

HOLD TO GOD’S UNCHANGING HAND—PART 3

“WHAT’S THAT IN YOUR HAND?”

Exodus 3: 1-15, 4: 1-17 -- Pastor Richard P. Carlson

This 2020 pandemic has taken us deep into the wilderness. On the last day of December, in 2019, China alerted the World Health Organization of several cases of an unusual pneumonia in Wuhan, a Chinese port city of 11 million people. Covid-19, the newest of seven known types of human coronavirus, is now sweeping the globe. On January 20, 2020, this new or novel virus was called a “global emergency.” On March 11, 2020, three weeks ago, just over 3 weeks ago, the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus a pandemic. Hold to God’s unchanging hands. Hold to His unchanging perfections, holiness, love, grace, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence. Hold to God’s unchanging purposes and His unchanging promises. Yet know holding to God’s unchanging hand, means holding on to His unfolding plans ever unfolding second by second.

God has led me in this third message about holding on to God’s unchanging hand, to notice what we have in our own hands that He wants to use for His glory. Moses had been herding sheep for his father in law, Jethro, the priest of Midian for 40 years. The wilderness in our text was at the foot of Mt. Horeb, the mountain of God. God had finished His preparation in Moses’ life, using forty years to humble him. Moses now 80 years old, had thought at age 40, that he could kill an Egyptian oppressing his people, and get by, and thereby deliver God’s people with brute force. God had to trim off Moses’ rough edges. God knew He was ready to use Moses to deliver His people. After 40 years on the back side of the wilderness, who wouldn’t like a break in the action, perhaps a chance for fame? This wilderness account reads like a story book. But like our lives, though the story may seem bazaar, yet the story of each of our lives is true. When God calls us in the wilderness at our burning bush, or in this pandemic, we had better acknowledge His call and say, v. 4—“Here I am!” When God is talking, beloved, I urge us all—Don’t argue with Him or show His word or His promptings any disrespect. Hear the word of the Lord. God said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” After Moses heard that this voice from the burning bush was God speaking, He further learned this voice was the God of his father, Amram, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. When we know it is God speaking to us through His Word, by His Holy Spirit’s prompting or through other believers, we ought to take off our shoes in reverence. When we know and admit God is speaking, that is holy ground.

Saji Lukos sent me a picture of people in India begging for food and there is none. Prime Minister Modi has called for social distancing, but in India, there are too many people to social distance. Multiplied millions have lost their jobs. Businesses have shut down. Millions are standing in lines 100 feet wide, miles long hoping for

someone to bring them food, as they are dying of hunger. He sent a tragic picture of one husband, wife and little girl hanging separately from on limb of a tree. I showed the picture to Pastor Larry. They committed suicide in their despair. The problems we see are only glimpses of what God sees. He sees it all, across our besieged world. He sees with x-ray clear vision and He knows the remedy.

Our answer to this pandemic 99 times out of 100 or more, is not God's answer. The shortest route to 40 years in the wilderness as Moses had, is for us to see the problems and to try to fix them our way. Whenever God calls us, or however He calls us, He is calling us for a holy reason. He wants to end our wilderness time to employ us for His purpose. Moses heard God's call in the wilderness, v. 10.

“Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.” When we hear God's call, the fight is often on for many of us. We go from “Here am I” to “Who am I?” God promises to be with us. In fact, God's first sign to Moses was that when the exodus happened, Moses and all those 3 million Israelites, led by him, on the Exodus would worship God right there on Mt. Horeb, this mountain of God, this holy mountain at this spot of the burning bush—v. 12. Moses hurried on to say, “Who shall I say sent me to deliver the children of Israel from oppression in Egypt?” God's answer was classic, v. 14. “I AM WHO I AM! I AM has sent me to you...That is My name forever and ever—My memorial name to all generations.” And Moses said, “Okay, Lord, when do I start?” Right? Wrong!

