

Exodus 3:1-15

¹Now Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, a priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²The Angel of the LORD appeared to him in blazing fire from within a bush. Moses saw that the bush was on fire, but the bush was not burning up. ³So he said, “I will go over and look at this amazing sight—to find out why the bush is not burning up.”

⁴When the LORD saw that Moses had gone over to take a look, God called to him from the middle of the bush and said, “Moses! Moses!”

Moses said, “I am here.”

⁵The LORD said, “Do not come any closer. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶He then said, “I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷The LORD said, “I have certainly seen the misery of my people in Egypt, and I have heard their cry for help because of their slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. ⁸So I have come down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹Now indeed, the Israelites’ cry for help has come to me. Yes, I have seen how the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰Come now, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

¹¹But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

¹²So he said, “I will certainly be with you. This will be the sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will serve God on this mountain.”

¹³But Moses said to God, “If I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what should I say to them?”

¹⁴So God replied to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” He also said, “You will say this to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.”

¹⁵God also told Moses, “Say this to the Israelites: ‘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 this is how I am to be remembered from generation to generation.’”

Who Am I?

I.

Some people count only four. I count five—five objections. Perhaps he had come up with so many objections and so many questions about why he should be the one because he had done things poorly in the past.

It happened 40 years before this moment. He had been dismayed by what his people were forced to endure. More than dismayed—he was angry. Moses had been raised as an Egyptian—adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter herself. As such, *he* wasn’t subjected to the same treatment as his fellow Hebrews. But he saw what was going on. One day he saw an Egyptian strike one of the Hebrew slaves. Moses’ anger boiled over and he killed the Egyptian. He didn’t get prison time for his murder, but he was forced to flee for his life to another country (Exodus 2:11ff). There, in exile, he had remained for these 40 years.

40 years is a long time to think. 40 years brings different perspective to a person. 40 years to atone for the mistakes of the past is humbling. Moses was now nearing 80 years old

and was about to begin his life's work. God had plans.

One day Moses saw something strange. A thornbush was on fire, but wasn't being consumed by the fire. "So he said, 'I will go over and look at this amazing sight—to find out why the bush is not burning up'" (Exodus 3:3, EHV). With the drought conditions we have experienced and the haze all across the country from wildfire smoke from Canada, it's not hard for us to understand why a burning bush that wasn't burning up or spreading to other vegetation was something Moses wanted to investigate further.

"When the LORD saw that Moses had gone over to take a look, God called to him from the middle of the bush and said, 'Moses! Moses!' Moses said, 'I am here'" (Exodus 3:4, EHV). I don't know about you, but the last time a bush talked to me, I wasn't inclined to answer. Come to think of it, a bush—burning or not—has *never* spoken to me. If one had, I'd probably be looking for a counselor about now. Hearing voices from things that don't have voices is not something to be taken lightly.

The bush spoke again. "Do not come any closer. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground... ⁶ I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:5-6, EHV). Moses knew that the burning bush was not God. His curiosity had led him to an encounter with the Lord.

"Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God" (Exodus 3:6, EHV). Anyone who knows something about the holy God would understand Moses' fear. No human being is worthy to look at God. Much later, after the Golden Calf incident, Moses wanted reassurance that God would still go with him as he led the people. When he asked to see God's glory, God said to him: "You cannot see my face, for no human may see me and live" (Exodus 33:20, EHV).

All those years earlier, when Moses had killed the Egyptian, he had *thought* he might do something to rescue his people. He had been convinced that things were much worse than they had ever been, and that it was time to take things into his own hands. But that was *not* God's time.

"The LORD said, 'I have certainly seen the misery of my people in Egypt, and I have heard their cry for help because of their slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. ⁸So I have come down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptians'" (Exodus 3:7-8, EHV). *Now* was God's time. He had not been unaware of the goings-on in Egypt. He had not been unaware of the suffering of his people. God had plans to deliver them, but in his infinite wisdom he knew the right time.

"Come now, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10, EHV). *Moses* was God's planned leader. Perhaps Moses had been too full of himself 40 years earlier. Perhaps he had things to learn from his father-in-law, Jethro. Perhaps he just needed lots of time by himself, tending the sheep, before he was ready to listen to the wisdom of the ages.

"But Moses said to God, 'Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?'" (Exodus 3:11, EHV). 40 years ago Moses had wanted to do things *Moses'* way, not God's way. 40 years had taught him that he wasn't anything special. 40 years had shown him that he wasn't really qualified to be God's point man. 40 years had brought some wisdom; and humility.

"So he said, 'I will certainly be with you. This will be the sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will serve God on this mountain'" (Exodus 3:12, EHV). "Here's the difference, Moses. 40 years ago you tried to do things on your own and in your own way. *This* time, I, God, will be with you. I will give you direction.

You're not floundering around on your own this time, trying to make things up as you go."

If you were paying attention to the reading earlier, you will have heard the mountain listed as Horeb. You might have guessed: Horeb is another name for Mt. Sinai. This was the very place Moses would meet with God to receive the Law of God and speak to God on behalf of the People of Israel.

