

Moses and the call of God

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[0 : 00] Perhaps you can keep them open there at Exodus chapter 3. We spent some time, maybe a couple of years ago now, in the first 15 chapters of the book of Exodus.

We're going to return to Exodus, picking the story up in chapter 16. But just to give ourselves a reminder of some of the key events and some of the key themes, we're going to look at some of these early chapters, and especially, as Bob said, this hugely significant chapter, Exodus chapter 3, where we meet Moses, and he receives his call from God.

The story of Moses is one that captures the imagination. It's one that has featured prominently through the years in film and TV.

So for some generations, they'll have been raised on Charlton Heston, the Ten Commandments. Perhaps you watch Christian Bale in a more recent one.

There's the DreamWorks, Prince of Egypt. Even Netflix has got a new series on the life of Moses. And it's really understandable when you think about how grand and epic his story is and how God works through him bringing deliverance.

[1 : 25] It makes for a great and gripping story. It's also interesting to think about the life of Moses in light of the modern interest in origin stories.

So now there's that great interest, not just in who are our heroes as they're fully grown and established in their roles. We want to know what is their background. What is it that made them tick and makes them the people that they are.

Moses has one of those stories. Sometimes God's people, they appear on the scene and we don't know anything about their background. We get just one or two brief details, perhaps.

But we have some chapters devoted to the early years of Moses. So we learn about Moses' birth. And we discover him arriving in history at this point of great tension where the people of Israel, God's people, are under real threat.

There is a king, Pharaoh, who wants to destroy the people of God by throwing the firstborn or the male children into the River Nile.

[2 : 33] And so we meet Moses, God's chosen deliverer, himself having to be rescued from an evil king. And of course we fast forward in our minds to the life of Jesus and we see a parallel.

Jesus too was threatened by an evil king, King Herod. Jesus also was the rescuer who was himself rescued.

Also in chapter 2, we meet a moment of decision in Moses' life. Raised in the palace, educated in the way of the Egyptians, at one point in his adult life, he chooses to leave the palace behind in order to identify with God's enslaved people.

And again, that reminds us of Jesus leaving the glory of heaven to become one of us, to identify with us in order to save us.

And then we come to this chapter that we've just heard, chapter 3, where Moses is called by God to be his chosen mediator and deliverer.

[3 : 46] Just as we understand that Jesus is God's chosen, great mediator, deliverer for his people. So as I said, our story is, our series is largely going to focus on chapter 16 onwards.

But I want us to think about the call of Moses because we see in this chapter themes that will run through the whole book of Exodus. So we discover as God calls Moses, he comes to be personally present.

He announces his promise to save his people and to reveal his purpose for the Exodus, which involves freeing his people from slavery, inviting them into relationships so that they might worship. So we'll think about those things together. We'll see how this story connects with us today and how this story connects with the story of God's Son, the Lord Jesus.

But let's go to verse 1 to set the scene and to think about God's presence here in the call of Moses. So the day starts like any other day.

[5 : 03] Moses was tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law. He led the flock to the far side of the wilderness, came to Horeb. Moses has had to flee.

He's on the run from Egypt. He's got married. He's now a shepherd, which will prove excellent training for future service, leading, guiding, protecting. He comes to Mount Horeb, which becomes significant in the story because it is also known as Mount Sinai, the place of meeting with God. The day begins like any other day. But then, verse 2, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush.

God is present. How do we know God is present? There are numerous signs along the way. This burning bush and these flames stand as a signpost for us.

As we read through the book of Exodus, we discover that fire is a sign of God's presence. We have the pillar of fire that guides them through the wilderness.

[6 : 14] We have, when they arrive at Mount Sinai, a mountain with fire and with smoke on the top. And then, as the tabernacle is built as a place to worship, chapter 40, as God's glory cloud comes down, there is fire.

So there's the flames of fire and there's the bush. And Moses saw that though the bush was on fire, it did not burn up. Telling us some important things about God. God who is eternal.

God who is self-sustaining. God who is unchanging. It is this God who comes to be present, who comes to speak to Moses. We know more about God as we go on in our text.

