

EXODUS 3, 1-15.

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In these verses that we have now read we have the incident that gives its character to the subsequent life and service of Moses. And Moses was remarkable as a servant of God, as a man of God, in this respect, that he himself was familiar, so far as man can be, with the presence of God; one to whom Jehovah spake as a man speaketh to his friend. His brother Aaron was associated with him in his service, but the business of Aaron was more with the people of God for their help, and their blessing too. But Moses, while he was God's medium for blessing to the people of Israel, had this remarkable characteristic about him, that God spoke to Moses, and God spoke to the people through Moses. Year after year these communications went on.

This feature of his service follows what we have recorded in this chapter. It was here, as far as history goes, that he was brought face to face with the presence of God here upon the earth. God so revealed Himself to Moses, and the effect of the revelation upon him was to stamp a character upon his life and influence that he never lost. In the forty years of public service for God there was this thing, that he drew near to God, and God drew near to him.

So he stands out head and shoulders, so to speak, in the Old Testament in this respect. He was God's mouthpiece here upon the earth; and it was because he came into the presence of God, and there the holy words came into his ears. He received them

direct from on high; he passed them on to those who listened to him, and who were guided by them.

I think, too, that this incident has its lesson to ourselves - a lesson that we ought never to forget - that the presence of God is the real fountain of all service for God. That servant is used of God who has found his right place, in due appreciation of his heart and spirit, in the immediate presence of God, in the place where he has to put the shoes from off his feet. And the man who has not been there may be an attractive man in the world, may have choice words and phrases in his lips, but if he has not been in the presence of God, he has not got his message from God Himself, and it is but of little power, little help, little blessing to those who hear him.

Now to understand better the force of what we have in these verses, it may be well to recall a little of the previous history of Moses. Moses is brought before us here as in the desert, feeding sheep, and his previous history is in contrast with that, as we know. He was born at a time of special peril, when the great enemy of God was active here upon the earth through the king of Egypt, the object being to destroy the seed of Abraham that should be the source of blessing to all the earth. It was the great scheme, worthy of the Devil, to destroy the children of Abraham upon the earth; to destroy every male at its birth, so that the name of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob should be stamped out of the earth, and that God's word that the whole earth should be blessed through the seed of

Abraham should fall to the ground, and be a vain and empty thing.

Moses was saved at that very epoch. He was born in the atmosphere of faith. His parents knew that he was a proper child, a child of God. They had their spiritual discernment, such as Manoah had, and Zacharias too, that this child was one with whom God meant to work here in this world. They knew it from God. And they braved the king's commandment, and Moses was hidden for three months.

It was God's purpose that he should be a deliverer. Aaron had come, and we read nothing concerning his birth. But Moses was different. He is a type of Christ, but I do not dwell upon that tonight. There he was, as it were, separated from his mother's womb for the service of God. And we know the marvellous way in which God reversed the schemes of men so that the daughter of the very cruel king who sent forth this murderous ediot, that princess should be the means of Moses' salvation from the water.

And so it came about that he was brought up in Egypt's court. But first of all God saw to it that he should have the training of faith, and we cannot but believe that Amram and Jochebed had it upon their hearts and on their consciences before God. They besought that their child might be saved from the horrors of a royal court, and he was brought into the household of God. What zeal they showed in training that young child in the knowledge of what God had done in days gone by. How they instructed that little one in the wonderful

promises that God had made to Abraham; how Isaac was brought back, as it were, from the very dead to be the seed of blessing to the earth. All these things were instilled into that young life.

But the time came when that child was put in the court, trained in wisdom, instructed in all the advantages that could be in such a high station. Nothing was denied him there; everything to occupy him in pleasure and delight, schemes of every kind. Had He a wish it was accomplished. But down in his heart the worthy instruction of his mother, what she had said, and what the father had corroborated, there it was acting as a barrier against the opposing influences of a royal court. Idolatry everywhere, but the knowledge of the true God in the child's heart. He was there till he was forty, and he was preserved.

Oh, beloved friends, we ought not to forget how God preserved His servant amidst the horrors of that kingly palace. It was the power of God that preserved him. And at the age of forty he had faith in God. He said 'My place is with the Lord's slaves, they are my relatives, they come from my forbears. They have the promise, and I have the promise, and we share it.' God promised that His people should be delivered. And at forty years he went out, and he saw what they were suffering. He saw their burdens, saw the cruelty of the taskmasters in the way they used his brethren, and the passions of his heart were stirred. He thought of the promises made to the fathers. 'Their place is in Canaan, and not in Egypt. I will stand upon

God.' And he slew the Egyptian. He killed the man outright, and buried him in the sand.

