

Title: The Call to Come Home
Text: Exodus 3.1-10
Theme: Revelation and Responsibility
Series: Exodus #3
Prop Stmt. Knowing God is at once the most glorious and weighty issue upon a life.

There are three seconds to go in the basketball game. Your team, losing by one point, has the ball and calls timeout. The coach draws up a play with a double-pick designed to get you open, so you can get the ball, set and shoot. All you have to do is make the shot. All of the glory or all of the disappointment is basically on your shoulders. But that is a game. In life, the things that have the capacity to bring us the greatest pleasures usually have the capacity to bring us the greatest heartache. In order to desperately avoid the latter, many forgo the former.

The ultimate example of this is God. You were designed by God with a desperate need to know Him and follow Him. Knowing God and following Him is at once the most glorious, the most satisfying and the most terrifying thing in all of life. There is an enormous tension in this text, that I want you to feel from the very toes of your soul. The tension is this: In this chapter, God reveals Himself to Moses. In this text, God speaks! For 400 years, God has been silent, and now He speaks to Moses. The speaking of God, the revelation of God, the word of God, the unveiling of the plans of God are comforting, encouraging, deeply satisfying, desperately needed and they are demanding, driving, unalterable, and fixed. God drew the play, and set it up so that Moses would get the ball. It was a play the Moses knew, he was called to do. It was also a play that he knew that he had to do. The call of God is like the Word of God, it is compelling and it is terrifying. Nothing else will satisfy your soul, nothing else will resonate so deeply with your heart, nothing else will fire your very being with such a thrilling joy and security than the knowledge of God and His gospel and his calling, but at the same time nothing is more terrifying, because if you don't find your ultimate joy in Him, if you don't truly give your life for the glad worship and faith-driven obedience of God, then you could die. His commitment to His glory and your joy is serious business to God. Because this is such a heavy truth and a glorious truth, this is a difficult and delightful text to preach.

The opening phrase of chapter 3 paints a picture of monotony. Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law. Stop for a minute and let the reality of that statement sink in a little deeper. Moses, the one "drawn from the water" by the daughter of Pharaoh, the one rescued from Pharaoh's slaughter squads, the boy who lived, the boy who miraculously was spared, the boy, who's mother was paid to nurse him in her arms while all the other Hebrew boys were mercilessly ripped from the anguished arms of theirs, the Hebrew raised as an Egyptian, the slave educated and trained as a prince, the one who appeared to be born to be a redeemer, the man of action, the man of conviction, the man of justice, the man of potential, is, now, almost 40 years later, watching his father-in-law's sheep. He is alone. The land is lonely. In the desert, in the deserted places, unlike the Pharaoh's palace no couriers run with important messages. No heads of state are given entrance and an audience. No treaties are signed, no banquets are held, no dancers dance, no monuments are constructed, for nothing of any importance takes

place out here. Sheep are born, they live, and they die. Forty years is a long time to watch sheep. Habits of quietness, and attitudes of leisure can take hold of one's mind and easily replace the idealism that is often found in the young. The "I'm going to change the world" kind of people can easily become the "I don't care what happens to the world" people. All of the ideas of rescuing others seems to be gone. The dreams of leading his people out of bondage have long since stopped. They did not want me, they'll have to find someone else. But, all of that was about to change in a single day. Chapters 1 and 2 cover 400 years, chapter 3 and part of 4 cover a day. Moses began the day as a shepherd and expected to end it that way doing what he had done for, more than likely over 14,000 days. But this day would be different.

1. **God loves to call the most unlikely people.** (1)

God, we may be tempted to say, what are you thinking?! The guy is almost 80 years old and all that he has to show for his life is watching his father-in-law's sheep? Is this all that he has done with his life? Wow, talk about wasting a scholarship, man this guy is the ultimate disappointment. If you are going to call someone to lead a nation...forget that! If you are going to call someone to help rally a people, inspire them with hope, map out plan, lead them out of bondage, and then form them into a nation, find someone who has some turn-around experience. This guy has nothing on his resume that would be appealing to this job. But, God calls an unlikely man, because he is calling an unlikely people. Later on, God tells the nation of Israel that he did not choose them because they chose him. He did not choose them because they were powerful or intelligent or significant. He chose them because they were so weak, hopeless and powerless¹, and because of that, His glory was set on display in such a magnificent way. It has always been that way.

