal my glory to them on Mount Sinai, just as I have revealed my glory to you. And they're going to know. They're going to know that they know that they know that they, too, are called to be my kingdom of priests, and a royal nation. And so Moses, in and of himself, he's a hollow man.

He's a "Who Am I?" He says, "Well, when I go and I talk to these Israelites and I say to them, you know, God sent me to rescue you," and I'm sure he's got in his mind, those Israelites that say, "Who made you Prince and King over us?" They're going to say, "Who's the God that sent you? What's His name?" And the Lord says to Him, "You tell Him Yahweh sent you." Tell him, "I am who I am sent you." Isn't that fascinating juxtaposition?

Moses says, "Who am I?" And God knows exactly who He is. "I am who I am." See, apart from the nature of God and the identity of God, none of us truly know what we're supposed to be doing on this planet. We don't know what our purpose is, we don't know what our significance is, our value, our dignity, and our task.

But once we come into contact with the God of the universe, the living God, Yahweh, the one who says, "I am who I am, all of a sudden the rock becomes firm under our feet. And there is no gate of hell that will be able to stand against us." That's what Peter was given in this moment.

"Peter, yeah, you may not want to pick up your cross and follow me.

But don't worry, it's not you doing it in and of yourself, but I will be doing it with you and in you, and you will be engaged in my name as a divine ambassador with my calling behind you, before you, and in you."