It was little for a royal prince to do. In those days it might easily have been passed over. It was the first blow that he struck for the emancipation of his people. But who told him to do it? Where did the order come from? It was just out of his own heart. It was love for his kin, those of his own blood, that caused him to act. And what is that? In New Testament language it is the flesh; the word is natural to us. And it is not right. God has condemned the flesh. He has condemned it in the Cross. The Lord Jesus Christ there upon the Cross bore my sin, and it is in man's flesh that sin dwells, and it is man's flesh that is corrupted by sin. Sin leads our flesh in the wrong direction. "Ought not I to bring this people out? Am I not a deliverer? And here I can stand it no longer. I will smite a blow, and will lead them to victory, and get them out."

He acted in his own time, not in God's time. God had spoken of the time. He had spoken to Abraham. And if Moses had only reflected, he would have known what God had said, that in the fourth generation they should come out. They should be afflicted 400 years. It was written down. He was not acting according to scripture. He was before God's time, and therefore he was wrong. It was a failure. He was in earnest, for it was a noble thing for a royal prince to go down and stand up for a labourer, an honourable

thing to do, no shame about that. But it was not of God. It was the wrong time, and the wrong man. Moses' hand was raised against a slave, but when God sets him to work he says "Do not go to a taskmaster, go to Pharaoh, and tell him to let the people go." He was very much in earnest. He wanted to do well, but he had not God's mind in the matter. Has it any lesson to you and to me? We may do a right thing with the best of intentions, but if we do not do it in God's time, it will be a failure.

And we know what happened the next day. When Moses went out and settled a quarrel between two of his countrymen, they said "Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" Moses did not answer. He had no credentials. He had not been told to go. God had not sent him. And when he is challenged by an angry man he had no reply. And he loses all his courage, and he flees to the desert as if he had done something wrong. It was altogether a failure. 'It is my very brethren that turn against me. I tried to help them, I tried to deliver them, and they won't have me.' And he sought refuge in the desert.

Oh, beloved friends, it is very hard to walk the right path unless we know God has set us there. There are always difficulties in the way, and we can never get over them unless we have deep down in our souls the assurance that God has put us there. And if He wants me to do this thing now, if we have the assurance of God, we do not fear the wrath of the king, we do not mind one of our brethren, for God is for us.

It may be only a simple thing that you are taking up - a class in the Sunday School, if only God has given you the work. Go to God about it. Someone may say 'There is a class that has no teacher, come along and take it,' and you do not like to say no. God knows the class is there without a teacher, and God knows who can teach that class. Very well, then, it is your place to go to Him to find out whether it is time for you to go, and have it from His lips. When a believer consents to do anything, let it be something that you have felt, as you have been on your knees before God, He would have you to do it, and then you can go with a clear conscience because you know that if God sets you about a thing He will see you through, and it will be for His glory.

Well, Moses had not learnt that. He went out in his own strength. He was learned in the wisdom of the Egyptians, mighty in word and deed, but he was not just ready to take on the work of delivering the people of Israel from bondage.

He went into the desert of Midian, and was there forty years. He was forty when he left Egypt, and for forty years he was tending sheep in the wilderness. It is a long time to think. It was a great contrast to what he had been used to in the court, no occupation, the same thing every day, the same sort of trivial, monotonous incidents. And it goes on for forty years. He is there; he had a lesson to learn. And he learned a great many things.



I wonder what he thought about his own people there in Egypt. He knew very well how it had been in Egypt, that a good many of them had submitted to the idolatrous influences among them, and they served the gods of Egypt. Idolatry amongst his brethren, worshippers of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! And they did not want him when he went there. There they are going over to the worship of idols. They are making themselves as comfortable as possible in Egypt, and they won't have him to be their deliverer. "Well, let them take care of themselves. I have offered myself, and they won't have me." And there was nothing but the silence of the desert, and the word that God had spoken to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Oh, how he meditates on these things. God had said He would take the people out of Egypt, and if God had said so He would do it, and that if He did so, He could do it quite well without the help of Moses, he was quite negligible in the matter, and he was not in himself competent to undertake it. In other words, he learned the worthlessness of himself.

I think we have all learned this lesson, because Moses had faith, and I presume the audience here is amongst those who have faith in God. Yet here is a man who has faith in God - for we are told so in the Acts and Hebrews - who seems to be wasting his life for forty years in the wilderness. He is not ready for God to use. God's time had not come, but the instrument was not ready. He had no patience. You could see that, because when he saw the

blow of the Egyptian descend upon his brother in the flesh, he raised his arm. He was just like Peter when they came to take his Master. He took up his sword, and took off a man's ear. It was an effort of the flesh. The Lord said "Put up thy sword." His kingdom was not after the manner of flesh and blood, it was a different thing altogether; it was the way of the Spirit, the way of power that God gives.