And what does God use as part of his calling? He uses a bush. He could have used lightning, thunder, and other highly dramatic and awe-inspiring expressions of his power. He could have turned the entire mountain into a brilliant fireball and made the earth tremble with his voice. He could have, with a little breath, sent gale-force winds to flatten the terrain at Moses feet, but he uses a little bush. Little bushes, like little people do incredible things, when taken over by Almighty God.

2. **God's calling is compelling.** (2-4)

Moses is minding his own business and carrying on with this ordinary, rather non-descript life, when he sees something that makes no sense to him. Moses was a man of intellect, training and experience. He had learned a lot of things and living as a shepherd for these forty years gave him a great deal of earthy understanding. He lived in a world that was governed by the same laws of nature that we live in. Bushes in the desert are known on rare occasions to smolder and burn, but this was not one of those occasions. This was a bush that was on fire and was not being consumed by the fire. There were flames, but probably no ashes. In fact, there was probably no smoke either. Before God spoke to Moses, He got his attention, didn't He?

¹ Deut. 7.7-8

What do you do when you see something or experience something that is completely outside of the laws of nature as you know them? You may rub your eyes, pinch yourself, ask someone next to you if they just saw the same thing that you did, etc. It is like seeing the Loch Ness Monster, the Abominable Snowman, or a UFO, isn't it? If you are by yourself, you know that no one will believe you. You are not even sure of you believe you. So you hit yourself on the head to see if you are "seeing things". Well, you know that you are seeing things, but what you don't know if you are seeing things that are really there. If there is no apparently logical explanation to what you have just experienced, you are now faced with a choice. Are you willing to re-think life as you know it? Are you willing to face new information that has the potential of changing your entire view of the world? Many people don't want to face that. They would rather just stay in the ignorant little cocoon that they have made and just hope that inside these meaningless and empty walls of silk, that their monotony will not be disturbed.

Scientists face this all the time. The theories of evolution have been blown apart, but if you let it go, and admit that you were wrong, then you have to grab on to something else, and so many are scared to death to acknowledge that there really is a Creator. To admit that, starts you down a road that has consequences that most do not want to face. So, they close their eyes, pretend to be oblivious to the data; pretend to forget their promises of being faithful to the true scientific method, and even worse, pretend to ignore the cries of their own heart for ultimate meaning.

People trapped in certain religions face the same thing. You were raised being taught something that you begin to discover is not really true. You ask the meaning behind habits and rituals, and no one has clear answers. What do you do? If you investigate it and see the lies, then you are faced with a series of consequences, some of which are probably relational, and you would rather not have to deal with all of that. Do you ignore the burning bush and pretend that everything is okay? People who attempt to do that live fragmented lives. Or do you have the courage to step outside of your predictable life and dare to go look at the burning bush? But be careful. God is more than a fascinating topic for a philosophy class or a conversation at Starbucks. Theology is the queen of the sciences not simply because it is immensely profound, it is deeply personal. Donald Macleod said,

God is not simply a great sight, the object of speculative curiosity. The revelation of His glory and the whole theological process which legitimately follows from it is holy ground. We cannot stand as superiors over God or His Word. We may not coldly and detachedly analyze and collate the great self-revealing deeds and utterances of Jehovah. We may not theologise without emotion and commitment. The doctrine must thrill and exhilarate. It must humble and cast down. . . . Theology has lost its way, and indeed its very soul, if we cannot say with John, "I fell at his feet as dead" (Rev. 1.17).²

² Donald Macleod, *Behold Your God* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1990), 39. (cited in Reymond, p. 130 (see next fn))

Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up.” From that point, his life forever was changed. He was facing something that he did not understand, but was willing to explore. And when he did, “God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” Several translations along with the NIV, including the ESV and the NASB use an exclamation mark and it is fitting. Whenever a word is repeated in the Hebrew language, it is usually because there is a sense of urgency and importance. This was both urgent and important. God was calling Moses. But, before you simply swallow that statement, stop for a minute and look at this book. This is the first time in Exodus that God has spoken. The last time a prophet of God gave recorded revelation from God was in Genesis 49³. Now, in our Bibles there are not too many pages between Genesis 49 and Exodus 3, but the time gap is 400 years. For 400 years, God did not speak, and His people were languishing. We were made to depend upon God’s Word. We cannot live off of bread alone. Physical food only sustains our bodies, but we are more than sweat glands, blood vessels and brain tissue. We are humans, the highest level of God’s creative work, made in His image, made with souls, made with a need to know God, trust God, love God, obey God and follow God. When there is no Word from God, we starve. When there is no Word from God, we cannot experience our true humanity like what we were made for. The revelation of God, the unfolding of God’s Word, the speaking of God is like the incredibly satisfying cold, clean water on parched lips. We need this. For 400 years, God has been working, but his voice has been silent, and now, in the most unlikely place, to what appears to be an unlikely person, God speaks! And when God speaks, he calls a man, by his name.

That is amazing, isn’t it? God calls a person by name. He called Abram by name, and then gave him a new name. He called Samuel by his name. He called Elijah by his name. Knowing that God knows your name means that you are not anonymous. You are not hidden. You are not unknown. You might be able to slip in and out of large gatherings without being noticed, without having to talk, or answer any questions. There’s no accountability, no real risk, no sense of identity or commitment, if you never tell anyone your name. If you never sign your name on a communication card, or go out in the gathering space and meet the pastor, or talk with the people around you, then you can remain an island, alone, aloof, like in a desert just watching sheep. But, when you realize that God knows your name, that you are seen, you are known, your life is an open book, every fear, every thought, every memory, every dream, every desire is known to Him, it changes things. The One who knows it all, calls you to come. But if you don’t, know this, there is no where to hide.

For the first time in the book, the covenant name of God is used. LORD is our translation of the Hebrew word that we believe is pronounced as Yahweh. This is the basis for the title, Jehovah. In v.4 both LORD (Yaweh) and God (Elohim) are used. I will explain more of this in two weeks when we explore the rest of this chapter.

This entire text deals with God revealing Himself and His plan to Moses. Everything is specific to that. Even the way God identifies Himself makes this clear. He tells Moses in

³ Robert Reymond calls this a “blackout of divine communication to Jacob’s family in Egypt.” The New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith, p. 58 fn 7, Thomas Nelson pub., Nashville, 1998.

v.6 “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” This takes us back to the final verse of the preceding chapter where we read that God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

3. **God’s calling is terrifying.** (5-10)

Here, the tension begins to surface. God gets Moses’ attention. God, by means of this burning bush, brings Moses near, calls him by name, elicits a response from him and then tells him to stop. “Do not come any closer.” “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” God gives, what appears to be an invitation, but in reality it is a summons. God calls Moses to draw near and then threatens to kill him if he gets too close. God calls Moses to follow him, but this divine invitation carries a not-so-veiled threat, that when you follow God, it has to be on His terms. You are not in a position to negotiate because as much as He desires and loves your worship and obedience, He does not need you. It is an amazing grace that God provides a means for us to follow Him. He loves you, but do not allow the intensity and immensity of his love to cause you to underestimate Him. This is the same idea that Paul spoke about at the end of his first letter to the Corinthians (16.22), when he said, **“If anyone does not love the Lord – a curse be on him.”** What right does God have to command my love? He has every right to do that because He is God. As God, he is right, he is true, and for him to allow you to think that loving Him above all is optional, would be a mockery and denial of his very being and your very purpose. He summons us to love Him and threatens us if we do not. It is that serious. He summons us to follow Him, but sets the terms. In the very next chapter, Moses sets out to go back to Egypt, and on the way, God threatens to kill him because his boy was not yet circumcised. That is why preaching this text is itself like walking on holy ground when you realize that the opening of the mouth of God to speak to us is for our benefit because our benefit is for His glory. God is not ultimately concerned about our benefit. He is ultimately concerned about His glory. But since our benefit is tied to his glory, he takes our benefit so seriously. That is why, God is so committed to you hearing and following His Word. I am paraphrasing Jonathan Edwards:

