

EXODUS pt.3

Mr. Moses Meets His Maker 9-22-13

(Exodus 2) As we rejoin the continuing saga of Moses, the humble shepherd of Midian. Moses, remember, had departed from Egypt to save his skin and was living in a desert land, called Midian, where God was secretly training Moses for the work that lie ahead. Leonard Ravenhill tells of how a proud-looking woman came up to him after hearing him speak and asked what university or seminary he had attended. Ravenhill said to her, "Bush University." *What's that?* "Bush University." *Oh really, I haven't heard of that. Did anyone I know go there?* He said, "Moses." *Moses who?* she asked. Today we join with Moses for a lesson at Bush University **2:23-3:10** *Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God. 24 So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 25 God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them. 3:1 Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. 3 So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. 7 The Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. 8 So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. 9 Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. 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."* As I indicated last time the real beauty and value of these Old Testament stories is to be found in their theology, in the lessons they

teach us about God. Last week we searched out the sovereignty and grace of God as they were expressed in the life of Moses. This morning I want us to discover in our story three other attributes of Almighty God. But first, I want to clear up some puzzling details in the passage we read.

The first mystery surrounds the name of Moses' father-in-law. In 2:18 he is called *Reuel* and in 3:1 he is called *Jethro*. What is his name? Apparently, his name is Jethro Reuel, or something like that. The man uses both names. In the New Testament we have Levi who is also Matthew and a Simon who is also Peter, so it seems here we have a Reuel who is also Jethro. And since Jethro is a lot easier to say and remember that is what we shall call this man who was the father of Zipporah and the priest of Midian. By the way, what kind of priest was he? Some believe he was a pagan priest of a false religion. Others believe he was a priest toward the true and living God, leading a group of true worshippers who were outside the nation of Israel. That is interesting to consider but impossible to answer based on the information we have. In any case it appears he was a good father-in-law to Moses and we will meet him again in chapters 4 and 18.

The other loose end I want to deal with is the question about the angel of the Lord. Verse 2 says the angel of the Lord appeared in the fire. Who is this angel of Yhwh? I am persuaded that the angel of the Lord is the angel who is the Lord. I'll show you why. We first meet this angel in Genesis 16 when He appears to comfort Hagar **10** *Moreover, the angel of the Lord said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count."* Notice that the angel says, "I will multiply your descendants." He addresses her as God would address her. And in verse **13** *Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, "You are a God who sees"; for she said, "Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?"* Hagar believes that she saw, not just an angel, but God Himself. In Genesis 22, the story of Abraham's great sacrifice, **10-12** *Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.* ¹¹ *But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!"* And he said, "Here I am." ¹² *He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."* From who? From me. Again, the angel here seems to be God Himself. In Judges 6 we read the exact same thing in a story about Gideon, and when you come to our story in Exodus 3 you see the same thing once again. In verse 2 it says the angel or messenger of the Lord appeared. In verse 4 it says God spoke and God says in verse 6 "I am God." That is who Moses encounters in the burning bush. This is not just an angel, as great as that would be. This is a close encounter of the first kind. Man meets Maker.

Now let's get to the first of our three primary considerations for today. Three things we see about God from this story. Point one is that we encounter here a holy God ®. A God who is holy, holy, holy which means he is far above us, different from us and pure as a white-hot fire. Several things in the story bring this out - the first one is the appearance of God in what form? The form of a fire. The Bible teaches that God is a spirit, but when he does want to communicate a tangible presence to men He often uses a fire to do so. Why a fire? Well, a fire is powerful and fearful and it is pure. And look what happens when Moses gets interested in the fire. 5 *Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."* Holy ground. What made the ground holy? God was there. When God displays his glory in a given location even the ground becomes holy and Moses could not get too close, he had to take off his shoes - why? To show reverence to the Holy One. The taking off of shoes in eastern nations is like the taking off of your hat in our society. It is a show of respect. Joshua had to do it too, when God came and spoke to him He told Joshua in 5:15 *The captain of the Lord's host said to Joshua, "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy."* Boy, I would too. When you see God you don't argue with him over his directives. Can you imagine how Moses felt here? I mean he is walking along, tending his sheep when he sees this amazing sight of a bush blazing with fire but not being consumed - the first lighted Christmas tree I suppose. Then as he turns to look at the bush, the bush starts to speak to him. Was it the bush or was it the fire? No, it was God, and Moses knew it. 6 *He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."* Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Dear people, learn something from this reaction of Moses. Learn what God is like. He is not the cosmic good humor man that some portray him to be. When Moses gets a glimpse of God's glory he doesn't jump up and down with glee, he hides his face in fear! In Acts 7 it says Moses shook with fear. Learn this, my friend, that there is something terrifying about the presence of God. This reaction from Moses was only typical of those who had a God-encounter in the Scriptures. In Genesis 32, Jacob wrestled with God and then said 30 *I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.* Jacob was amazed that he had seen God and lived. In Exodus 20 the people say, "*Don't let God speak to us lest we die.*" In Judges 6 how Gideon cried, "*Oh no, I've seen the angel of the Lord.*" And God responds, "*Don't worry, you won't die.*" In Judges 13 Manoah, Samson's father cried out, "*We shall surely die for we have seen Yahweh.*" In Revelation 1 John saw the glorified Christ and this is how He appeared 1:14-16 *His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet were like*

burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. You see the images of fire and heat and light **17a** *When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man.* My friend, in the presence of the Holy, there is a feeling of helplessness that descends upon a man, a disintegration of the personality, a dissolution, you come unglued, you fall apart at the seams. Nothing is so terrifying as the presence of God for a sinful man. So Moses hid his face and quivered.

What do you think it is that Moses found so scary? This text doesn't say but there are other Scriptures which answer that for us. When men encounter God and realize who He is the major characteristic of the fear they experience is an overwhelming sense of moral uncleanness and filth. They feel that such a powerful holiness will consume their sinful bodies. In Job 42, after God reveals Himself so mightily to Job, Job says **5** *"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You.* That is, I learned about you in Sunday School God, but now I have seen you as you really are **6** *Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes.* Job was called the most morally upright man in the world, but when He encounters pure holiness he repents in dust and ashes. Isaiah 6:**1-5** *In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. 2 Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." 4 And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. 5 Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."* Do you see it? This is the trauma of holiness, the disintegration, the conviction, and the fear. In Luke 5 we read of how Peter saw the glory of God in a miracle of Jesus. He knew that he stood in the very presence of God and he said to Jesus, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man, Oh Lord." That is why Moses hid his face in fear. I wonder, is this the God you know? Our popular view of God is often so imbalanced that many conceive of Him as just a really nice fella and have missed His blazing purity. This God says to Moses, "Don't get too close." The scrutiny of curiosity is repelled and in so doing God exposes the excessive familiarity with which we sometimes deal with him. When we come to God we must remember He is holy.

Secondly, we encounter in our story a Covenant God. By Covenant God I mean a God who deals with his creatures on the basis of covenants and promises. In 2:**24** *So God heard their*

groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You can read about that covenant in Genesis 12,15,17,22,26 and 28. God established a covenant with Abraham and with his descendants after him. He had made promises centuries earlier and now in Exodus 2 He moves in history to keep those promises. This is something you can count on from God. He doesn't forget his promises. Psalm 105:**8-10** *He has remembered His covenant forever, The word which He commanded to a thousand generations, ⁹ The covenant which He made with Abraham, And His oath to Isaac. ¹⁰ Then He confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, To Israel as an everlasting covenant.* And this covenant God made is still the basis for his dealings with his people. In Galatians 3 Paul writes to Gentile believers in Christ and says, **29** *If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.* Christians have a part in this covenant with Abraham. It is a gracious covenant that has been worked out over the course of human history. It is a covenant that included in it the sending of our Redeemer. When we read the first chapter of Luke's gospel we find the coming of Christ presented as a fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham. Zacharias says God is sending Jesus **72-73** *To show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham our father.* Understand then that God's dealings with men today are connected to the promise he made to Abraham. God doesn't forget.

So, let's go back and look at one portion of God's promise to Abraham. Genesis 15:**13-14** *God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. ¹⁴ But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.* Centuries later in Exodus 2 the divine alarm clock went off and in His time God was about to keep His word. He is coming to deliver Israel from Egypt -why? Because they deserved it? Because they had been a faithful people all this time in Egypt? No way. He did it because He had bound Himself in covenant with Abraham. God remembered His covenant ®. He looked on the children of Israel and did not remember their backsliding. He did not remember how they became so Egyptian in their ways and fell in love with the idols of Egypt. He could have remembered those things but He is a covenant-keeping God who remembered Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. This speaks to me. It tells me that my God will never desert me. We are members of a covenant too aren't we? We are part of what God calls the new covenant which was established not with Abraham or Moses but with Jesus Christ. He is My Mediator. He said, "this is the new covenant in my blood." So I know that when I pray it is not my sin that God remembers but it is the blood of His son. That is why we pray in