And so Moses came at the end of that time to the positive assurance that what he was naturally as a man - a learned philosopher, a man who had had experience in the management of armies, and also the agricultural life of Egypt, and the government of Egypt, knew all about it - it was of no use to God. It is just like proving ourselves that "In me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing."

And now, when a man has come to the end of himself, God can begin to work, and that is the great blessing that stands out here. "Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God," - the place of authority. That is what he needed. God was in the mountain. He was right away from where Jethro was. He came to the mountain of God in Horeb where Sinai was, and where God would appear later; that is why it is called the mount of God. It was the place where God came down to this earth. And Moses found Him, with his sheep, there, on the mountain of God.

Oh, have you had that experience in your life? We know that actually with these eyes of ours, none of us can see God. But there are those who see God. There are those who come face to face with Him in their lives. And sometimes God has to do a great deal with us before we are brought to see Him. We are so busy, the hours are so filled, we have so many things to occupy our minds. But it is not until we get right away in the desert that there we come into the presence of God. Many a person has been roused in the middle of the night, and has found themselves face to face with God, His very presence, come to teach a lesson; come to give us to know His power, His influence, and that He has something for us to do.

How many there are here tonight that God may use! But to be used of Him you must be brought face to face with Him. You see there was no one else in the desert. Jethro was far away, and Moses was just there alone with God, and that is the thing. You see a great many of us may feel that God is not sufficient. We do not put it that way, but how many are there that can sit down quietly in a room by themselves, and read the word of God, and know that they are in the presence of God? Why? Because it becomes so very tedious that I soon get tired, and I go to sleep. I cannot keep up my interest in the word of God. But if there is a person in that room whom you love, would you become oblivious to the presence of that one? If we believe in God, is it possible that when we are alone in our room, and we read the word of God,

that God is really there to speak with us, to make His word known to us? That is why it is that the word of God has not the effect, because when we say 'the word of God' we do not believe the full meaning of that phrase. It is the word of God. It means that God is speaking to me, and it is necessary for the life of every believer "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." The real meaning of the word is to feel that out of that printed page comes God's word to me.

That is what Moses had to learn here in the wilderness. He came to the mount of God, Horeb. "And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed." There was the Angel of the Lord. We know, if you look through these verses, it was God Himself. It is God that speaks. The Angel of the Lord occurs frequently in the Old Testament, it is God. God was there in the midst of the bush.

And it was a flame of fire - that which was the symbol of the presence of God. Later, when the elders looked at Mount Sinai. they saw a sight of the glory of God as a devouring fire. "Our God is a consuming fire" as we find later on. And when John in Patmos saw the Lord, His eyes were as a flame of fire.

But you know earthly fire needs fuel, but this was fire without fuel. The bush

was not consumed, and therefore it was of God, it was from heaven, it was supernatural, a beaming light there shining. It was that which had come from heaven, God's own presence there.

The bush was growing by itself, with its prickles, to show that it was not a fruitful thing, but a worthless shrub. The fire is there in the midst of it, but it is not consumed. What was the bush? Was it not that people, that group of slaves in Egypt, who were just contented with their onions and garlic, cucumbers and melons? They had the taskmaster's whip about them, but when they got home, and had their portion, they were at ease. 'It is not so bad after all, and there are plenty of gods we can worship. Where is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? If He is God, why does He not deliver us? We will attend to these gods about us.' There were many persons in Egypt of the Israelites who had gone over. But God had spoken the word. It was a bush indeed, but it was His bush you see, and He had some purpose for it. The lineage of Joseph afterwards were associated with the good will of Him who dwelt in the bush. A poor, worthless thing, but the bush became the habitation of God here upon the earth. All through their history God was in the midst of His people - not visibly, but they were His people. Now the flames of persecution blow upon that guilty nation. They seem to be consumed, but God has His eye upon them, and He will bring them forth again, and make them the centre of the renewed earth.

It was a great lesson, this bush, for Moses, and he drew near to see the sight. And then there came the voice of God. I do think there is significance in the order. You find it often in scripture, if you study it from this point of view, that God very often appears to the eyes of our hearts before His voice comes. It is the sight first, then the sound. There is that which brings us towards Him, then He speaks. The sight brings us near to Him, you see, so we come and repent, and then we hear things. It appears so beautifully in the case of the two disciples of John the Baptist. When John the Baptist said "Behold the Lamb of God," those two disciples looked. They looked upon the gracious, meek Person walking there. They did not know very much, but there was something that drew them after Him, and they went to Him, and they stayed with Him, and they listened to Him for the rest of the day. They came into His presence, and then they heard His word. The thing that can bring into your daily life, your morning reading and prayer, make sure that you feel yourself in His presence, and listen to His voice, what it has to say to you.