In Exodus 3: 16-22, God told Moses to ask Pharaoh for a 3-day wilderness journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord—v. 18. God informed Moses that He knew Pharaoh's heart that ‘the king of Egypt would not permit the Israelites to go, except under compulsion.’ Then God promised Moses that when the Israelites left Egypt, they would leave with a high hand—no Israelite would leave the bondage of Egypt “empty handed.” God promised Moses that the enslaved Israelites would thus plunder the Egyptians—v. 21, 22. By now Moses was convinced and said, “Okay, Lord; when do I start?” Right? Wrong! Exodus 4 begins with Moses continuing his debate with God, “What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? They may say, “The Lord has not appeared to you.” If the Lord speaks to you truly and you don't make it up, this is one of the most common responses of others, your spouse, your children, or even brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. They will question or deny the call of God in your life. In Exodus 4: 10, Moses continued his debate with God by announcing, “Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently, nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue. God had an answer that undergirded His call. v. 11. “Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you shall speak.” What a debate! When push comes to shove with God, remember God's still small voice is real, persistent,

never changing, in His message to us, and ultimately, God breaks us down from a false excuse to the real excuse. God cuts to the chase. He knows our “I can’t’s” 99 times out of a 100 are “I won’t’s.” It all comes down to Exodus 4: 13. Here is the heart of each of us who become accustomed to our wilderness or even to this pandemic and we don’t want to be delivered, much less help to deliver others. Moses said, “I don’t want to go—O my Lord, please send someone else.” When we finally tell God and others what we can’t do, really telling Him what we won’t do, it becomes an affront to God. His anger burns then—v. 14. His anger was kindled. God will not ultimately take “No!” for an answer from us. His plan He desires for us to choose freely, but the longer we resist, the more He will close in on us and finally make it clear He is insistent that we obey His voice. If we say no then, we quench, grieve, and Hebrews 10: 29, we insult the Spirit of grace.

Today, the most important part of this dramatic interchange between God and Moses for me is, God’s question to Moses, “What’s that in your hand?” Let’s focus on that one question in this message. God can use supernatural means to call us in our wilderness, but like Moses, it doesn’t ensure our obedience. God can use supernatural means **(1) visible signs** like the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, but the Israelites grumbled anyway and said no to God’s commands. Here God was using the visible sign of the burning bush, but Moses argued with God anyway. There are other supernatural means like **(2) audible signs**, “Moses, Moses, or “Samuel, Samuel,” or God told David when to attack the Philistines. He was to wait for the “the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees.” (II Samuel 5: 24) God can use **(3) angels** as He did with Hagar, Abraham, Jacob, Balaam, David, Elijah, Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, Peter, Paul, and others.

God can use **(4) visions and dreams** as God showed Gideon what he ought to do though the dream of a man in the enemy camp as he overheard the guard telling his dream. God can also use **(5) a prophetic voice** of one of His messengers such as the 401st prophet, Micaiah who prophesied the defeat of Israel and the death of Ahab. Micaiah was thrown in prison for His obedience to God’s voice in Him and his food was bread and water. We hold up these supernatural means and we should, but they do not limit God’s ways or tie His hands in speaking to us. God has many natural means to speak to us, “What’s that in your hand?” Today let’s focus on some natural means God uses. These natural means we hold in our hands today. What are these natural means that God uses to get us and others out of our wilderness? Each of these 10 natural means are an extension of God’s question to Moses, “What is in your hand?” Here are the ten questions:

IS THAT DUTY THAT IS IN YOUR HAND? (I.) See Exodus 4: 2. Moses had a rod/staff in his hand because that was his occupation, his duty. He didn’t have to stop like Gideon and throw out a fleece. God’s question caught Moses right in the line of duty, as a shepherd. “What’s that in your hand?” Often duty implies that

God is asking us to just do the next thing in our life that comes to us, and often, it is an extension of our very occupation as parents, as mothers or fathers, or in working, wherever we are employed. It is often in the doing of the next thing God places before us that He reveals His will in our wilderness. He shows us the way through, by the duty right in our hand. God's will is often, using something we do well and something He just has a desire to use in a further way. When God was looking for a shepherd to lead His people out in the exodus, He looked for a shepherd in the line of duty. Moses qualified. When you start debating what God is asking you to do, ask yourself, "Is this something I know something about? Is it in my line of duty? What's that in your hand?"

