

The Call

Exodus 3-4

Have you planned a special holiday recently?

Maybe a big trip overseas, maybe a long road trip here in Australia?
Our holidays recently have all been to locations we know quite well
so there's been no need for us to a lot of planning,
but if you're going somewhere new there's lots to think about beforehand. I
Maybe you'll grab a copy of the Lonely Planet guide
or perhaps log on to Trip Advisor.
And you might make a list of all the sites you wish to see
and the experiences you wish to savor.
You'll create a list of things you want to achieve, wont you?

And holidays are not the only journey we might take which involves a list. Every now and again I make a trip to Bunnings with a list, although I always leave with more in my hands than what I've listed. This is why they're so successful, they know how to spot a sucker!

The reason I've asked you to think about taking a trip or a journey is that in these opening Chapters of Exodus, God is described as making a journey. Have a think about how last week's passage ended: In chapter 2 verse 23, we were told that The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery *went up* to God. God is described as being at some distance to the Israelites, not so far as to be out of earshot, but far enough away to make it clear that he is distinct from us humans and the world that we live in; There exists some gap between us and God; he is *up there*, we are *down here*. But in Ch 3, God doesn't stay *up there*, rather he makes a journey down to earth.

By this stage Moses has been herding his father-in-law's flocks for a long time—40 years to be precise—until one day when his life takes another incredible turn. While he's out with the animals he sees a bush that's all aflame, and yet it's not being burnt up by the fire. He has to have a closer look, and when the LORD saw that he had gone over to look we're told in verse 4 God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." ⁵ "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

And so God has made a journey to earth,

arriving on a mountain top to meet with Moses.

One of the purposes of these opening books of the OT
 is to help us understand how the God of the Bible is very different
 to other Gods that were spoken about in the Ancient world.
 Here is a picture of a model funerary boat found in an Egyptian tomb.
 The idea is that when you died
 you had to go and make a trip to the afterlife where you would meet the gods.
 Pharaohs got to make this journey in a boat.
 But here in Exodus 3, it's the God of Israel who makes the journey,
 he's the one who descends to us.
 It's just another reminder of how gracious the God of the Bible is.
 Rather than waiting for us to move to him,
 he is the one who moves towards us.

And in making this journey, he has a list of things he wants to achieve.

On top of that list is the salvation of his people. Ch 3 v 7 The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ *So I have come down* to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.

Salvation is a theme that we often speak of here in church,
 and rightly so because it's the central message of the Christian faith:
 through Jesus, God saves us from sin and its consequences.
 When we speak about salvation we often think about what it means for us.
 But what does salvation tell us about God?
 When God takes a trip in order to save, what does it tell us about him?

Verses 7-9 give us a couple of ideas.

God saves because he has *seen* the misery of his people
 God saves because he has *heard* the Israelites crying,
 God saves because he is *concerned* about them.
 Salvation happens because God is paying attention and he's concerned.

It's a little window into the Fatherly heart of God.

In ch 4 he calls the nation of Israel *his son*, doesn't he? Ch 4 v22
 God tells Moses to say to Pharaoh, "This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son,
²³ and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me."
 God saves because he's the Father of his people,
 and good Fathers can't help but be concerned about the children they love.

The same can be said about the salvation that we know about in Christ.

How does John's Gospel put it? John 3:16-17 "For God so *loved* the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

¹⁷ For God did not *send* his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

It's the same theme: love that results in a journey.

God our Father loves us, and so God the Son is sent to us;
he makes a journey to secure our salvation.

Has it been a while since you prayed to God *as your Father*?

Since you've groaned asking for your Father's help like the Israelites?

Since you've shared your concerns and fears with him?

Maybe you've never asked him to enact his fatherly love and save you.

He sees what we are going through, and he's concerned, and he will hear us.

As our Father there is a strong connection between him and us
and that connection there to be explored.

Now we've all seen those items on the six o'clock news

where the rescued is lying in his or her hospital bed,

and stranding next to the bed is the ambulance officer or rescue worker,

and they're having a reunion,

they get to speak and perhaps learn a bit more about each other,

maybe even learn one another's names if they haven't already.

Well, the rescue that's about to take place in Exodus

is also an opportunity for the relationship to proceed to another level.

Moses asks in verse 13 "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" ¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.' " ¹⁵

God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, And whenever we see the word Lord written in small capitals like we do here, that's how our English Bibles render the name "I am", the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.

God reveals his name and it's a strange one, "I am"

It feels like an incomplete sentence, doesn't it: "I am ..."

to which we want to reply "Yes, you are what?"

God needs to complete the sentence,

but he doesn't, *and that's the point*,

because what on earth would God complete that sentence with?

What could God possibly use to accurately describe himself?

I said that these opening books of the Old Testament

help us distinguish the God of the Bible

from the false gods of the ancient world.

This revelation of God's name as "I am" is one way this distinction is made.

The Gods of Egypt were all associated with something in the physical world,
so we have Ra the Sun God, and other gods associated with different animals.

In contrast, the God of the Bible doesn't grab hold of the sun or the moon
or an animal or any human figure, he simply says "I am who I am",
his name is completely self-referential,
because there is nothing or no-one else like him!

