
The Deliverer Called

Exodus 3:1-4:17

Introduction Sometimes the plight of God's people is such that prayer is the only visible recourse. C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Hideous Strength*, tells of the descent of great darkness and great evil on the land of England. A group of godly people resist the evil with little apparent effect. They seem to be powerless and are on the verge of despair and defeat. Near the end of the novel, one of the characters says, "No power that is merely earthly will serve against the Hideous Strength." One of the companions rightly responds, "Then let us all to prayers."¹

Israel has reached that point themselves. The "hideous strength" of Egypt's malevolent masters has wrought the suffering of slavery and genocide. The darkness is deep. Resistance appears futile. In despair, they cry out to God for deliverance (2:23-24). They groan in their praying.

Their groans and their cries rise up to God's ears. He hears their prayers. He knows their pains. He remembers His promises. What will He do? How will He help His people?

He will send them a deliverer. He will come down in holy flame to meet a humbled man. He will show Himself to the deliverer and will send him to His people.

In the Appearance by God's Presence

(v.1-6)

Moses has now been in the wilderness for 40 years. He has worked as a shepherd, keeping his father-in-law's flocks. He is around 80 years old. Later, other texts tell us that at 120 years old his body was still strong and his eyesight good. So don't imagine the ordinary 80 year old weak, broken down man.

The Manifestation of God's Presence

(v.1-3)

He takes his flock over into the western side of the desert and comes to Mount Horeb. Yes, it is the mountain of God. It will come to be known as Mt. Sinai. It is the place he will later bring Israel to as they leave Egypt. As he approaches the mountain, he is comes upon or is startled by a bush that is burning. He notices, to his surprise, that it does not appear to be burned up. Upon closer inspection, the bush itself is not burning. There is a flame rising up within it. As an educated Egyptian and an experienced wilderness shepherd, he is curious as to what is going on. He decides to get closer to try to see better.

¹ Cited in *Exodus, Saved for God's Glory*, Phillip Ryken.

The Holiness of God's Presence**(v.4-6a)**

God calls to him out of the bush by his name. He is getting Moses' attention. Moses responds with the Hebrew formula for "present and accounted for." Here I am. You have my attention. God commands him to remove his shoes, a cultural symbol of respect for one's household. Moses is not to come closer and he is to remove his shoes because where he is has been made holy by God being there.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the one in the burning bush. Verse 2 informs us that the angel of the Lord appeared to him. Through verses 3-4, it is who calls out, who speaks and who commands. Then, in verse 6, the he, referring to the angel of the Lord, identifies Himself as the God of the patriarchs. So, the angel of the Lord here is not merely a created, heavenly being. He is God. He is flaming sword at the gate of the garden in Genesis 3. He is the angel who supped with Abraham on the eve of Sodom's destruction (Genesis 18). This is a preincarnate appearance of Christ.

The Response to God's Presence**(v.6b)**

Moses responds as we all will when confronted directly by holy glory of God. When God manifests Himself as the fire of holiness and glory, we cannot draw near. We must bow down and hide our faces. We cannot look upon the fearsome holiness of a glorious God. The holiness of God bars sinners from delighting in the glory of God.

Phillip Ryken points out that we tend to respond by either exaggerating our own holiness or minimizing the holiness of God. Both deceits will destroy us. Both deceits will lead to damnation. We have no holiness in ourselves. God is absolute holiness in Himself.

This is the glory of Jesus' coming in the flesh. There the holy glory of God is seen through the incarnate Christ and what is beheld is grace and truth. We may draw near. We uncover our faces. In the New Covenant is not hide our faces lest we see the face of God. The invitation now is to gaze upon the face of Christ now in the Word and later face to face. Such beholding is transforming.

With the Appointment by God's Voice**(v.7-10)**

So we have the scene. In the near distance is the mountain of God, Mount Horeb. A prostrate man, his shoes at his side and his covered with his shawl, trembles before a brightly burning bush. At the center of the flame is Jesus Christ, the angel of the Lord. Now, He speaks. The deliver is appointed by the voice of God, the Word.

God has Come Down**(v.7-8)**

The Lord declares that He has seen the affliction of His people. He knows their great suffering. He has come down to deliver them. He will not only deliver them out of their bondage but will bring them home to the Promised Land. This is a saving act of God. He comes down to His people through His Son. He will bring them deliverance.

Their Prayers have Gone Up (v.9)

God asserts that while they might believe that God is not only absent, but inattentive, He has been listening and looking. He hears their groaning. He sees their grinding. He is actively engaged with them in the midst of their sufferings. He has heard their prayers and will bring them deliverance.

Moses will Go Forth (v.10)

God will use a man to bring that deliverance. God sends Moses to Pharaoh in order to deliver them. God is not going to reveal Himself personally to Pharaoh as He is Moses and His people. He will deliver through a deliverer. He will send them a leader, a deliverer, a warrior, a man of God. He will send them Moses.

