

Who Am I? -- The Truth about Me

What is Truth? – 4

Exodus 3:1-17

Sermon

Hobart, September 7th, 2014

Devonport, September 13th, 2014

Launceston, September 14th, 2014

Exodus 3:1-17

3 One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up. ³ "This is amazing," Moses said to himself. "Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go see it."

⁴ When the LORD saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!" "Here I am!" Moses replied.

⁵ "Do not come any closer," the LORD warned. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. ⁶ I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." When Moses heard this, he covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the LORD told him, "I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey—the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live. ⁹ Look! The cry of the people of Israel has reached me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse them. ¹⁰ Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt."

¹¹ But Moses protested to God, "Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?"

¹² God answered, "I will be with you. And this is your sign that I am the one who has sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain."

¹³ But Moses protested, "If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they will ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what should I tell them?"

¹⁴ God replied to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you." ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: Yahweh, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.

This is my eternal name, my name to remember for all generations.

¹⁶ "Now go and call together all the elders of Israel. Tell them, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—has appeared to me. He told me, "I have been watching closely, and I see how the Egyptians are treating you. ¹⁷ I have promised to rescue you from your oppression in Egypt. I will lead you to a land flowing with milk and honey—the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live.'" ' ¹

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Ex 3:1-17). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

INTRODUCTION:

A. WE HAVE BEEN FOCUSING RECENTLY ON "TRUTH"

1. On God being the ultimate reality and truth
2. And that we learn of him through Scripture, but most clearly and fully through Jesus, God with us, and the Holy Spirit

B. TODAY

1. We are going to look at the truth about us
2. Who are we in God's eyes, in his reality?
 - a) What is our true identity, calling and purpose in life?

C. PRAYER

BODY:

II. MOSES

A. OUR PASSAGE TODAY IS ABOUT MOSES

1. And his calling

Exodus 3:1-17

3 One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro,* the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai,* the mountain of God.

B. MOSES

1. We see a lot about Moses in this dramatic confrontation between Moses and God
 - a) We gain insights into who he was, his nature, his strengths and weaknesses
 - b) And importantly we also see the potential and purpose of his life in partnership with God and serving his people

C. GOD WASN'T TRYING TO MAKE MOSES INTO SOMEONE ELSE

1. He was wanting to help Moses be the Moses God created him to be
 - a) And in that capacity to serve God and his people
2. Moses was clearly a unique individual
 - a) He had a dramatic childhood starting with trauma and danger and ending up being raised both by his mother and Pharaoh's daughter in the Egyptian court
 - b) He had many opportunities to learn and grow
3. He had a passion for his people
 - a) He wasn't prepared to stand for oppression and injustice

* Moses' father-in-law went by two names, Jethro and Reuel.

* Hebrew *Horeb*, another name for Sinai.

- b) But he was impatient and impulsive as well in reacting to it
- 4. He ended up burning his bridges and running away
 - a) He then ends up in oblivion
 - b) In the wilderness
 - c) He wasn't doing anything to serve God or his people
 - d) Meanwhile, the suffering and injustice was increasing
 - e) All his experience and understanding of the Egyptians, his training in leadership etc. was being wasted
- 5. His world had become small, minimal,
 - a) and his impact and effect as a human being was small and minimal

D. GOD'S PLAN FOR MOSES

1. So in Exodus 3 we see God confront Moses and call him out of his wanderings in the wilderness, into more appropriate and effective service
2. But where does God start? He first comes to Moses and grabs his attention, wakes him up and challenges him

Exodus 3:2-

² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up. ³ "This is amazing," Moses said to himself. "Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go see it."

3. Nathan Nettleton suggests that the bush not burning up shows that God isn't a hateful, destructive God.
 - a) Jesus exemplified this by overcoming evil by submitting to it, and bringing new life through death, rather than fighting and destroying.
 - b) God isn't out to destroy Moses, or you and me, to eliminate our unique personhood.
 - c) He calls us to clean us up, purifies and reorients, and redirect us, and helps us grow to be the people he created us to be

4. Nathan Nettleton;

This fiery God certainly purifies and refines and communicates and sometimes terrifies. But even those who get too close and are engulfed in this purifying fire discover that it is a fire of love and that nothing and no one is destroyed.

This God is not defined by being against anything, but by being ablaze with fiery love for everything. Everything is gathered into this love, and in the fire, our true identity is revealed, and we are not destroyed. And if we are to be true to our identity that is forged in the fire, we too cannot burn against anyone, but only blaze with love for all as our God does. No wonder Moses has to take off his shoes and hide his face. ²

E. I AM

⁴When the LORD saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!" "Here I am!" Moses replied.

1. Notice that there are a lot of "I am" statements in this passage.

a) Statements about identity, God's identity and Moses' and his people's identity and calling

2. A lost and bewildered Moses starts by listening to God, responding to God's call and presence in his life

⁵"Do not come any closer," the LORD warned. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground.

3. God just isn't anyone, we need to have awe and respect for who he is, the Great "I am"

⁶I am the God of your father*—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." When Moses heard this, he covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.

