



MBCC RESPONDING TO THE CALL OF GOD

Exodus 3:1-15

By Ps. Peter Anderson

When I was ten years old, I went with my parents to a meeting in my hometown of Bulawayo in what was then Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). The two speakers that evening were J. Oswald Sander, General Director of the China Inland Mission (now OMF international) and Hayden Mellsop a former CIM missionary in China. Both men were New Zealanders. God deeply touched my young heart as I listened to Mr Mellsop's stories of his years serving in China. As I listened to Mr Mellsop and his gripping stories, I sensed that God was calling me to serve Him one day in China. I didn't hear any voice or feel any special feelings or see any flashes of light, but deep down I knew God was calling me. That sense of calling only grew stronger as I got older—even though back in those days I hardly ever saw Chinese people and probably had little idea of where China was on the world map.

▼ Today we are going to study a passage in Exodus that records how God called Moses for a special mission. Moses was born around 1500 BC. He is one of the towering figures in the Bible—and in human history. Moses was born to an Israelite couple living in Egypt. Like his fellow Israelites, he was a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

▼ During the time of another famous Bible figure, Joseph, the Israelite people had moved to Egypt from Canaan. That happened almost 400 years before Moses was born. By the time Moses was born, however, the Israelite people had been being forced into slavery. The Pharaoh ruling Egypt had a policy demanding that all Israelite male babies should be killed at birth.

Moses, however, miraculously survived, and not only that, but he was adopted by the daughter of the Pharaoh. As a result, Moses grew up to enjoy the privileges and luxury associated with being an Egyptian prince. By the age of 40, despite being an Israelite, he was a gifted, powerful and highly educated member of the Egyptian ruling class. We read about all this in the first two chapters of Exodus.

▼ However, as we come to the beginning of chapter 3 of the book of Exodus, we find Moses living in obscurity in the wilderness of Midian and the Sinai Peninsula. He was 80 years old and for 40 years he had been doing little apart from looking after sheep. His was the humdrum life of a shepherd. The reason for this complete turnaround from the palace to the desert was the fact Moses had had to flee from Egypt. In his prime he had tried to defend his people from ill treatment, but his attempts had failed miserably. Now 40 years later, what could possibly break the humdrum and the seeming pointlessness of Moses' life? This brings us to our first heading for today.



GOD'S CALL TO MOSES Exodus 3

Moses had been shepherding his father-in-law Jethro's sheep, but God was about to appear to Moses and call him to a totally unexpected task. God had been preparing him to be the shepherd leading His people. Let us read what happened.

“¹ Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

If you and I had met Moses earlier that day we might have asked, *“How are things, Moses? Anything interesting going on?”* And he would have perhaps replied, *“No, just the same every day. Looking after these sheep. Finding pasture for them here in the wilderness.”*

But this was when something unusual did happen. Moses noticed a bush on fire. Seeing a bush on fire was not in itself unusual but what was unusual was the fact the bush, though burning, was not consumed or burnt up in the fire. So, Moses decided to go over and take a closer look. Indeed, it was a strange site.

▼ Verse 2 tells us that **“the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush”** and then in verse 4 we read, **“⁴ When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”**

When Moses turned aside to see the burning bush, God called to him out of the bush.

▼ It was not the bush speaking. It was God speaking to Moses out of the bush. Moses replies, **“Here I am.”**

And then God says, **“Do not come any closer.” Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”** We then read God says, **“⁶ ...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.**

Understandably, Moses was afraid. He was indeed standing on holy ground for he was in the presence of a holy God. He wants to hide.

▼ Imagine it, Moses had been living for 40 years in obscurity and in the boring routine of being a shepherd. Now all-of-a- sudden, out of the blue, he is confronted with the awesome presence of a holy God, the One true God, the God of his ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. What an incredible, awesome encounter!

And what about you and me? We too need to remember that God is holy, and we need to bow before Him in surrender.

God had a mission for Moses, and He has a mission for us too.

▼ We read about the mission God had for Moses in verses 7-10.

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—... ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.’”