And what does He say to Moses? "And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said Moses, Moses." Twice He took up the name. It is the way of God. You get His call, as it were, when He saw that father of faith take up the knife of sacrifice to slay his son. The voice out of heaven came "Abraham, Abraham," the double call. "Moses, Moses."

What was Moses doing? Moses was rushing into the presence of God. "Draw not nigh hither." The One who speaks dwells in light incorruptible, draw not nigh. He was not fit to go. The veil had not been rent: the holiest of all was not opened, and he could not go into the immediate presence of God. He was to take his right place in relation to God. God was supreme, the Almighty, full of holiness, and you must not draw near. "Put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place where thou standest is holy ground." There in the immediate presence, there was the most holy place, but the place where he stood was holy, because it was near God. He was listening to the voice of God, and that made the holy place, the presence of God.

So we have to follow peace and holiness, without which no man can see the Lord. It was necessary for Moses to understand he was in a holy place, for his ears are ready to take in the messages that would be given him. And we ought to remember that too. I have been brought to Him; how can I hear the voice of the Lord God? Put off thy shoes from thy feet. Holy and reverend is His Name. Bear it well in mind. God saves us from our sins, and when He makes us His own we have to learn the holiness that belongs to Him. And Moses had to learn that too.

Well, he said "Here am I." Then He said "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover He said I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

It is rather striking to notice what God says, "I am the God of thy father." To Jacob it was "The God of thy fathers," here father. Why should it be? It was linking Moses in Midian with Moses in Amram and Jochebed's house. "I am the God of thy father." The purpose that God had committed to his father, God had not forgotten it eighty years after. And then He went back "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

And Moses hid his face, he was afraid. It is a proper fear, true fear, the fear of reverence. He was afraid to look upon God. Adam and Eve were afraid at the presence of God, they had a guilty conscience. Moses was afraid because he felt his own weakness and failure. He said "Why have I been wasting my time in the desert forty years? It was my own fault. Forty years ago it was when I smote the Egyptian, and they would not have me as a peacemaker. I have been wasting my time." He was ashamed; he was afraid to look upon God. The presence of God makes us feel our faults, how very small we are, the wrong things that we do. Oh, beloved friends, it is a painful operation, but it is necessary to have our hearts exposed to the light in God's presence. Get into the presence of God, and there expose the innermost crevices of your heart in the light of God. And when you do that you are afraid to look up until He speaks. And as thus you face your sin you find how faithful and just He is to forgive you your sin, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. And Moses was prepared in this way for that mighty task that was before him.



And then Jehovah speaks, and He says "I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows." I think that is very beautiful. Jehovah in that dwelling place viewing that unworthy people in Egypt. He had seen them, and He had come down to them; and He had come down because He knew their sorrows. The voice of their groaning rose up to Him, and He knew their sorrows - the burdens that pressed upon their spirits. Not only the long day's work, and the taskmasters, but it was sorrow of the spirit. Weariness of the bones is one thing, and weariness of the spirit is another thing. People do not understand you when you are oppressed with weariness of the spirit, but the Lord knows. He knows our sorrows. He knows everything, but it is beautiful to think that He knows our sorrows. And He comes down to help us, to deliver us. We are not orphans, we are not left alone. This people in Egypt, God knew every sorrow, and He says "I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, to bring them out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey."

And then comes His direction to Moses. "Come now, therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." And that took Moses' breath away. Send him, the failing servant! He had been down to help them. He went out of the royal palace, and went down among the Israelites, and he found his worthlessness. He had no influence behind him. "Did not my fore-

father Joseph save the people?" But Moses had not provided corn for them, with all the political power behind him. He tried, and the whole thing went smash at once.

Now forty years after that God says "I know all about this people - My people." You know that is the first time the children of Israel are called a people in Exodus. They are brought out as a nation, and a people. They are a nation amongst the nations, and a people because God was in the midst of them, and He spoke of them as His people. He calls them such now. He says "I am going to send you unto My people."

And Moses looked at his own heart, and considered his own life, and said 'There is not one redeeming feature in it. I have not one spark of worthiness. I am utterly incapable of dealing with it.' That was his belief. Well, that was right as far as it went. It was right as far as he went, as he himself was concerned; he was not any good, it was true. But he had only got half the truth, and the Lord was very gracious with him. Moses said "Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? Who, indeed! He had no power to do it, no wisdom, he could not do it. And then God said "Certainly I will be with thee." That made all the difference - no hurry at all. Jehovah was going to take him up, and if God took him up He could accomplish almighty things. He had forgotten the power of God.