² Nathan Nettleton, Burning Identity Questions, a sermon on Exodus 3: 1-15 & Matthew 16:21-28, 31 August 2014 © LaughingBird.net

* Greek version reads *your fathers*.

F. GOD STARTS OFF BY REVEALING HIMSELF, HIS REALITY TO MOSES

1. "I am the God of your fathers"
2. The title "I am" as we have examined before, means basically "I am who I am".
 - a) God is the eternal, self-existent being, who is dependent and answerable to no-one but himself
 - b) He is the ultimate truth and reality as we have been focusing on lately
3. So God is the starting point for Moses in his journey to being the true Moses that God created him to be
 - a) To live and serve God with his unique personhood, including his temperament, his brain power, his passions, his experience and opportunities.
 - b) All the internal aspects of who he was, plus all that he had been given from outside

G. ISN'T THIS THE SAME FOR YOU AND ME?

1. To be the most effective people we can be—we need to start with God's revelation of himself
 - a) Jesus is the foundation of our lives, and if we build on any other basis we are founding our lives on sand
 - b) And we need God to speak to us through the written word, through Jesus the living Word, and he does so through his Spirit
2. The answer to "who is God" is clearly, Father, Son and Spirit
 - a) Each are one, yet distinct
 - b) As the creeds state, The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father, the Spirit is not the Son etc.
 - c) They exist with deep self-knowledge, but also with complete understanding of each other
 - d) They each have their own roles, but live them in complete co-operation and harmony with each other

3. Jesus, as the Son of God incarnate, human and divine lived his life, growing in knowledge of who he was,
 - a) And always maintaining and growing in his knowledge of the Father through the Spirit
4. This is the reality, the truth that we need to live into
 - a) We can only truly *know* who we are, when we understand who God is, and live our lives as Jesus did
 - b) We can only truly *be* who we are, and grow when we actively and prayerfully participate in the life Jesus shared with the Father and the Spirit

H. GOD GIVES MOSES HIS CALLING

1. After revealing himself, God now shows Moses how he is to partner with God in doing his work of saving his people and leading them in a new life with their God

⁷ Then the LORD told him, "I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey—the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live. ⁹ Look! The cry of the people of Israel has reached me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse them. ¹⁰ Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt."

2. We aren't all called to be Moses
 - a) Sometimes we can get frustrated or feel guilty that we aren't all being Moses's, or Miriam's, Mary's, Priscilla's, Peter's or Paul's.
3. God wasn't calling Moses to be Abraham or David, or Mary, or Jesus or anyone else
 - a) God was calling Moses to be Moses
4. But the heart of the whole story here is clearly that God wasn't leaving Moses to be Moses lost by himself any longer

- a) It was time for Moses to move forward, warts and all, with all his proclivities and personhood, with all his strengths, weaknesses
- b) Not alone, but in partnership with God and in partnership with others who had complementary strengths and weaknesses
- c) The modern individualist approach, of God just for me and my own personal betterment is not how God works

¹¹ But Moses protested to God, “Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?”

I. WHO AM I?

- 1. This is one of the ultimate questions of life, the question of identity, who am I, who is the true me?
- 2. And then as Moses goes on to do, we tend to worry about our abilities to cope with the things that face us
 - a) Who am I, how am I as I am, going to be able to do such and such a task, or take on particular responsibilities?

¹² God answered, “I will be with you. And this is your sign that I am the one who has sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain.”

3. Nettleton;

In response to Moses’s anguished “Who am I?”, God replies, “I will be” - same verb again - “I will be with you.”³

J. GOD PROMISES TO BE WITH US IN DOING WHAT HE HAS EQUIPPED US TO DO

- 1. He is our life partner
- 2. God gives Moses a sign of his continuing presence into the future
 - a) But we may say, that was ok for him—but what about us?

³ Nettleton

K. Q: WHAT SIGN DO WE HAVE THAT GOD WILL BE WITH US?

1. Jesus
2. Jesus is God's sign that he is with us
3. The cross in particular is the sign we have been given
4. In Jesus, God has brought us all out of bondage through Jesus' death on Golgotha
5. We worship Jesus who has ascended to God's Holy mountain, his throne in heaven
6. Through his death and resurrection and ascension Jesus' promises to be with us, and he sent us his Spirit as a sign of his presence with us on our journey
7. So like Moses, we aren't alone in the challenges of life
 - a) The Father, Son and Spirit walk with us, even through the valley of death
8. Notice also that the sign won't be apparent until Moses has completed his calling to lead the people out of Egypt
 - a) Sometimes, like those listed in Hebrews 11, we just have to go forward in faith, and the proof as they say, will be "in the pudding" - in the fruits of what results
 - b) We too, are looking to the city whose builder and maker is God, the city which we have the privilege of being co-builders and co-inheritors

Exodus 3:13-

¹³ But Moses protested, "If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they will ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what should I tell them?"

¹⁴ God replied to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM.* Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you." ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel:

* Or I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE.

Yahweh,* the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.

This is my eternal name, my name to remember for all generations.

