

God Steps Out Of The Shadows

Text: Exodus 3:1-10

Series: Book of Exodus [#03]

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April 26, 2009

Theme: **God Recruits And Assigns His Workers.**

Introduction

This is our third week in the book of Exodus. In the first two chapters God has been *in the shadows*—present and working, blessing and protecting, but not easily seen. He is not even mentioned until the end of chapter 2. But that changes as chapter three opens. *God steps out of the shadows* in a very dramatic way, in something He had never done before in human history and has not done since.

God appeared in a fire in a thorn bush. What's so dramatic about a thorn bush burning? Nothing! But, the bush *wasn't* burning. Picture it—God appeared in a blazing fire in a bush, but the bush still looked as it normally did because it was not singed, let alone destroyed by the fire. Hollywood's special effects can easily create the appearance of this, but this was real, not a special effect.

God did not do this for show, but for a very specific purpose. This was the event, the place, the day, the moment when He called the one He had chosen and prepared to lead the Hebrews out of bondage in Egypt. As *God stepped out of the shadows*, He called Moses out of exile in the wilderness to serve Him in this pivotal position.

God' call of Moses was unique. The record of his call gives us the history, but also truth about ourselves and our service fo God. This is what we are going to look at this morning. The central, unifying truth for us is that *God recruits and assigns His workers*. The first thing to note here is that when God calls us to a task He takes the initiative.

God Takes The Initiative.

God comes to us. We know that when God has work to be done through people, He does not scratch His head, think, draft a job description, post it, and wait to see who applies. God took the initiative with Moses. He came to him. Verse two tells us “The angel of the LORD appeared to” Moses. We don't know where Moses was at in his walk with God that day.

- He may have been praising God for another beautiful day out with the sheep, or not.
- He may have been enjoying close, refreshing fellowship with God, or not.
- He may have been burdened and praying for his people back in Egypt, or not.
- He may have been wondering about God's plans for him in the future, or not.

We *do know* that God took the initiative. He came to Moses.

That's exactly what God does when He has work for us. God comes to us. Isn't it wonderful, reassuring to know that God takes the initiative, that He comes to us! This doesn't mean we fold our hands, sit back and do nothing until we hear from God. We keep moving forward with our day just as Moses did with taking care of the sheep. As we move forward faithfully being and doing what His word tells us, He comes to us with opportunities and responsibilities of service.

God comes to us, and He also gets our attention. There is no question that God got Moses' attention that day. Look at verse 1.

“Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, ‘I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.’” (1-4)

The immediate attention grabber was the bush that did not burn up even though there was a fire blazing at its center. But it was not the biggest attention grabber that day.

The Old Testament phrase, “the angel of the LORD,” not “*an* angel of the LORD,” refers to what is called a *theophany*. This term is made up from two Greek words: God + appear. It refers to God appearing in a form we can see. I, along with many others, believe it is a reference to God the Son appearing in the Old Testament.

That this is not just one of God's angels here is clear as “the angel of the LORD” in verse two is the “LORD” and “God” in verse four, and the same One who identifies Himself in verse six by saying “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Moses understood it was God present and speaking because he goes on to tell us, “Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.” God came Himself, and He got Moses' attention.

That was a great, never forgotten experience for Moses. “But,” you may say, “I have never seen God in a blazing fire in a bush or in any other way.” Neither have I. In fact, God has rarely appeared in forms people could see. The Bible tells us God appeared in a visible form perhaps to Adam and Eve in the Garden, and also possibly to Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-nego and King Nebuchadnezzar. Clearly He appeared to Abraham, Hagar, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Balaam and his donkey, Gideon, Samson's mother, David and Elijah. Now, in view of the entire Old Testament, that's a short list.

The point is not exactly how nor how dramatically God gets our attention, but that He always reveals Himself enough to get our attention, if we are listening. Often it is in His still, quiet voice, prompting us to speak to someone, lend a hand or encourage. At other times God's directions to us are loud and clear. Sometimes we may be reluctant to respond, especially if it means stepping out of our comfort zone. At other times we may be so focused

on ourselves and our concerns that we don't hear or see God's approach to us. And then there are the times we sense, we know His call and follow, even if we have some questions and fears.