IS THAT GOD'S TIMING, NOT YOURS, THAT IS IN YOUR HAND? (II.)

Compare Exodus 2: 11-15 with Exodus 3: 7-8. (II.) Sometimes, God creates a job for us that is not on our time schedule at all, but on His? Often, we come upon an accident and what is that in our hands? It is God's timing, not ours, to witness, even to a wounded or dying man or woman. God's timing usually means that He is revealing something He wants us to do that we would have no intention of doing, unless we noticed it stands before us. It is what is at hand and what is in our hand. In Exodus 2: 11-15, we see what happens when the timing is ours, not the Lord's. In our text in 3: 7,8, God said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people... for I am aware of their sufferings, so I have come down to deliver them." But how was God going to deliver His people? God came down at Mt Horeb, the mountain of God, 3: 1 to speak to Moses in a burning bush. Notice in 3: 10—"Come, I will send you to Pharaoh." That was God's timing in Moses' hand.

IS THAT GOD CALLING YOUR NAME, THAT IS IN YOUR HAND?

(III.) Notice 3: 4. "Moses, Moses!" Notice God calls His servants by name more than once. Jesus said in John 10: 4, "My sheep follow Me because they know My voice." The shepherd of our souls issues a personal call, in recognition of our individuality. He may not audibly call our name as Jesus said, "Mary, Mary." That is a supernatural means. Let me tell you a story by permission. I was amazed after searching for a secretary for two months after Bev Megahey resigned, God almost forced me to call Tammy Wollman. I knew she was unable to do any more. She was busy for the Lord. Yet, I was feeling desperate and I kept overlooking Tammy's name because I knew the things she was facing and doing. God kept bringing me back to her name. When I called her and told her that God had strongly placed her on my mind, she told me, "I think I know what you want to ask me. She even told her mother in law, Carmen, what she believed I was going to ask her. Tammy told me that God had been calling her name for a month about the job. God uses us to call others when we ask them what God has over and over placed on our hearts to ask them.

IS THAT A HUMAN RELATIONSHIP THAT IS IN YOUR HAND? (IV.)

Notice Exodus 3: 6. God most often guides his people in relationship to each other, like a shepherd leads a flock. When we seek God's guidance, we ought to always look carefully to those with whom we have some special relationship. It could be husband, wife, children, parents, shepherd, flock, or citizens, leaders. As citizens, Jesus tells us to render to Caesar what is Caesars. It is His will that we pay taxes. Now it is postponed from April 15 to July 15, 2020. Ephesians 5: 21 tells us, "And be subject to one another in the fear of Christ." In our text, God is calling Moses to lead his own people out. God identifies Himself with Moses as being the God of Moses' father, Genesis 3: 6. God is saying, "I want you to deliver your own people who are My people."

IS THAT A GOD GIVEN GIFT OR ABILITY THAT IS IN YOUR HAND?

(V.) Notice Exodus 3: 1. Moses was leading his flock. When we are looking for the right direction, God is often looking for people who have had some similar experience in the area to which He is calling them. Often it is a God-given gift or ability that has prepared us for another similar calling in our lives that is before us. Notice in Exodus 4: 1 that Moses was objecting to the heaviness of the load by his excuse, "What if the people will not believe me or listen to what I say or if they say, "God didn't appear to you." And the surprising response of God was "What is that in your hand?" And Moses said, "A rod/staff." God was going to use a common ordinary thing that Moses didn't see as special to do special miracles. God used the rod to become a snake, and then He returned it to a rod again- v. 3,4. God used Moses own hand to become leprous and then become restored and whole again. Beloved, what's that in your hand? And even further, "Do you have a hand?" God wants to use your hand. For the last two weeks, God has been using folk in our church to labor with their hands—Blake, Tammy Wollman, Curt and Barb Barker, Alyssa Ertl, Becky Ryberg, Debbie Franich, Dorie Johnson, Aiden Barker, Jill Green, Corky Fredericksen, Chris Folks, JoAnn Grove, and Sharon Hummel. What has been in their hands? Mops, brooms, vacuums, polish, cleaning products, cleaning rags, scrub brushes—2 solid weeks of cleaning, now dedicated.

