

Special Series

the Call of God – Moses (2)

Prayer

We praise You great Creator, Almighty God, for the seasons You have made. By them, You have enriched life with changing colour, seasonal foods, patterns of growth and weather, and a timescale for festivals and celebration. We praise You for all such gifts, and the way in which these enrich life for all people and give us glimpse of Your amazing generosity. Thank You, Almighty God: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Turn off the television when you would usually watch, and give that time to God in prayer and Bible reading

On-going prayers

- **Pray about the world of sport** *Pray for the Winter Olympics in Canada, that the highest and best examples of sport will be maintained*
- *Pray for those who have suffered in a train collision in Belgium*
- *Give thanks to God for the gift of His Word, written and spoken*

Meditation

Jesus, here You are:

dissatisfy my soul with mortal and material things,
and excite me by the sheer potential of Your presence.

Jesus, do Your work:

Melt my stony damaged heart by love's simplicity,
and assure my ever flagging spirit of Your eternal care.

Jesus, strike the sin:

break through Satan's brutal bondages with vigour,
and delight me by the exuberance and joy of risen life.

Jesus, lead me on:

motivate me by love's justice, derided by the world,
and ever soak my soul in spiritual joy and righteousness.

Jesus, stay always:

consecrate my path by Your divine companionship,
and fix my destiny; lock my life in heaven whilst on earth.

Bible passage - Exodus 3:7-12

⁷ Then the LORD said, 'I have plainly seen the misery of my people who are in Egypt. I have truly heard their cry which has arisen because of their taskmasters. ⁸ I have come down to rescue them from the hands of the Egyptians, and lead them up out of that country to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ Now, indeed, the outcry of the Israelites has come to me, and I have also taken notice of the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ Now, go! I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt. ¹¹ But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt?' ¹² He said, 'I will be with you; and this will be a sign for you that it is I

who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will all worship God on this very mountain.'

Bible Study

Review

It is impossible for us to guess exactly how low Moses was after the failure of his futile attempt to lead the people of Israel (2:11-15) and the forty years he spent in the service of his father-in-law. At the heart of the book of Exodus lies God's call to this broken man to do His will and achieve the impossible, the liberation of His people from Egypt, the greatest Empire of the day. When God drew Moses' attention, he had sufficient faith despite his bruised spirit to reply (3:1-6), but the extraordinary gap between Moses and Almighty God was enormous, and it is not something people often comment upon today. Many preachers like to draw attention to the way God prepared Moses for the task ahead through his quality training at court and his awareness of history and his ancestry, for example. Too many people assume that Moses was a ready-made leader, merely awaiting God's call to take up his rightful place as the leader of his people.

However, the more we read about Moses' call in Exodus 3 and 4, the more we realise that he was like a man who had experienced emotional breakdown. He was not merely reticent about doing God's will because it was right to be humble before the Lord (3:11), he was genuinely broken before the awesomeness of God and the task he was called to do. As we will discover, Moses' call was not just about the 'burning bush' (3:1-6) or the great revelation of the name of God (3:13-15). It was an extensive conversation with God in which Moses was laid bare, with all his personal inadequacies exposed. The task required was extraordinary, and God had to do a great work in this old and bruised man in order to prepare him for the spiritual task ahead. Up to this point, Moses' spiritual preparation for the role of liberator was non-existent, but the seed of faith was present in him as he responded to the burning bush. It was all God required.

Today's reading contains a clear and astounding statement of intent by God. He had heard the plight of the Israelites (3:7,9), He intended to rescue them and lead them to a 'good and spacious country' (3:8), moreover Moses was the man he wanted to do the job for Him (3:11)! The breadth of this vision was probably not beyond Moses' grasp, as there can be little doubt that it was once Moses' own desire to see his people set free. However, Moses was not able to see that the task was achievable; 'who am I ... to lead the Israelites,' (3:11) he said, haunted by the knowledge of his own past failure.

The reply God gave was crucial. The words 'I will be with you' (3:12) were not just a form of re-assurance to Moses. They were the exact same words spoken to the forefathers Isaac (Gen 26:3) and Jacob (31:3) when they needed a word from the Lord to help them face the future, and they were words which were closely associated with God's Covenant promises to His people. One of the main features of the Covenant promise given to Abraham (13:15) was that his ancestors would take possession of their own land, and this promise was one which God intended to keep. It was now that the Israelites needed their own land, and they needed to be delivered from slavery so that they could move there and take it. This holy task was given to Moses, and God was not going to take 'no' for an answer!

All of us feel small next to the great works of God, indeed, if we did not, then we would have turned true faith on its head. Moses could no more 'fake' humility than we can, for the Lord knows all things. We now look back on Exodus, knowing that God's prophecy in this passage was fulfilled, and Moses did indeed accomplish the great task of deliverance. This should encourage us to follow the Lord's guidance, for He will indeed do what He intends.