In communicating ...he [God] does it for himself, because our good, which he seeks, is so much in union and communion with himself. God is our good. Our excellency and happiness is nothing but the emanation and expression of God’s glory. God, in seeking our glory and happiness, seeks himself, and in seeking himself... he seeks our glory and happiness.⁴

The tension continues to rise. In verse 7 we read again of the compelling and comforting nature of God’s plan. He describes Himself as having “seen the misery of MY people” and having “heard them crying out” and being “concerned about their suffering” and then acting. “So I have come down to rescue them.” The situation in Egypt is now, so urgent, that God is coming down! All of that sounds great, if you are a Hebrew. All of that

⁴ Jonathan Edwards, The End for Which God Created the World, included in John Piper’s God’s Passion for His Glory, Crossway Books, Wheaton: 1998, p.177. In the original text, Edwards was referring to the benefit of the creatures and used the plural pronoun “their”, which I changed to “our”.

sounds great if you are Moses. We see in verse 5, that God is holy and in that sense unapproachable. We see in verse 7 that God comes down. He is the One who does the approaching. He is transcendent and immanent. He is over all, and He is here.

God goes on to tell Moses that He is not only going to bring them out of the land of Egypt, but that He is going to bring them into a spacious land that gushes with milk and honey. This phrase describes a pleasant, prosperous, safe and flourishing setting. This is a land of hope and promise. You are going to go from a place of constriction and bondage, from a place of limits and confinement, from a place of deprivation and slavery to a place of wide open freedom, a place of plenty, and a place without limits. You, one nation, will take over the land where many nations are living. Three times God uses the word "land" in verse 8. And again in v.9 God repeats the fact that the "cry of the Israelites has reached me" and "I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them."

But verse 10, is the real reason why God has now chosen to speak after 400 years. Up to this point in the encounter, it all sounds good. But now the hammer falls. Moses, I am sending you. God did not even bother to ask, did he? He called. He summoned. He sent. "So now, go!" It is a direct order. "I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring MY people the Israelites out of Egypt." The very thing that Moses ran from had now caught him. What he was born to do was now thrown upon his shoulders. He was summoned. He was summoned by God. It was the one thing he feared, but the one thing he had to do. The play was drawn up, the picks were set, the ball was passed in, now Moses, you have to hit the shot.

Concl.

This whole business of following God is both glorious and terrifying. It is what you were made for and nothing else will satisfy. At the same time, He will not be mocked by anything less than our total surrender. But how can we follow this God who calls us to come near and then threatens to kills us if we do? How do we answer this God who calls us to carry out His plan and will not take no for an answer? All by yourself, you cannot. That is why God has sent to you and for you, a Savior. God sent Moses back to Egypt to get his people out of their bondage. Moses, was a picture of the perfect Savior, Jesus Christ who would come to rescue us from our bondage to sin. Because we are sinners, we cannot approach God, and yet we have to have God. God demands from us, the very thing that we cannot do. So, God provided a Savior for you. Christ came to this earth to live in your place. He lived a perfectly righteous life. He kept every law and expectation that God set forth. He kept every law that you have broken. Because sin is so serious, God punishes it with eternal death. But, Christ, who did not sin, and did not deserve death, went to the cross in order to die. He went to the cross in order to die in your place. In his dying he bore upon Himself the wrath of His Father against your sin. All of the wrath of God that was intended to be poured out upon me, because I am a guilty sinner, was instead poured out upon Christ. The death of Christ, totally satisfied the righteous wrath of God against my sin, and made it possible for me to be forgiven of my sin, and credited with all of the righteousness of Christ. So now, when God calls me to come, I come running to Him because I am not credited any longer with my sin, because Christ has taken that from me and not only that but I have a righteousness that is not my own. I

have the righteousness of Christ applied to my account. God accepts me because of Christ. The calling that He has placed on my life, to live for Him is thrilling because when He changed my heart, I don't want to do anything else, even though I often confess my weakness and know that apart from His grace, I cannot live as I am called.

In this text, God speaks and Moses has to respond. Revelation always demands a response, and that response includes responsibility. Do you know what you have in your hand? Do you have the faintest idea of the weight that has just been transferred to your soul by the preaching and explanation of this text? What will you do?