IS THAT YOUR FRAME OF REFERENCE THAT IS IN YOUR HAND?

(VI.) See Exodus 4: 17. God often leads us in our own frame of reference—to do something we have done well before. What we are, where we are, and how we got here, are all part of God's right way to lead us. God often starts to prove His word and His will to us, right where we are. Notice in 4: 17, "And you shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs." God used a special star to lead the wise men who were astrologers. God knows how to start right where we are. It may not be what we wish to do, but God knows we are good at what we do and He has a further use for us within our own frame of reference.

IS THAT A DIVINE CIRCUMSTANCE THAT IS IN YOUR HAND? (VII.)

See Exodus 3: 1 and 12. What appears a haphazard incident to us is a calculated

circumstance to God. Where was Moses when God called him to lead the children of Israel in the Exodus? Notice 3: 1. He was pasturing the flock of Jethro? Was that God's calculation to find a man who was pasturing someone else's flock—as He was looking for someone to pasture His flock and lead them out in the Exodus? And where was Moses—where did he happen to be when God called him? Exodus 3: 1 tells us he was leading the flock to the west side of the wilderness at Horeb, the mountain of God. Was that coincidental? Notice v. 12. What's the point—where you are Moses, is where you I am going to use you to lead My people out here—right here to worship.

IS THAT ADVICE OR HELP FROM A TRUSTED FRIEND THAT IS IN YOUR HAND? (VIII.)

Look at Exodus 4: 14. Nearly always, someone but us, will be affected by our decision. Have we consulted them? Do we take their advice or welcome their help as that help or advice often being an extension of the will and voice of the Lord? Notice God's convincing of Moses when he simply said, in essence, "I won't obey you." Notice 4: 14. Our decision to obey the Lord should in the end, no matter how difficult, make our closest friends glad in their heart. Aaron is on his way to meet you. He'll be glad.

IS THAT A DESIRE IN YOUR HEART THAT GOD WANTS TO FULFILL THAT IS IN YOUR HAND? (IX.)

See Exodus 2: 11-12. In other words, is the outcome of what God is calling you to do a fulfillment of a desire that has been in your heart for years? God often works through our desires, though most often it is not by the means we desire to follow. What did Moses want to do 40 years earlier in Exodus 2: 11, 12? His killing of the Egyptian was his own ill-founded desire to try to deliver His brethren from hard labor and slavery his way, by brute force.

IS THAT A HARD THING TO DO GOD IS ASKING YOU TO DO THAT IS IN YOUR HANDS. (X.)

Exodus 4: 13. Remember God's words to Sarah when she laughed at God's promise that she'd have a child at age 90? God answered, "Is anything too hard/difficult for the Lord? Age is often an excuse in our viewing of what is difficult. We often use the words, "at your age or at my age". What was Moses' age? He was 80. Why does God ask difficult things of older people? Why not work with young people only? Why use Noah at age 500 – 600? Why use Abraham at 100, Sarah at 90, Caleb at 85, Moses at 80? And why ask such difficult assignments, so difficult, "Build an ark, sacrifice your son, have a baby at age 90, kill giants at 85, or lead My people on the exodus at age 80?" Most of us avoid a crisis or hard thing at all cost. Beloved, what's that in your hand today? Will you follow Him? Close with last words of the song by Ken Medema, "Ol' Moses, Way Back There In The Wilderness." What's in your hand? Throw it down! Look with me at 1-10. Is God talking to you in this pandemic? Is God finally getting time with you alone, so again you will hear what He has been asking you to do for a long time? Will you debate with God or say yes to His call. Let's pray!