In verse 4 and verse 5, God called to him from the bush, Moses, Moses, and Moses said, Here I am. Do not come any closer, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.

So here's another theme in the book of Exodus. The people are being introduced to the reality of a God who is holy. A God who is separate from sin.

[7 : 27] A God who is utterly pure. A God who both makes and declares people and places to be holy. So there is nothing particularly special about the kind of scrubby desert land of Mount Horeb.

But because the holy God is there, it becomes a holy place. And again, as we understand in the book of Exodus, the fire in itself also speaks of holiness.

And indeed, Moses, as he writes the book of Deuteronomy, draws attention to that. A couple of verses. Deuteronomy chapter 4, verse 24. Moses is warning the people here about the danger of idolatry.

They need to have loyalty to God alone. And he says there, for the Lord, your God, is a consuming fire. A jealous God.

So that stands as a warning for God's people. But let's hear him now in Deuteronomy 9, verse 3, present it as a promise. Be assured today that the Lord, your God, is the one who goes across ahead of you like a devouring fire.

[8 : 49] He will destroy them. He will subdue them before you. So he warns the people, you must stay loyal in your worship to me because I am holy in a consuming fire.

But he gives this promise, I will save you. I will rescue and deliver you as your holy God. And it's this God who says to his people then and now, be holy because I am holy.

And of course, this creates that sense of tension. How can sinful people draw near to the perfectly holy God?

As Moses comes to understand that he is dealing with God, we find him at the end of verse 6 hiding his face because he was afraid to look at God. And again, the book of Exodus is so helpful.

How is it possible for sinners to be in relationship with God? Well, the book of Exodus will introduce, by God's grace, the sacrificial system.

[9 : 56] And so we are being reminded that God graciously provides a way to make atonement, a way to make reconciliation. And we're being pointed, ultimately, to the provision of the Lord Jesus.

God who draws near. God who draws so near as to become one of us. Becoming one of us to give his life as a sacrifice so that we, by faith, might draw near to our God.

We also discover that this holy God is a personal God. We already heard the truth that God speaks, speaking to Moses by name.

We don't worship a force, we worship a person. Verse 6, then God said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

The one who is speaking is the God who is revealed in the book of Genesis. This is the creator God. This is the God who has made covenant promises to Abraham and to Abraham's family. [11:08] This is a God unlike the false gods of Egypt. This is the true and living God. And that takes us to verse 14, where this personal God, the God who is holy, also reveals his personal name to Moses.

In verse 13, Moses asked the question, suppose I go to the Israelites and say, the God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, what is his name? Then what shall I tell them? God said to Moses, I am who I am.

This is what you are to say to the Israelites. I am has sent me to you. So here's a key verse in this chapter. Who is speaking?

It's the eternal, unchanging Lord God. The God of the covenant promise. And what does he say to Moses? He says, I will be with you and for you, Moses.

I will be with and for my people in steadfast love. Moses is full of personal doubts and fears.

[12:23] God, I don't feel eloquent. I don't feel capable. God sends someone else. And the answer to Moses' doubts and fears, I am who I am.

And that invitation to know the God who is the God of steadfast love, that's the answer to our doubts and fears also. He draws near to speak, to reveal himself to us.

So the holy and personal God draws near to call Moses. And of course, this is a unique event. But at the same time, there is a pattern set and true for every believer.

That we too, if we know Jesus as Savior, we too have a personal encounter with the true and living God. We too are invited to know this holy God who is awesome.

This loving God who graciously calls us into covenant relationship. To jump ahead in the book of Acts, Derek will be preaching on Acts 2 next week, but to jump ahead to Acts 2, how is the Spirit sent?

[13:41] If you remember, the Spirit comes as flames of fire, the sign the holy God has come to dwell. with and in his people.

This is God's design. Helps to anticipate the coming of Jesus. God come down.

The holy God who himself puts on sandals so that he might walk among us. The son of God who promises to be with us always.

When Jesus was speaking to his opponents in John chapter 8, he said that he was the I am. It's one of the themes of John's gospel, those seven great I am sayings.

Before Abraham was, I am, Jesus said, saying to his listeners loud and clear, he is the God that met with Moses.