Oh, does it not show us what we are! How we prove this over and over again.

First we go into a thing, and make a hopeless mess of it, and then we do not want to do anything about it any more. Then the way is made perfectly clear. I am not fit. We forget God will help us, and be with us. "Certainly I will be with thee. Certainly I am with thee," which makes it stronger. It is not only that He will be by and by, but He is now.

Well, Moses, there is your strength. "Certainly I will be with thee, and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee. When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain." That was what they did, of course, afterwards.

And then Moses has another objection. The first one was about himself. Then Moses said unto God "Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you, and they shall say to me, What is His Name? What shall I say unto them?" Well Moses, now there are all these people who are mixed up with the gods of the Egyptians. We have many enemies. So many had forgotten the truth concerning the way that God had revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Moses knew that. What is His Name? Who is it that sent you? Is it one of the gods of the Egyptians? Who is it? And Moses wants to know what is the right thing to say. After all, what is God's Name?

And then God reveals His Name in a threefold way. The first thing that God says is to Moses himself. God said unto Moses "I AM THAT I AM." He does not

disclose any of His attributes, but He speaks of Himself as the Personal God, I. And He is the One that exists, I AM. Nobody can say that. God is self subsisting. The power of existence is in Himself. "I AM THAT I AM."

In a recent publication it was stated we are to understand "I AM THAT I AM" to be "I will be that I will be," which takes out all the force and beauty of the words here. "What I have written I have written" Pilate said. It is not what God will be, it is what God is. "I AM" now. And all that God is now was for Moses.

Oh, beloved friends, we want to know more of the inner meaning of God's words when He speaks of His Name. His Name is what He is in all His almightiness, His omnipotence. Everything that is characteristic of Him as God is all summed up in His Name. And that Name of God is found in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we gather unto His Name He says "Here am I." Oh, the Name of Jesus! It is because it speaks of suffering. Oh, the infinite depths and riches, there they are.

And God says to Moses "That is the thing you have to bear in mind as a servant, as a man of God "I AM THAT I AM." "I have looked upon the burdens of your brethren. I AM THAT I AM, the Unchanging God." Oh, it is a comfort to find that He is ever the same "I AM THAT I AM."

And then He says "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent

me unto you." It was the name of our Lord, as we know, "Before Abraham was I AM." He often speaks of Himself as I AM, and puts in it that which is true for the moment: "I am the Good Shepherd," "I am the true Vine." And Moses is to go to the children of Israel, and say "I AM." What God was in His love when He called Abraham out; what He was to Isaac, and what He was to Jacob, He was still to this people many years in this bondage in Egypt.

Then in the 15th verse "God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you, and this is My Name for ever, and this is My memorial unto all generations." All through the history of the children of Israel this was to characterise them for all time, this unchangeable quality of the Name of Jehovah God. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that will be His Name for ever, and that shall be His memorial unto all generations.

A memorial is that which brings to mind. The Lord's Supper is a memorial, but the Lord's Name is a memorial too, that is to say, the Name of God, the Name of Jehovah brings to our mind what He is. We know Him as Father, and that brings His love to us. We know Him as Son, and that brings the gift of God to our mind, and the death too, of God's Son in which we are reconciled unto Him. And the Spirit speaks of God's Name, the One who was omnipresent everywhere, the invisible God. God has given His Name as a memorial of Himself.

He does not change His Name. And if we are associated with the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ for ten or fifty years, has that Name changed? Circumstances have changed, the persons who assemble may have changed, but the Name is unchangeable, and that is what we want to get at.

And I would leave this desire for all of us, that we may really apprehend because we have been in the presence of God, because we have been in the presence of His Son, because we have been sealed by God's Holy Spirit, we may apprehend Himself in His unchangeability.

The Church of God has suffered irretrievable disaster. There it is in hopeless ruin. And you may look upon it, you can wander up and down on the ruins, and listen to the hoot of the owl among the ruins of the church, and your heart may fail with fear and foreboding. We forget the Name; the Name is true; it is just the same as it was. The Lord Jesus Christ speaks to us now for the comfort of His people. And if two or three only come together, there is sufficient in that Name, sufficient power to satisfy every desire. Because of the difficulties we forget what is true "My Name is set for a memorial unto all generations." Outward things may pass away, but what He has spoken, what He is Himself, will never pass away.

May God grant that we may have this thing first of all in our life as Moses did, and then to go on in the power of that knowledge.