"Who am I?" was really already answered. Moses was the one chosen by God and called by God to lead God's people. His first objection was already answered.

"But Moses said to God, 'If I go to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is his name?" what should I say to them?'" (Exodus 3:13, EHV). This is a lame objection. Some don't really count this one, but I do. "Who are *you*, God?"

God already answered this. He identified himself from the bush when he first told Moses to take off his shoes. He identified himself as the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob—the God of his fathers.

"So God replied to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' He also said, 'You will say this to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14, EHV). God is patient. He answered again.

In chapter 4 Moses will come up with the rest of his excuses. "What if they don't believe me?" (Exodus 4:1). "I have never been eloquent" (Exodus 4:10). "Please send someone else" (Exodus 4:13).

II.

Not everyone has killed an Egyptian because of mistreatment of their countrymen. In fact, other than in outright warfare, not many of us know *anyone* who has deliberately taken a life. Not everyone has spoken to God in a burning bush; Moses is the exception to the rule. In fact, not many in all of human history have spoken to God directly.

Pastors and teachers sometimes feel like Moses. In fact, every called worker, if he or she is honest, feels inadequate to speak for God. Not one of us knows everything. You men, stand before that altar sometime to be the fill-in preacher when I'm out of town. See if it doesn't make you nervous. It isn't just a public speaking gig; when you announce the forgiveness of sins, you're speaking for God. Not one pastor should feel adequate to do that; not one member of the congregation given a limited call to read the service for the week should feel adequate to do that.

Who am I to speak God's Word? Every pastor asks that question—or they're really not much of a pastor.

I think that goes far beyond just pastors. It even goes far beyond called teachers. Perhaps every Christian asks the "Who am I?" question sometimes.

Maybe you go on with some of the other objections Moses had, too. Who are *you*, God? Believers have doubts some times. Ask Thomas. Ask Peter.

What if they don't believe me? It can make a person feel like a failure when people you speak to about Jesus walk away, never to return.

I have never been eloquent. Many people who sit in the pew week after week feel this way. *I can't speak about God. I don't know everything.*

Please send someone else. When God meets every other objection with the promise to be with you, as he did with Moses, eventually you come to this one. I don't *want* to, Lord! There are so many other believers out there; get one of them to do it in my place.

III.

I wonder if Jesus ever asked: "Who am I?" To be sure, he was different from conception—he did not have any sin. But in all other respects he was just like each one of

us. He had to grow. Physically, his body grew from a baby to adulthood. He had to learn. That's why, as a young boy, he left his parents and made his way to the temple courts to talk to the teachers there.

The Bible doesn't tell us everything about Jesus' childhood, so we don't know whether he ever asked: "Who am I?" We *do* know who he *is*. Jesus is the "I AM" who spoke to Moses. He made a number of "I AM" statements in the New Testament that show that he was identifying himself as the God of the Old Testament. He is the God who was yesterday, who is today, and who will be forever.

That I AM Jesus is the One who came to take away the sins of the world. He took the sins of hubris of the young Moses and paid for them. He took the sins of the Moses who doubted his abilities and was reluctant to trust the God who promised to be with him as he led the People of Israel.

He took the sins of Thomas who doubted, and Peter who was overconfident. He took the sins of pastors who feel inadequate or who fail to make use of the gifts and abilities God has given them to serve the church.

Jesus also took the sins of every Christian. So many fail to open their Bibles for devotion or study. So many doubt, just as Moses did, their own abilities or eloquence. So many clam up when presented with the opportunity to share the message of the Savior, failing to rely on the Holy Spirit to give them the words to say. Jesus paid for all these sins, too.

The great "I AM" has done it all. He paid for sin. He sent his Spirit to work faith in your heart.

IV.

The Great I AM God decided that it would be people who would be his servants; people who would carry the message of salvation to other people.

God called people who were wholly inadequate to do great things for his kingdom. Paul says in today's Second Reading: "Christ Jesus our Lord...treated me as trustworthy, appointing me into his ministry. ¹³He did this even though formerly I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man" (1 Timothy 1:12-13, EHV). Paul was called by God, even though he had previously persecuted the church of Jesus.

Today's Gospel (Matthew 9:9-13) speaks about the call of Matthew to be a disciple of Jesus. Matthew makes a big deal of the fact that he was a hated tax-collector, someone unqualified and unworthy to be called by Jesus. Jesus chose him for ministry anyway, despite the objections of the Pharisees.

Who am I?

When he calls people to spread the message of salvation, inadequate though they may be, God promises to be with them, just as he was with Moses. He promises to give them the strength of character and the strength of faith to stand firm, even in the face of adversity in the current social climate. He promises to be there with us, even if we are speaking the gospel before magistrates and rulers.

In his grace, God chose you. In his grace God gives you the tools you need to speak to others about Jesus. You don't have to be eloquent. You don't have to have a pretty speech all prepared for the moment. Be in God's Word on a regular basis and you will be prepared to give an answer concerning the reason for the sure hope of heaven you have—the knowledge you have that Jesus died for your sins and the sins of the world and that others should know that, too.

"Who am I?" you might ask. You are a child of God. You have been given God's grace. Share it. Amen.