[14:41] God wants people to know him. That's clear that God wanted to know and to call Moses.

That God wants to know us and reveal himself to us is clear in that Jesus became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

That as the author of the Hebrews would say, in the past God spoke through the prophets but now he's spoken through his son. And it's wonderful to think about.

It's wonderful to think about the truth that every time we gather together for worship or every time we come to God in prayer, we're invited to an encounter with the living God.

Of course, it doesn't always seem dramatic. We spoke about that a little bit this morning. We can't control how God works and how the spirit moves.

[15:47] But again, we know that when we are consciously aware that he has drawn near to bless us, to speak to us, there's a power, there's a beauty, there's a grace there.

The gracious God loves to meet with, to strengthen, to speak with his people. So that's God's presence. Let's think secondly about God's promise that we have here.

So where have we got in the story so far? We have Moses, the shepherd, with his staff in his hand, with his shoes off, with his face down, bowing before God.

The eternal, living, unchanging God is speaking truth to Moses. Moses is living in exile. Moses is separate from God's people, yet we discover wonderfully his identity is fixed by God.

His purpose is given to him by God. When he hears in verse 10, so now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.

[17:03] Moses had tried to be a deliverer in his own strength and it had failed miserably, but he now hears God say, I have come down to rescue them.

And this is the great promise, the great promise at the heart of the book of Exodus, that God will be a savior and deliverer for his people. Key verses here, verses 7 to 10.

Listen to God speak, the Lord said, I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt, I have heard them crying out and I am concerned about their suffering.

What a wonderful truth about God. He sees, he hears, he cares about misery and oppression and injustice.

So I have come down to rescue them, from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

[18:11] He's going to transform everything about their experience, taking them from misery to the land of milk and honey, from slavery to the spacious and good land and of promise.

One of the things that we see in the early chapters of the book of Exodus is a conflict between God represented by Moses and Pharaoh and the false gods of Egypt and here we have in anticipation the reality that God is the true king and the true king will act and act decisively.

If you go towards the end of the chapter, verse 19, I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him, so I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them.

After that he will let you go. And we are led to see that Pharaoh, the most powerful king on the earth, is no match for the true and the living God.

His mighty hand of judgment and salvation will reveal the glory of God to the Israelites and to the Egyptians. And he will break down Pharaoh's resistance and the end result will be freedom for the people of God.

[19:46] Exodus presents us with a spiritual battle and we understand that the battle belongs to the Lord. And again we see anticipation towards the end of the chapter.

The end result is that God as he reveals his glory, he's even going to turn the hearts of the Egyptians to be favorable to their former slaves so that as they leave, they will leave with the spoils of war.

there is no contest, no one opposes God's will. He has said he will save and so he is going to save. Verse 15, it says, God also said to Moses, say 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.

And in that, there is a promise, a promise already given, a promise already given to Abraham. God was not thrown off course in his plan of redemption when his people went into slavery.

[20:56] In Genesis 15 and verse 6, we find God telling Moses, it's not verse 6, is it? It's verse 13, the Lord said to Abraham, know for certain that for 400 years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and ill treated there.

That's the story of Exodus to date. But here's the promise made 400 years before, but I will punish the nation they serve as slaves and afterwards they will come out with great possessions.

And now what is God doing for Moses? He's restating that promise, saying now the time has come. God's promise of rescue is here.

And so Moses is called and he's given this job to be God's mediator, to be the deliverer, but there is never any doubt in the whole book of Exodus about who is in charge and who deserves the glory.

It's not Moses, it's the Lord God. I have seen, I have heard, I have come down. The story of Exodus is the story of salvation in the Old Testament.

[22:21] As the New Testament writers look back on the Old Testament, they see such powerful pointers to the person and work of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus who before his birth is revealed as Emmanuel, God with us. God the Savior present with his people.

The child who is given the name Jesus, which means God saves. Saving from a greater slavery than political slavery, saving his people from slavery to sin, becoming the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

As Jesus would say again in John 8, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. But if the son sets you free, you are free indeed.