When God has work for us to do, He takes the initiative, as He did with Moses. He comes to us. He gets our attention. As well,

God Specifies The Requirements.

The first requirement here is that it is God who is in control. Look at the opening words of this encounter. Verse 4,

“When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’ He said also, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.” (4-6)

Right at the start God established who was in control.

- God is the One who appeared.
- God called Moses by name.
- God set the conditions for approaching Him.
- God identified Himself as the Eternal God, faithful to His people down through the generations.

There was no question in Moses' mind as to who was in control.

Why I am pausing to look at this. After all, it's so basic and obvious. “God is God. We are His creatures. *Of course He is in control!*” We can say that, but do we live this truth? There have been times when I have looked at needs, opportunities and challenges and set out to work on them, to get them under control and move forward. Moses did that back in chapter two when he struck a blow for his people, killing the Egyptian. Perhaps in your own way you've been there with us as well, at least a time or two.

Even when we know God has called us to a task, even when we are excited about a great idea, even when we are certain that our direction and approach is right on, we need to slow down, stop, and listen for God, listen to God. God gives us abilities and responsibilities. We must be faithful in them. But God never turns control over to us. When you think about it, aren't you glad God is the One in control of all the smallest details as well as the big picture of His work? We have nothing to compare with God's perfect wisdom and unlimited power. He will channel that through us when, and only when, we submit to His control, allowing the Holy Spirit to fill or control us.

A second requirement is that God is the one who sets the standards. God sets a number of standards for us as we serve Him. There is one which is front and center here. Moses was approaching the bush. God called to him. Next, verse 5, God said “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

Does that sound a bit strange? “Moses, take off your sandals! This is holy ground!” After all, as many have noted, if Moses’ sandals were dirty, so were his feet. So, what’s the point in taking off His sandals?

Let’s begin with the standard: holiness. This spot around that bush close to Mt. Horeb, also known as Mt. Sinai, had not been designated by God as some kind of *holy place*. It was holy at that moment because God, the Creator, the *Holy One* was there to meet with Moses.

Holiness. To be holy means to be separate or set apart. When we say God is holy, we are saying that He is totally pure, totally free from any contamination of sin. He is completely separate from it. But holiness also reminds us that God is infinitely different and separate from us in the sense that He is the eternal Creator and we are His creatures.

Now let’s come back to Moses. There is no way Moses could make God or the place where God chose to appear unholy with dirty sandals, or dirty feet for that matter. This was a sign of humility and reverence before holy God.

At the men’s *Coffee Night In Canada* last Tuesday in a discussion on prayer, we talked a bit about our relationship to God. The emphasis in the western church over the last number of decades has been on the closeness and fellowship we have with God through Christ. Sometimes we may focus on this so much that we lose sight of His holiness. We can lose the proper balance. It is one of those tensions God has built into our relationship with Him. We are always to remember that He is totally other as the holy Creator, but also that He calls us into His presence.

Another aspect of holiness for us, of course, is how we actually live. Five times in the book of Leviticus Moses recorded God’s command, “be holy, for I am holy” (11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7, 26). We stand before God in the holiness of Christ. We are to walk, to live in holiness in purity of mind, heart, motives and actions. As Peter wrote, we are to be holy in all our behavior (1 Peter 1:15).

God recruits and assigns His workers. He takes the initiative. He specifies the requirements of His being in control and setting the standards for our service. Finally,

God Selects Our Assignments.

When we think about the service God wants us to do, we should remember that it is God who determines the priorities. If God appeared in a physical form you could see and/or He spoke to you in an audible voice saying, “Come now, and I will send you ...” and paused for a few moments, how do you think your racing mind might complete that sentence? Or, if you could choose any ministry or service you wished, what would it be? Then, what kind

of ministries interest you? What needs touch your heart? How do you decide which service opportunities to accept and which to decline? All these questions have their place. But beneath and before them is the question, “What are God’s priorities for me?”

When God came to Moses that day He made His priority crystal clear. Go to verse 7.

“The LORD said, ‘I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them.’”