This was God’s call to Moses. He wanted Moses to go to Egypt, to Pharaoh, and bring His people out of slavery and back into the Promised Land. Simple? No, totally scary stuff. Moses must have been blown away. “*God, are you serious? You must be joking!*” I wonder if that was what Moses thought.

And how about you and me? Has God ever presented you with a new and impossible-sounding mission?

I well remember back in December 1981 when my late wife and I were happily serving with OMF in Taiwan. We received a letter from one of the OMF IHQ Directors in Singapore inviting us to take up the position of Coordinator for OMF’s new China Program based out of Hong Kong. Just reading that letter got my knees knocking. What? Me? Us? How could this be? I was just 34 at the time and my wife just 30. What happened next? I might tell you later.

▼ 2. MOSES’ RESPONSE TO GOD’S CALL

So, yes, as we can imagine, the call or the commission God gave to Moses came as a huge surprise and shock. Let us see his response.

In verse 11 we read, “¹¹ **But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”** “Who am I, God?” Moses felt completely inadequate for the job God was giving him. And of course, it was perfectly natural and understandable that he felt this way. He *was* inadequate.

Forty years earlier Moses may have thought, “*Sure God, I’m you man!*” Back then he was young and full of energy and self-confidence.

But any self-confidence had long since evaporated. And Moses rightly felt he was not up to such a challenging, pretty much impossible task.

How about you, my dear friend? Is God calling you to what seems like an impossible mission? Do you feel completely inadequate for what God wants you to do? Whether you are young or old (or somewhere in between)—you know that the task or the challenge is way beyond you.

Was Moses right to feel inadequate? Was he right to ask, “Who am I, Lord?” Are we right to ask the same questions?

Yes, I believe Moses was right to question his ability to take on the challenge, and so are we! On our own, in our own strength, and with our own wisdom or giftings, we *are* inadequate. Totally inadequate. In fact, when we think we can do anything on our own we are in danger of falling flat on our face.

▼ As Jesus Himself told His disciples in John 15:5, **“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”**

▼ When Moses said, **“Who am I that I should go...”** God didn’t say, *“Oh, you’re terrific, Moses. You’re just the perfect one for this job!”* No, what does God say? ▼ Look at v.12, **“And God said, “I will be with you.”** Yes, He says, **“I will be with you.”**

This was the important truth Moses needed to know. And it is the same truth Jesus’ disciples needed to know and the truth you and I need to know.

God was not asking Moses to go in his own strength. God often calls us to tasks that seem too difficult for us, but He doesn’t ask us to do them alone. He promises to be with us and that makes all the difference.

▼ God promises to give Moses a sign that it was indeed God Himself that was sending him. **“And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”**

The very place where God spoke to Moses from the burning bush was Mt Horeb or Sinai. Moses would later be back in this very place—but that time it would be with all God’s people.

▼ Moses then has an interesting question for God. We read in v.13, **“¹³ Moses said to God, ‘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?’”**

The Egyptians had many gods, and Moses wanted the Israelites to know the One who had sent him was not one of those gods but was the God of their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Did He have a Name?

▼ Indeed, God does have a name. **“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.’”**

God called Himself I AM, a name describing His eternal power and unchangeable character. It is a declaration of the self-existence of God. God says, “I am who I am.” He uses the verb to be.

And from the Hebrew for “I am” we get the word Yahweh.

▼ So, we read in the next verse, **“¹⁵ God also said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD [Yahweh], the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’”**

Moses could not use the fact he was weak and inadequate as an excuse. The eternal unchanging God would be with him.

But in the next chapter we find Moses has some other excuses. His next excuse, excuse number two, was his concern that his own people the Israelites would not believe that God had sent him.

▼ In chapter 4:1 we read **“Moses answered, ‘What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you?’”** The Lord answered that excuse by showing Moses His miraculous power. He told Moses to throw his shepherd’s staff on the ground. When he did, it became a snake. Then he told Moses to grab the snake by the tail, and it turned back into his staff. God showed other signs of His power. Basically, God told Moses He would give him power to do many miraculous signs and wonders.