And Jesus is the Lord, the Lord of the covenant promise. And how did Jesus, our Lord, establish covenant relationship with his people by his broken body and his shed blood on the cross.

[23:44] Satisfying God's justice, demonstrating God's love, bringing us into fellowship. Jesus is the greater Moses, the perfect mediator, fully God, fully man, a greater Savior with a greater rescue.

you. And so the call of God to us becomes a call to faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. To believe that when Jesus died on the cross, he died for me. That I have sinned and broken God's law, and Jesus in love, he died to forgive me.

That though I deserve death, Jesus died to give me eternal life. The call to faith, to believe he is the one that we must follow and trust.

He is the one who leads us from slavery to freedom and all the way to the promised land of glory in the presence of God.

[24 : 55] That's the promise at the heart of this chapter and the heart of the book of Exodus. One last thing to see, and it's God's purpose. I don't know how many of us have seen the movie Shawshank Redemption.

It's an old movie now, but there's a character in that movie called Brooks. So the movie takes place in a prison, and Brooks has been the prison librarian for decades.

Eventually, as an old man in his 70s, he is released. And he writes a letter back to his friends in prison. It's a really poignant moment in the movie.

As he writes, and we see on screen how he can't believe how much the world has changed, and he struggles to cope in a world that has changed.

He can't find a place to fit in, he can't find a job, he has no connections prison had been, his home and his family, and he writes of his despair.

[26 : 05] And we discover eventually he commits suicide. Brooks needed more than freedom, he also needed a purpose for life in freedom.

The story of Exodus, and this chapter helps us to see this, that salvation is freedom, but it's both freedom from slavery, and it's freedom for relationship with God.

There is a purpose to the freedom that God brings, and the purpose ultimately is worship, that we would know and enjoy and glorify God.

We notice this in two places in this chapter. First of all, in verse 12, as God again looks to assure Moses, he said, I will be with you, and this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you.

When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain. So when you are set free, you will meet with God, and you will worship.

[27 : 25] Verse 18, here is the message the elders of Israel are to bring to Pharaoh. You and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us.

Let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God. Their message, we have met God.

He has spoken with us, and he is calling us out from this place, calling us to meet with him, calling us to worship him. And so the story of Exodus is always something much bigger than just a political freedom story that we see portrayed in the movies.

This is a deeper freedom. This is true freedom. Set free to know God, the creator. Set free to live under his good and loving rule.

Set free that they might glorify and enjoy God. Set free to become the people of God. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

[28 : 41] The goal, the purpose, is that they would become a people who worship their Savior God. A wee preview that Zach will remind us of that on Wednesday at 6.30 as we think about what happens when we worship.

But the holy personal God calls us to worship him. It's a great theme of this book.

Great theme for our lives. This is why Jesus has come. He is the one who saves by sacrifice. The cross is the victory of God over all the dark forces, securing our spiritual freedom.

He is the one who both leads us in the worship of God and is the Lord we are called to worship. worship is the great purpose of our freedom.

It is the goal of our discipleship and our mission. As followers of Jesus, we want to grow to know and to worship our God.

[29 : 55] Why do we go on mission? We go on mission not just to get decisions for Jesus, but to create worshipers. As John Piper put it so helpfully, mission exists because worship doesn't.

We won't always be doing the great commission, but we will for all eternity be worshiping our God and Savior.

So that's Moses and the call of God, and it's a chapter that reveals, I think, wonderful truths for us about the one true and living God, that he is eternal, he is unchanging, he is personal, he is holy, and he draws near to call people to himself.

And this God has sent his son Jesus into the world to be our great Savior and mediator to represent us before God.

God. And we discover just as Moses, just as Israel would be called out and then called in to meet God and to worship, so God and his son Jesus calls us out of slavery and darkness, calls us to worship him as king, confessing Jesus Christ is Lord.

[31 : 16] Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you for the book of Exodus, we thank you for the story of your dealing with Moses and with your people, Israel, and we thank you for the way it helps us to understand that you are a God personally committed to saving your people, that you are the holy God who in grace establishes a way where sinful people like us can draw near, by way of sacrifice, by way of your son the Lord.