With the Answers by God's Power (v.11-22)

The rest of this section down to 4:17 as we have in our Bibles is a dialog between the Lord Jesus and Moses. It roughly divides into two sections: Moses' questions and Moses' objections. The deliverer's two questions are answered so as to inform and strengthen his faith.

Who Am I (v.11-12)

What a great change has taken place since we last met Moses. 40 years ago, he would have clearly felt that he was ready and able. Now, the humbling work of God has had its affect. He sees himself as unworthy. This is not an objection perse. It is a reflection of the making of the man in the breaking of the man.

God answers by promising His abiding presence with Moses. When Moses goes into Egypt, God will be with him. When he faces the Pharaoh, God will be with him. When he leads the people out, God will go with him. When he arrives with the people at this place, God will be here for Moses will serve or worship God here. An unworthy, humble, lowly man, diminished in his own stature will go where God promises to be.

Moses does not have a self-esteem problem. This is not God affirming Moses' worth and value so that he feels good about himself and is ready for the great task. Who we are is not important. God's presence with us is the most important thing about serving Him. In Matthew 28:20, when Jesus commissions His disciples to an age long and world-wide task of evangelism, He promises to be with them and us till to the end. Where God sends, He goes.

Who are You (v.13-22)

If it is not about who Moses is, then it is all about who God is. Moses' recognizes that he is going to represent God. He wants to know exactly who he should say he represents.

God is Identified by His Name (v.13-15)

In asking for the name of God, he not just asking for a label. He is seeking to know how God wants to be known. By what name do you want the people to know you? God's response is to identify Himself as the "I AM". He is the eternally self-existent One. The I AM has sent the deliverer.

This is important for Israel must never think that God needs them. He is wholly self-sufficient and complete in Himself. He does not come to rescue His people in order to be fulfilled. His rescue of them is an act of grace in view of His promises. He is being faithful to His Word.

This is important for Egypt must never think that God is one of their idols. He uses a name that is uniquely His own. It was not in use at all by any gods and therefore He would never be confused with them.

Remember the Lord Jesus in preincarnate form, in a Theophany, is speaking. Out of the holy, unapproachable flame the Lord Jesus Christ, says, "Tell them that the I AM has sent you." Ages later, the incarnate Jesus would declare that He is the I AM. Moses is the one sent by the I AM. But there was a coming day when the I AM was the sent One (John 8:58).

God is Identified by His History

(v.16)

While God is eternally existent, He has chosen to move in history. He does so not just as the Divine power moving providence, but also as the Divine person in relationship with people. The God of the patriarchs sends His deliverer. The eternal God who walked with men and women in time, space and history is their God. The God of their fathers. The God whom they know in their family, tribal and cultural history. He is to be known as the I AM of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who loves and rescues them.

God is Identified by His Promises

(v.17-18a)

The God who made promises to their forefathers, promises to bring them up out of Egypt. God was faithful to His Word then. He will be faithful to His Word now. He promised them a nation and a land. Now He will deliver them so as to bring to the land as a people.

The God who covenants with His people, promises Moses that they will listen. God wraps up His name with His actions. He will accomplish what He has purposed and sets His name to it. Moses is to go as the faithful deliverer believing God's promise *that He can and will cause the people to believe him.*

God is Identified by His Worship

(v.18)

Because of who God is, Moses and the Israelites must come to worship Him at His dwelling place. Asking to go to worship the I AM in the wilderness will precipitate the conflict and bring about the deliverance. If a slave people are to be delivered, sacrifice is required. Sacrifice is a part of the worship of God's people. We no longer bring the sacrifice of animals because the perfect Lamb, the Lord Jesus, has now been slain. But we present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God which is our reasonable act of worship (Romans 12:1).

God is Identified by His Enemies

(v.19-22)

People are often identified by their friends. Some people are identified by their enemies. God is also identified by His enemies. It is a good thing for Israel that the I AM is no friend of Egypt! Moses and Israel will learn to trust the mighty hand of God that will do wonders for His people to despoil and

destroy their enemies. This is a part of who God is. For the sake of His Name and on behalf of His people, He arises with power to defend His people and to destroy His enemies. It is love for His own glory and love for His own people that moves the mighty hand of God. This is nothing to deny and everything to affirm: God's identity is upheld in the ruin of His foes.

With the Assertion of God's Power

(4:1-17)

Would you not expect the one who will become faithful as a servant in all God's house to begin with humble affirmations and acceptance of God's call? Yet it is met with growing resistance by Moses. In his questions are the seeds of doubt. Now it grows and flowers into a stubborn resistance of the power and the promises of God. The deliverer is rejecting the job.

Disbelieves the Promise

(v.1-9)

Moses disbelieves by contradicting the promise of God. "Look God, they are not going to believe me nor that You have appeared to me." God had just told him in 3:18 that "They will listen to your voice." Moses remembers what happened the last time he stood up to deliver his people. If he was rejected at the height of his power as the son of the Pharaoh, what will they do when he shows up now after forty long years?

God responds by giving him three signs that will authenticate his authority and cause them to believe that God has appeared to him.