L. ALL MOSES DID AND SAID WAS TO BE IN THE NAME OF “I AM WHO I AM”

1. This is YHWH, usually simply translated “LORD” in the OT with small capital letters in most translations.
2. He is the true God, the ultimate loving being who is the ultimate reality and source of all life and creation
 - a) And his identity is bound up in his being a leading, rescuing, restoring God

¹⁶ “Now go and call together all the elders of Israel. Tell them, ‘The LORD, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—has appeared to me. He told me, “I have been watching closely, and I see how the Egyptians are treating you. ¹⁷ I have promised to rescue you from your oppression in Egypt. I will lead you to a land flowing with milk and honey—the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, ⁴Hivites, and Jebusites now live.” ’

M. AGAIN GOD MAKES CLEAR WHO HE IS TO MOSES

1. Moses can only know who he is when he knows who God is
2. And Moses is called to make clear who God is to the Israelites so they can all know their true identity and calling as well
 - a) All their lives individually, and as a community are to be lived in the light of who God is
 - b) They are who they are because of God
 - c) Their future, their rescue from oppression and their future lives are all in his hands
 - d) He will lead and guide their lives

* *Yahweh* is a transliteration of the proper name *YHWH* that is sometimes rendered “Jehovah”; in this translation it is usually rendered “the LORD” (note the use of small capitals).

⁴Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Ex 3:1-17). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

3. They need to listen to him, learn of him, and trust and follow him in their lives

a) Then they could become the people God created them to be to the fullest

N. AFTER THIS MOSES PROTESTS THAT THE PEOPLE MAY NOT BELIEVE HE IS SENT FROM GOD

1. Then in Exodus 4 he protests that he isn't a very good speaker

2. God in each case helps him and fills in the gaps

a) He provides Aaron to do the speaking, and promises to be with and inspire what they both do

O. WE ALL NEED TO LISTEN AND LEARN FROM GOD TO DISCOVER WHO WE ARE.

1. And the way he wants us to serve him and his people;

2. Parker Palmer writes in his book "Let Your Life Speak,"

I first learned about vocation growing up in the church. I value much about the religious tradition in which I was raised. . . . But the idea of 'vocation' I picked up in those circles created distortion until I grew strong enough to discard it. I mean the idea that vocation, or calling, comes from a voice external to ourselves, a voice of moral demand that asks us to become someone we are not yet – someone different, someone better, someone just beyond our reach.

Today I understand vocation quite differently – not as a goal to be achieved, but as a gift to be received. Discovering vocation does not mean scrambling toward some prize just beyond my reach but accepting the treasure of true self I already possess. Vocation does not come from a voice 'out there' calling me to become something I am not. It comes from a voice 'in here' calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given me at birth by God.⁵

3. God has given us his Son, his Spirit and his written word to help us discover who we are in Jesus Christ, and our calling, our life's purpose, including our day to day priorities

⁵ Parker Palmer, Let Your Life Speak, p.10

4. Parker Palmer struggled with understanding who he was, his identity and what he should be doing with his life.
 - a) He came across an old Quaker saying, "Let your life speak."
 - b) For quite a while, like many of us, he believed that meant, Let the highest truths and values guide you. Live up to those demanding standards in everything you do.
 - c) Palmer looked up to famous people who seemed to have lives of high moral standard and purpose, like Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi and probably Mother Theresa.
 - d) But like most of us, he found that he just couldn't be like them
 - e) It didn't work trying to be someone else and their values
5. Thirty years later, he came to understand that we can only find fulfilment when we become our true selves in God.

III. DISCUSSION

A. IS THERE ANYONE YOU HAVE ASPIRED TO BE LIKE?

B. HAVE YOU EVER FELT PRESSURE TO BE SOMEONE YOU ARE NOT?

1. What was the result?
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CONCLUSION:

A. MOSES WASN'T CALLED TO SUDDENLY BECOME SOMEONE OUT OF CHARACTER

1. To live a life that bore no resemblance to who he was
 - a) Remember Moses was born a Hebrew, he was trained by the Egyptians to be a leader. He had always been concerned about his people, and about justice and liberation
2. But God had to get his attention, to bring him back out of the wilderness—back to the life he was prepared for
3. He needed to know God and let God lead him and partner him
 - a) To listen to God every day, so he could continually be involved in the aspect of God's work that he was called to participate in

B. THE MORE WE WALK WITH GOD,

1. The more we talk with him and listen to him through his living Word and his written work, then the more we share in his life and become like him
2. As we have seen in the past few weeks, this often means surrendering dearly held views, attitudes and habits, and as we have seen today,
 - a) Sometimes this includes giving up trying to be someone else, and accepting and rejoicing in who God has made us to be in his image
3. And that truth, like all others, will truly set us free
 - a) Set us free to grow and be the unique, valuable member of God's family he made us to be; as Nathan Nettleton puts it; Your true self, and the destiny for which you were created exist only in God and as an expression of God and are found, as Jesus is found, in giving your self away for the life of the world.⁶

⁶ Nettleton