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- Deliverance from slavery
- Deliverance into the Promised Land
- The continuing conversation between God and Moses

Going Deeper

There is great deal to study in this passage. We know all about the plight of Israel, but the description of the land to which God wanted to take His people is powerful and revealing (3:8). Then the commissioning of Moses in verses 10 to 12 has much to teach us about Moses, and indeed ourselves; and the final promise of a sign is intriguing. Who would normally think of 'worship' as a sign of God's work?

Deliverance from slavery

God had always intended His people to live in the Promised Land of Canaan, but it appears that whilst they were in Egypt, in slavery, they lost sight of this, having settled into life in Egypt. This was a key part of the Covenant promises of God to the forefathers (see above, and Gen 17:8, 22:17 etc.) which God needed to bring home to Moses in a clear and memorable way; but in speaking about it, God emphasised His compassion for the people where they were. They needed to be liberated and moved on, but they would probably not go unless they knew that their God cared for them in their distress.

There are two verses in this passage which speak of Israel's slavery (3:7,9). Each tells us that God has heard the plight of His people and intends to free them. This is clear from everything in Exodus so far, so why is it repeated like this? Each verse contains some strong language in Hebrew, and not the strong language of swearing or oaths, but the strong language of emphasis. For example, in verse 7, the word for 'I' is emphasised, telling us that there can be no mistaking God's attention to His people's plight. If you compare my translation with other Bibles, you will see that I have placed the words 'plainly' and 'truly' to express this feature of the verse. We are to be in no doubt about God's intentions. What follows in verse 8 is a prophetic description of God's deliverance; but before we study this further, we should notice that the next verse (3:9) echoes verse 7; 'now, indeed, the outcry of the Israelites has come to me ... I have taken notice ...'. The thematic repetition, which occurs each side of verse 8, draws our attention both to God's intention to save his people and the prophecy that it surrounds. Most people are not used to literary structures today, because people write or say things as they please; but most languages have patterns giving emphasis, and we need to study them to recognise them!

Deliverance into the 'Promised Land'

The real emphasis is on verse 8. This is God's prophetic promise of a 'good and spacious' land, 'flowing with milk and honey'. The second of these descriptions has transferred into English as an image of luxury and opulence, but that is unfortunate. These phrases tell us a great deal about God's intentions for His people. Firstly, God promised His people that their land would be 'good'. This comes from the very character of God who made all things, and saw that they were 'good' (see Genesis 1:4,10,12,18,21,25,31 etc.). Exodus 3 is the first passage in which God's Covenant promises are spoken of in this way, and it reminds us that God always intended His plan of salvation to re-establish the original 'goodness' of the world and its people. Secondly, the land promised was 'spacious' or 'broad'. This is one of the many places in Scripture which tell us that God's salvation is like being brought out of a restricted area into wide open space (see also psalm 66:12 and Psalm 23:1,2). The cynic could suggest that Egypt was a far larger country than Canaan, and Canaan was always a rather crowded country; but this passage is not about blunt facts but about vision, and the language is poetic and draws us in to believe that God has something better for His people.

Exodus 8:3 is the first place in Scripture where we find the idea of the Promised Land as a place 'flowing with milk and honey'! It is such a common phrase today, we read past it without realising the significance of its first use. The word translated 'flowing' is the one used to describe the oozing of milk from a sheep or goat's udder, and honey was a naturally occurring food which abounded when the land was fertile and well-vegetated (allowing bees to thrive). It was therefore a very powerful image which God intended should draw the imagination of the people of Israel in their captivity, as He needed the Israelites to want to leave Egypt. At the time, the people of Israel were shepherds and goatherds, and they lived from the produce of their animals. However, the labour forced on them (probably with taxes) would have made it difficult for them to sustain their herds, their traditional way of life, and means of support. A 'land flowing with milk and honey' would be just what people wanted!

Much has been made by some people of the list of nations occupying the Promised Land (the Canaanites, the Hittites etc – see verse 8). There is a possible explanation of each of the different people represented, some more than others; and clearly, they all occupied parts of the Promised Land around 1500 years BC. The list may be representative rather than purposefully accurate, as other similar lists of nations have different nations and numbers of nations (see Genesis 15:19-21 or Deuteronomy 7:1f.). It will take a long time to describe each of them here, so I will leave any detailed description of them until our studies reach those parts of Joshua and Judges where Israel faces these nations directly in competition for the land.