And yet, despite his genuine independence from all creation,
he chooses to come down to us and gather a people around him.
He is the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob; he's the God of *people*.
He is the God and Father of Israel, and he's our God and Father as well.

And, because The LORD is this relational God of people,
his journey involves the recruitment of people into his service;
as God saves he also recruits.

Ch 3 verse 10: The LORD says to Moses

"So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

And again in verse 16 "Go, assemble the elders of Israel"

But Moses is very reluctant, isn't he?

I count five separate objections to God's recruiting of him

Verse 11 "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

Verse 13 "What if the Israelites ask me about your name? Then what shall I tell them?"

Chapter 4:1 What if the Israelites do not believe me or listen to me?"

Chapter 4:10 "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have
spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."

And finally ch 4 v 13 But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it."

It's after this last answer that we see the strain on God's patience

Then the LORD's anger burned against Moses, we're told.

In many ways Moses is a great example for us

but I wonder whether this is one point where we shouldn't be like him;
always quick with an excuse
as to why we should be excused from God's service.

I think there are lots of us who fear we don't have the verbal gifts
that are needed to be useful in God's ongoing project of salvation.
Even something as straight forward as leading our congregations in prayer,
or having a conversation with a new visitor,

These are basic ministries that we are quick to excuse ourselves from.

And yes, it can be intimidating to speak up—Moses was intimidated—
but in the end it wasn't an excuse. Why wasn't it an excuse?

Because Moses was never going to be on his own;

God would be with him, and God would equip him.

Each and every time the LORD has an answer to Moses' objection:

He tells Moses in C 3v 12 "I will be with you"

He reveals a name for Moses to take to the Israelites: "*I am*"

He shows Moses miracles he can use to convince any doubting Israelites.

He reminds Moses that he has power over people's speech
and that he can teach Moses what to say.
Even when God's starts to burn with anger at Moses' reluctance
he arranges for Moses to work in tandem with his brother Aaron.
He's a very reluctant hero, but the reluctance is completely misplaced,
not because he's wrong, mind you.
The way God speaks about Aaron saying I know *he* can speak well
indicates that perhaps Moses was right!
But nonetheless it's no excuse
because it is the LORD who holds the real power.

It's a lesson just as true for us today,
because once more God has descended in the person of the Holy Spirit.
You remember he descended upon the Apostles at Pentecost,
and he has been sent by the Father and the Son
to be our helper and enabler as we speak about God's salvation in Christ.
So there are no excuses for not being involved in some way.
"But that's not me!" you might say. Well, that's the point.
As the new song says "Not I but Christ in me"
I labour on in weakness and rejoicing
For in my need, His power is displayed
[as final hymn says *with thy right hand to help us the victory shall be won*]

But there is one more item to be ticked of the LORD's list
on this journey to the Israelites.
After he recruits and *as* he saves, he'll also judge and punish.
Remember, the Israelites are in trouble
because of the oppression of the Egyptians,
so as they are saved it's also proper that the Egyptians will feel God's wrath.
This vengeful action of God will be seen in full colour in later chapters,
but there are hints in *these* chapters as to what's coming.
I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform
among them, the LORD says in ch 3 v 20.
He tells Moses of the opportunity the Israelites will have to plunder the
Egyptians in ch 3 v 22.
And in ch 4 v23, God speaks ahead of the terrible night of Passover when all
the firstborn sons of Egypt would be killed.

When God descends he means business, the business of saving,
the business of recruiting, and the business of judgment.

And the judgment of God falls against every sin of every sinner.
We have this very strange episode in Ch 4 vs 24-26,
where God meets Moses at a lodging place and is about to kill him.
Why would God kill the one he has just recruited?
Well, Moses is a sinner, and every sinner deserves to die.

The sin, it would seem, is that he has yet to have his Son circumcised,
which is what was required of every descendant of Abraham.

So Zipporah, Moses' wife, jumps up with a stone knife
and quickly makes things right,
then touches Moses' feet with the off-cut,
calling him a bridegroom of blood in the process.
We don't know what the touching of Moses feet is about,
nor do we know what a bridegroom of blood is
But it seems that the shedding of blood
is enough to allow God to back off and leave Moses alone.
Sin atoned for by the shedding of blood. Sound familiar? Of course it does.

Israel Folau is right! We are all sinners deserving of God's punishment
but thanks to the shedding of blood, Christ's blood,
then sinners are given a reprieve.
So we are back where we started from;
God comes to judge, but he also comes to save.

At the end of some journeys you are invited to make a mark!
When I was a young worker, just out of university,
some mates and I climbed *The Castle*, which is a rock formation
down in the Budawang National Park on the south coast.
If you made it to the top, you could write a note in a book that was up there.
When God descends to his people, he leaves evidence of his trip.
He leaves his mark *on us*. So which mark will it be?
Will we be objects of his wrath? Or will we be recipients of his salvation,
recipients of his Fatherly love?
Becoming a recipient of salvation is easy,
we turn from opposing God to open belief and trust in his Son,
then he will become our Father.

But there's also the mark of people recruited into his service.
That's mark we need not be frightened of,
because as our Father calls us, he promises to be with us.

I'll lead us in Prayer