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“A God Who Sets Our Hearts Ablaze”

January 7, 2007

Exodus 3:1-15

Introduction: I love the gift of a New Year. For me it is a reminder that God is not done with our world, with our church, with you or with me. Our next sermon series will be to look more closely at who Jesus is, as we look at the different titles for Jesus (such as the *I Am's*). This morning, we provide a framework for this study by pondering how God has revealed Himself to Moses and to us in the burning bush.

An Unexpected Message

When I reflect back on my childhood memories, I always thought Moses had a sense of destiny, perhaps because I knew how his life would eventually turn out. However, in this passage, there is no sense in which Moses is expectant or even remotely aware of what God is about to do. Instead (in something that is reminiscent of David too), Moses is stuck in the desert, shepherding his father in law's sheep. God though has a plan and purpose for Moses, and God is about to give him an unexpected message. Moses is clearly one of the most important and influential people in the history of the world and in the Bible. However, Moses was also a humbled and broken man, a murderer and an exile from his own country and family. Listen again to his main question of God: *“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt.”* This question of course is egocentric as are most of our questions for and of God. God chose Moses because he had been broken and was now ready to be used.

How about you this morning? If you are wondering what you have to offer God, you are on the right track. What God is looking for are open and willing hearts. God does not expect you to be perfect, to be ready, to be fully trained, to feel up to the task. God wants you to be apart of His larger plan to rescue and to save, to give new life and new hope to our world. I love the first line of the Purpose Driven Life, where Rick Warren says, “it's not about you.” So true! If only we believed this and lived this, our lives would be distinctly different. God wants to break us out of our self-indulgence, our self-centeredness, our self-absorption and remind us that life is about giving glory to Him and enjoying Him.

God is Alive and With Us

This self-revelation of God at the burning bush is both compelling and theologically significant. I chuckled when I read one of the commentaries. The author discussed how Biblical theologians have tried for centuries to figure out what

sort of bush was burning. Then, he said, the point really is that God is doing something significant, something only He can do. Only God can set a bush ablaze without actually destroying it. The Lord also explains why He has come to Moses. Listen to the verbs here. God has seen the misery of His people; God has heard them crying out; God is concerned with their suffering; God has come down to rescue them; God has come to bring them into a land that is abundant in blessing; God is sending Moses. These statements remind us that God is active and alive in our world. God does hear, God does care, God joins with us in the pain and brokenness, God acts on our behalf. God is not silent or distant. Rather, as Christmas reminds us, God is with us and for us, God has a plan and a purpose for our world, for our lives, for our families, for our church.

God also reveals His character in two main ways. God says, *“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob...I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites-I am has sent me to you.”* God tells Moses that His character and His person has been the same and known for some time. God is the God of his father (or of his family in Egypt), and of each of the patriarchal generations in Israel. God is providing His resume, which interestingly is not filled with what He has done (such as creating the world, taking care of Joshua etc), but rather, God is saying that He has been made known most importantly in and through relationships, in space and in time. His character remains the same. He is who He is. The name of I am also reflects that He is a God who is dependable and faithful, alive and at work in the world and in their lives. The tense of the verb here is that of continuing and unfinished action. God is not was or will be, God is, God is always who He is.

Fire is a common image for God in the Bible. At the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:3, the Holy Spirit came in a manner that looked like tongues of fire that separated and rested on each of them. In 1 Thessalonians 5:19, Paul tells us to “do not put out the Spirit’s fire.” Paul reminds us that our bodies are now the temples that God’s Spirit resides in, saying in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”* In the burning bush, God’s presence is clear. As the Holy Spirit burns bright in our bodies, lives, hearts and souls, God’s power and presence can be clearly seen.

How can you fan the flames of the Holy Spirit in your lives? Focus on Jesus as Lord. Focus on pleasing God, not others. Learn to listen. Slow down and see what is all around you, so you don’t walk right past burning bushes. Pray first and act second. Wait on God and realize that most things are not that important. I am excited about what the Lord will do in the life of our church this year. I am convinced that He is ready to reveal to us more of who He is and of who we are to become in Him. I believe that each of us can expect to meet the Lord in burning bushes, and in every moment. Let us see what He will do in our midst. Let us glorify Him and enjoy Him together!