Jesus' name. It is the name of Jesus that has weight in heaven. When God hears us it is for Jesus' sake, just as He heard the Hebrews for Abraham's sake. Spurgeon says, *Sinner, if God were to look on you to all eternity, he could not see anything in you but what he is bound to punish; but when he looks on his dear Son whom He loves, and remembers how he lived, and loved, and bled, and died, and made atonement for the guilty; and when he remembers his covenant with his Well-beloved, he says, "I will bless these people whom I gave unto him by an everlasting covenant. I promised that he should see of the travail of his soul; and so he shall. I will break the power of sin, and I will set these captives free; to the praise of the glory of my grace, they shall be accepted in the Beloved.* (45:343) How wonderful is the matchless grace of Jesus!

But I remind you that we can't just admire the grace of God. We are called as well to be like Him. God spoke to my heart in my study about this. He showed me that I too need to treat people on the basis of His covenant. You get a hold of this and it will radically transform your relationships. Listen, God says He receives me as His friend, as His son, because why? Because Jesus has paid for my sins. I am covered by the blood of Christ and so God's treatment of me is not based on my behavior but on His unchanging grace. How can you be like God? When your husband or your wife or your father or your brother sins against you - what will you choose to remember? Will you dwell on all their offenses and all their faults or will you relate to them based on God's covenant of mercy? I meet lots of spouses who can remember their partner's sins from years and years before but cannot remember the covenant of Christian wife, Christian man? When you get upset at someone in the church who hurts your feelings, like maybe the pastor, what will you remember? All the times people offended you? Or the vow you took when you joined the church about pursuing unity? I am grateful that God remembers His covenant and not our sins. I am challenged to do the same. Our God is a covenant God.

On to point three. In our story we encounter not only a holy God and a covenant God but a compassionate God. Compassion is a response to a need isn't it? And it is usually a response to someone who has a need and knows it and makes that need known. So that is the context for God's compassion to Israel. We read **23** *Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God.* It happened when one king died and a new king was coming into power - a new administration. If I may read between the lines here I think it safe to assume that the coronation of a new king was a time of hope for the Hebrews. Maybe, this king would change the policy on Hebrew slavery. Maybe this king would be the source of some

relief. Humanity has looked to the government for answers from the beginning of time and that is likely what the Hebrews were doing here. But, a new king stepped in and continued the old policies. They had hoped for a slavery-class tax cut but when they realized they wouldn't get that they did what? They marched on Cairo? They wrote letters? No. Those things are fine to do and are important in a democratic society, but in a monarchy there was no court of appeals and there was no vote. What the Hebrews could do they did and what they did was cry out to God! They saw God as the solution, God as the deliverer - not the president, not the pastor but God. To whom do you cry out when you've had all you can take? Do you yell at the kids? Fuss at your husband? Complain to the boss? You gotta cry out - but you get to cry out to God. And they did. And they did because they found their situation intolerable. Now this is key. Listen to me. Some of you don't understand why your life is in shambles. You can't figure why God is letting so much go so wrong. Perhaps is it that God is trying to make you sick of the world and sick of sin just like He made the Hebrews sick of Egypt so they would come out into something better. I mentioned last time my friend Jim who has so much of the world at his disposal and that it keeps him from God. Well, my prayer for him has been that God would turn it all to rubble in his hand. That he would come to the end of his infatuation with temporal pleasure. That is often God's first move isn't it? Spurgeon puts it this way: *when God is about to give a man to drink of the cup of salvation, he often first puts his taste right by washing out his mouth with a draught of bitters to take away the flavor of the accursed sweets of sin.* (45:339) God is gracious to make us sick of our sin, to let us see how miserable we are in Egypt. He has to point out our chains so that we long to be free. Those who are content to remain slaves won't ever be free. It is when you can no longer endure your bondage to iniquity - then the hour of freedom has come. It is God's doing when a sin-laden man comes to see what once he called pleasure for what it really is - the ball and chain of Satan's prison. Am I speaking to any here who are at the brink of losing hope? Are you so bound to your sin that you feel it impossible to break away? Have you sunk so low in the pit that you fear you will never come out alive? Then I declare to you that you are right where God wants you. Self-despair is the preparation for faith in Jesus. The end of the creature is the beginning of the Creator. Your extremity is God's opportunity. What you must do now is cry out to God! Cry out to the One whose law you have broken for He is a God of compassion and grace! When the Hebrews cry He hears.