God’s priority for Moses was not developing his resume, skills in speaking, organization or leadership; and certainly not boosting his image or approval rating. In fact, God had just one basic priority here: to deliver His people from the power of the Egyptians and bring them to their own good land. The rest of chapter three and all of chapter four show us that Moses had difficulty in fully adopting God’s priority, but in the end he did.

I wonder how many opportunities I may missed, you have missed because we did not accept, did not embrace God’s priorities. Since God does not come to us in a blazing fire in a bush, call our name and audibly detail His priorities for us, how do we know what they are?

- Listen to God, let Him speak to you as you spend time in His word and in prayer. Many of His priorities for all of us are revealed in the Bible.
- Listen to the counsel of others.
- Keep your eyes and heart open to the needs around you, needs in your neighborhood, among your friends, coworkers and neighbors, in the ministry of the church.

And when you see God’s priorities and then a specific ministry He has for you, always remember that He, not you, defines the job description. *God recruits and assigns His workers.* I picture Moses giving a hearty “Amen!” to God’s words about His heart, His priority to free His people. However the next word not only marked a change from God’s priority to His specific assignment, but also from Moses’ “Amen!” to questions, doubts and complaints. The pivotal word is “*Therefore.*” Verse 10. “*Therefore* [i.e., in light of what I have said], come now, and I will send *you* to Pharaoh, so that *you* may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.” We will see his responses next week, but now briefly,

- Verse 11. “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?”

- Verse 13. “I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?”
- Chapter 4, verse 1. “What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say?”
- Verse 10. “Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent.” Or, “God, I am not a great public speaker!”
- Finally, in verse 13, “Please Lord, send someone else!”

It is easy, in fact it is almost traditional to pile on Moses for all of this. But before we jump on top of the pile, pause for a moment. Does any of this sound at all familiar? Have you ever thought “I can’t do that! Who am I to take on that task? No one will listen to me. After all, I’ve never been good at that. God, send someone, anyone else!”

God selects our assignments and defines our job descriptions. Think about it. How could we want anything more? The God of the universe, the One who created us, the all-knowing and all-wise God doesn’t leave the selection or job descriptions to anyone else! With confidence and joy we can say with the apostle Paul

“Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant...” (2 Corinthians 3:4-6a)

Conclusion.

God has stepped out of the shadows in a very dramatic way teaching us that *He recruits and assigns His workers*. God calls everyone of His children to serve, to work for Him. He prepares us for that work through the spiritual abilities and natural talents He has given us as well as all the events and experiences of our lives.

You and your service *are* important. Warren Wiersbe, in a devotional titled “Big Lessons From Little Things” writes,

You and I are too impressed with size. If something is small and quiet, we have the idea that it is unimportant; but if it is big and noisy, then it must be important. But God doesn’t measure life the way we do. The big things don’t always impress Him. In fact, some of the little things in the Bible teach big lessons.

When God wanted to deliver His people from Egypt, He didn’t send an army—He sent a baby to a Jewish family, and years later, Moses led his people out of bondage.

God uses small things to accomplish great purposes.

He continues,

You may think that you are insignificant in the great plan of God, but you are not. You are tremendously important to God so much so that Jesus died for you, and the Holy Spirit lives in you. You may seem small in your own eyes, and this is good; because God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. However, don't let your humility become sin by making you believe you can do nothing for God. God can use you to help Him accomplish His will on this earth.

He concludes,

No work is small if it is God's work. No gift is small if it is given in faith and love. No act of service is small if it is done to the glory of Christ. Don't go around comparing yourself with others. Let God do the measuring and the weighing He measures for eternity—and that is what really counts.¹

As you reflect with God on the truth we have seen this morning, thank Him that you are not insignificant to Him, and your service is neither small nor insignificant. Thank Him that He has chosen you to make a difference for eternity in other people's lives. Determine to fulfill the charge He has given you as His servant by relying on Him, by giving your all to do His will and so bring glory to Him and the fullness of His joy in your heart.

¹ Wiersbe, Warren. "Big Lessons From Little Things," *The Bumps Are What We Climb On*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1980, 2002.

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