He is told to throw the staff in his hand down onto the ground. It turns into a snake. When he picks it up by the tail, not the way you are supposed to pick up a snake, it becomes a staff again.

He is told put his hand into his tunic. When he takes it out again, it is covered in leprosy. He puts it in and out again and it is healed.

He is then told, that if the Israelites will still not believe him, he is take water from the Nile river and pour it out on the ground. When he does, the water will be turned to blood.

Moses is the first of a long line of true prophets, people who will speak for God and lead God's people by declaring them God's Word. He is given signs, powerful works and wonders which he is to use when he is not believed. In the first call of a prophet and the giving of his signs and wonders, we have a precedent set that is carried through the whole Bible. This culminates in Jesus who finally, after long teaching and many demonstrations of power, turns to unbelieving and wicked Jews and denounces them as ones who seek signs before they will believe. In the end of days, signs and wonders will be exercised by the false prophets and preachers to deceive the lost and even the elect if that were possible.

Here is the wonderful grace and amazing wisdom of God. He is gracious towards Moses. He provides powerful signs to give Moses confidence. He is wise in that the signs He has given to cause Israel to believe, are given in the context of Moses' contradiction.

Doubts His Ability**(v.10-12)**

Moses responds by doubting his ability to speak. He protests that he is not eloquent. He is not persuasive. He is not a man of words. While in Egypt he was mighty in words and deeds. Now, long periods of solitude as a shepherd have eroded the skill, at least in his own view.

The Lord rebukes him with a question? Who is the maker of men? Who is the maker of mouths? Is it not God? So God will be with Him and with His mouth. It is not a matter of eloquence. It is a matter of being taught by God.

This is an important lesson for us. People do not believe the message we give because of our eloquence or lack of it. Being able to speak well can be both an asset and a liability. Do not strive to eloquent. As you have opportunities to witness, to speak, to teach or maybe even preach, strive to be taught by God. Study hard and write clearly and speak simply. Then our confidence will rest in the power of God to convert sinners and mature saints through His Word and Spirit.

Denies the Call**(v.13-17)**

Finally Moses rejects the call outright. "O my Lord, please send someone else." There is built in contradiction in this sentence. One does not say "someone else" to the "Lord". We know that this is sin because God's anger is kindled. His anger is against Moses. Moses may have had honest questions and reasonable doubts before. But now this is imply wrong.

God responds with a bit of irony. He does send someone else. God counters, not by turning away to someone else, but by bringing someone else alongside. Aaron his brother is qualified for office. He is also a Levite. He can speak for God and for Moses. He is coming out from Egypt to meet Moses and will be glad to see him. Moses is to teach him what to say. Moses will be as God to Aaron.

This is loaded and weighty with implications. Moses will himself have a spokesman to God's people on his behalf. He will speak and Moses will act. The final sentence here is significant for the book. Moses rod will be one of power, one demonstrably against sin and wielding destruction and death. But Aaron's rod will one that buds and brings life. Eventually, the rod of death and the rod of life will lay side-by-side in the Ark of the Covenant resting on the tables of the law.

Conclusion Hebrews tells a lot about Moses. He had moved from this questioning, objecting, squirming deliverer into the venerated Lawgiver of Israel. The preacher who wrote Hebrews saw that the honor given to Moses threatened the honor due to Christ.

Consider Hebrews 3:1-6.

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, ² who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. ³ For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. ⁴ (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) ⁵ Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, ⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. [ESV]

If Moses is great then Jesus is greater. How?

Moses is made by God, but Jesus made Moses.

Moses was faithful in the house, but Jesus is faithful over the house.

Moses was faithful as a servant, but Jesus is faithful as a son.

Moses was part of the house of Israel, but we are a part of Jesus' house.

How do we hear God today?

We do not receive an audible call like this any more. Prophets and apostles are called like this. Nothing in the New Testament points to this sort of sovereign summons to bear office. No other office bearers have to serve in that office.

We do not receive particular instructions like this any more. God can prompt our hearts. He is still God after all. But those are not authoritative. They cannot and do not define sin. You cannot disobey a prompting in the heart. And you do not know for sure whether it is God or you or too much pizza.

We do have the whole canon of the Word of God through which God speaks now loud and clear. In it, God declares who He is, what He has done and what He will yet do. In the Bible, God defines and interprets us and tells who and what we are. He commands and commends. Yet we are often responding to the Bible in the same sort of ways as Moses did. We disbelieve its promises, doubt what it says, and disobey its commands.

So we must repent. We must see the glorious holiness of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We must bow before Him, confess our sins and receive His great mercies.

In the burning bush, on the holy mountain, standing on holy ground, Moses argues with God. May we have grace to not argue with God, but rather to accept His sovereign will. May the One greater than Moses, Jesus Christ, be truly Lord over us. When He is, God's people will be delivered. Worship will be true and a delight. Sacrifice will be sought. We will flourish in the wilderness, tested and tried. We will all, every one of us, arrive safely home.