The continuing conversation between God and Moses

Many things within this part of Scripture are new, and we now meet another major topic. It is essential to our understanding of God's work with people throughout ancient times and through until today, and it is this: God wants to do His work of salvation through the people He calls. Now, we are used to hearing this said in a Christian, New Testament context, but here it is in Exodus! Having called Moses and obtained his response (3:4) and worship (3:5,6), God then called him to do the work of deliverance He wanted to have done (3:10). Even the words used in this verse, 'Now, go! I am sending you ...' are typical of Scriptural words used elsewhere in which God sent prophets and kings, and eventually apostles (in the New Testament) to do His will (see Numbers 22:20, Jonah 1:2, 3:2 etc.). But although we can look back on these words and be

inspired by the power of them over centuries to achieve God's great works of salvation, Moses only knew that God was calling him to go back and face his previous failure. He was called to go and do what he had previously tried to accomplish in his own strength and failed. It was a daunting task.

Moses' response was understandable, and the circumstances of what happened make it extremely unlikely that his reticence was some kind of false humility (see above). Moses' words 'who am I?' prefigure David's identical and famous response to God's Covenant promise to him to make of him an 'everlasting house' from whom would come a king who would 'establish a kingdom for ever' (2 Sam 7:13,18). The deliverance of whole peoples from slavery and the establishment of kingdoms can only be the consequence of godly commissions and ministry; works of God which have a purpose on the world stage and which affect our own, real, history. There is only one response any person can give to such a call; 'who am I?'

God's final promise to Moses is not new to Scripture, however, having been given to Isaac and Jacob before (Gen 26:3, 31:3). God said to Moses 'I will be with you.' The great importance of this text, however, is to reassure us that in the midst of doing new things and revealing more of Himself to Moses than any man previously, God was not acting differently than He had before. His desire was always to be 'with' His people in the midst of the tasks He required of them. By promising to be with Moses, God was continuing a pattern of revelation that would lead, one day, to the revelation of His own son Jesus Christ, Emanuel 'God with us' (Matthew 1:23).

Lastly, God offered Moses a sign for his own benefit, as a guarantee of his presence and a promise of success in the days to come. He prophesied that if Moses would follow His commands, then he would return to the mountain on which he stood with the people of God, to worship Him. This kind of 'fulfilment' sign is not one with which we are familiar today, for it takes a great deal of faith to believe. Nevertheless, the idea that God would add on a blessing to the fulfilment of the deed He asked of Moses was simple enough in its day. Certainly, after Moses eventually agreed to work with the Lord, his initial objective does appear to have been to return to the mountain to worship God (Exodus 19).

Application

There are a number of features of this passage which we can relate to as Christians without too much difficulty. Some pastors and theologians have made a living out of developing the ideas of 'liberation' contained in this and other texts, relating it to the saving work of Jesus and describing their work as 'liberation theology'. However, the more obvious connections we see are to do with the nature of Moses' call, and the idea that God wants to do His work in the world through His people. It is not that God cannot work with sovereign power; He does this all the time, and in ways that we do not always know about. However, His greatest desire is to bring the saving work of Jesus to the attention of all peoples, and He does this primarily through calling people to do His will in the world, and promising to be with them; just like Moses.

All too often in the life of the church, we have the habit of protesting our humility or lack of qualifications, or our limited availability to do the work of the Lord. If we claim to have faith in God and His son Jesus, however, no protest is ever sustainable, for it only exposes our lack of obedience and faith. If God is calling us, then it is absolutely right, if not essential, that we should feel inadequate and unworthy. That is precisely the right qualification for doing the work of God, for us as it was for Moses. In addition, if we protest further, this is not self-effacement or humility, but sin; the sin of unbelief in the power of God to do as He pleases with us. Our aim must be to follow Moses' example, and submit to God's call, whatever the cost.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss in your group your own reaction to verse 8. It is a complex verse full of God's promises, but what do they mean for us today?
2. Have you ever felt the hand of God on your life, or the voice of God, calling you to serve Him? Share your answers with others in your group.
3. In what ways do we experience the presence of God with us today?

Topics covered by this text

- *The saving heart of God*
- *The call of God to individuals*

- *The presence of God with His chosen servants*

Personal comments by author

The passage we have studied today is at the heart of the Bible's description of how God works with His people to fulfil His purposes. Each of us can only respond to what we know of God's call upon our lives, but it is fair to say that if someone has been a Christian and has never experienced the Lord's call to do some work or task, then there is something wrong. It is also possible for people to believe that once they have completed a task, then they have 'done their service', and nothing else is required. Remember, Moses was called at the age of 80!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *What is the Lord calling you to do now? Are you too old or too young, or too occupied, or too cautious for the Lord's call? Think and pray about these things.*
 - *Read through the words of this passage a few times and seek the meaning to be found in it for you.*
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Final Prayer

You have called many good people over the years, Lord God, and many have responded and done Your work. We praise You because You are always calling people to do Your will, and we ask You to make Your call clear for each of us who pray. May we make ourselves available to You without condition. AMEN