▼ Now comes excuse number three—in 4:10 we read, **“Moses said to the LORD, ‘Pardon your servant, 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.’”**

▼ Again, God answers Moses. I reckon God has a great sense of humour. This is how He answered Moses’ third excuse, **“¹¹ The Lord said to him, ‘Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord?’ ¹² Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.’”**

▼ Poor Moses. He has one more excuse, excuse number 4. **“¹³ But Moses said, ‘Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.’”**

Well, God has an answer for this excuse too. God was getting fed up with Moses, but He tells Moses that He will send his older brother Aaron who will speak on behalf of Moses.

In fact, God said that Aaron was already on his way from Egypt to meet Moses. God had it all planned. Moses was to discover that God had been at work in his life—his 40 years in Egypt and his 40 years in the wilderness—to bring him to this unexpected and unforgettable day.

God had broken Moses’ self-confidence and self-reliance and had prepared him to be the one to lead God’s people out of slavery. Moses was no longer to shepherd the sheep of his father-in-law, Jethro. He was to shepherd God’s people and lead them through the wilderness to the Promised Land.

▼ I recently saw this quote from the famous American evangelist DL Moody. He said, *“Moses spent 40 years thinking he was somebody, forty years learning he was nobody, and forty years discovering what God can do with a nobody.”*

We come now to my final heading.

▼ 3. THE CALL OF JESUS AND OUR RESPONSE TO HIM

Dear brothers and sisters, we may not have seen a burning bush or heard God speaking to us as Moses did. However, the fact is God has spoken to each one of us, including those dear friends amongst us who may not yet be followers of Jesus. God has spoken to us through His Word, the Bible, and He has spoken to us through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, God has called us. He has a plan and a purpose for each one of our lives.

▼ Firstly, He has called on us to repent of our sin and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We read in John's Gospel that when Jesus came to earth many of His fellow Jews did not believe He was who He claimed to be—the Messiah, the Saviour of the world.

▼ However, John goes on in John 1:12, **“Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.”**

This is the first and primary call of God to you and to me—the call to repent and believe in Jesus, the invitation to become children of the living God. What excuses have you made for not accepting God's incredible invitation?

Then there is another call God gives—the call to follow and serve the Lord Jesus.

▼ When Jesus called Simon and Andrew who were both fishermen, Mark records in 1:17, Jesus said, **“Come follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people.”**

▼ Jesus calls us to follow Him and He calls us to be holy. As Paul writes in Ephesians 4:1, **“I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”**

Jesus calls us to be salt and light in the world. And He calls us to be His ambassadors. He calls us to go and make disciples of all nations.

Have you heard His call? How have you responded? ▼ Have you, like Moses, made excuses? If you have, will you, like Moses, remember: i) God promises to be with you, and ii) He promises you the power you need, and iii) He promises to give you the words you need, and iv) He promises to give you others to help you and serve with you.

There is nothing more wonderful than to walk in the good and perfect will of God and to accept the mission and calling He has for you.

I told you earlier of when my late wife and I first heard that OMF wanted us to move from Taiwan to Hong Kong to take up the role of OMF China Program Coordinator. We were still young and had been in Taiwan for less than 6 years. We felt unqualified. Yet at the same time we were excited. Very excited.

▼ And imagine how we felt when that same evening, 31 December 1981, in our regular devotional time as a couple, we read these words, **“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and of good courage...for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”** (Joshua 1:5, 6, 9)

These Scriptures and many others over the next couple of days, absolutely confirmed for us the fact that God was indeed calling us to a new and exciting mission.

▼ Some months later in 1982 we moved to Hong Kong and so began a 23-year long adventure. Based mostly in Hong Kong, we travelled all over China, to every province, and at one point we also lived

in China. We loved both HK and China! What we saw God doing in those years was simply awesome. And it all began for me at the age of ten when I first heard God's call to serve Him.

▼ I encourage each one of you to say "yes" to the call of God on your life. Whether you are young or middle aged or older, He promises to be with you. Moses was 80, yes just 80, when God called him! Don't ever tell God you are too old to accept His call upon your life. And young people, don't be fooled into thinking that your plans and dreams are better or more exciting than God's plans are for your life.

So dear friends, my question for each one here today is: how will you respond to the call of Jesus?