Let's sit on that idea for a minute. Verse 24 says God heard their groanings. Verse 7 says God has given heed to their cry. Verse 9 says the cry of the sons of Israel has come before the heavenly throne. There are three ways we see here that God displays His compassion. The first is that He

hears. God hears. When you consider the vast gulf between our paltriness and God's majesty, when you weigh our sinfulness in light of His holiness this alone is astounding that God hears, that God pays attention to the squeaks of little humans. But His word affirms it over and over again. I think of how this theme just fills the psalms. Psalm 3:**4** *I was crying to the Lord with my voice, and He answered me from His holy mountain.* 6:**8-9** *Depart from me, all you who do iniquity, for the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord has heard all my supplication, the Lord receives my prayers.* 10:**17** *O Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble... You will incline Your ear.* 22:**24** *He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from him; But when he cried to Him for help, He heard.* 28:**6** *Blessed be the Lord, Because He has heard the voice of my supplication.* 34:**6** *This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him And saved him out of all his troubles.* **17** *The righteous cry, and the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.* Heard enough? Let me give you one more because it's my favorite. 116:**1** *I love the Lord, because He hears My voice and my supplications.* **1a** *I love the Lord.* **2** *Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I shall call upon Him as long as I live.* I tell ya, there is only so far you can sink into despair when you understand this. God hears our cries. The psalmist concludes as you should conclude **2b** *Therefore I shall call upon Him as long as I live.*

The second display of our Lord's compassion is that God hurts! God hurts! Don't ask me to explain how a sovereign God can feel pain. I do not know but that is what my Bible says about him. In verse 7 He says he is aware of the suffering of Israel. Look at Judges 10:16. This is unbelievable. **16** *So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord; and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer.* When His people hurt God hurts. Isaiah 63 says of the Lord **9** *In all their affliction He was afflicted, And the angel of His presence saved them; In His love and in His mercy He redeemed them, And He lifted them and carried them all the days of old.* **9a** *In all their affliction He was afflicted.* God feels our pain. Is that important to you to know that? It is to me. There have been times in my life when nobody knew how I was hurting but God did and the awareness that He shared in my pain was sweet comfort. As a pastor there are times I am in the place of trying to comfort those who are enduring trials beyond anything I have ever born. In those times, I feel, and I expect they feel my inadequacy to understand. That's why I said you don't call out to your pastor - primarily - you call out to God. He feels your pain in a way I cannot. And believe it or not He hurts along with you.

There is a wonderful hymn to a difficult tune that we won't sing, but we will read as we close. It asks the important question, "Does Jesus care when my heart is pained too deeply for mirth and

song: As the burdens press and the cares distress, and the way grows weary and long? Does Jesus care when my way is dark with a nameless dread and fear? As the daylight fades into deep night shades, does he care enough to be near? Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed to resist some temptation strong: when for my deep grief I find no relief though my tears flow all the night long? Does Jesus care when I've said goodbye to the dearest on earth to me. and my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks, is it aught to him does he see?" Does He care? The refrain of that hymn repeatedly answers the repeated question. *"Oh yes He cares, I know He cares. His heart is touched with my grief. When the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares."* For the Bible tells me so.

We see the Lord's compassion because He hears. We know He is compassion because He hurts. And thirdly, we see His compassion because He acts. The idea of a God who sits in heaven uninvolved with the world He made is light years from the Biblical story. The God of this book acts. He gets involved. 7,8ab *The Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. 8 So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey.* He doesn't just hear and hurt - He moves out. He comes down from heaven to make a difference. God is stirred to action by the prayers of his people, by their urgent cries. The Lord God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth is a major player on the field of human history. God hears! God hurts! God acts! What should we do? We should worship Him. Exodus 4:31 *So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshipped.* If God hears me and hurts with me and acts for me He has won my praise. And one other thing. We need to cry out to God as well. There is a connection, isn't there, between God's movement in history and the God-directed groans of his people. If people going to hell breaks your heart cry out to him. If a nation running from God breaks your heart, cry out to Him. If your daughter's unbelief breaks your heart cry out to him. If your own sinful habits break your heart cry out to God till your prayers reach to heaven and God comes down. Now, let's pray.