

WHEN GOD IS IN IT Exodus 3:1-15

INTRODUCTION:

Our theme for 2009 is “Little Is Much” and it is inspired by the song by Kittie Suffield, “Little Is Much When God Is In It”. Last week, I preached on the “Little Is Much” part of that song. This week, I want to emphasize the rest of that sentence: “Little is much when God is in it”.

There is nothing particularly meritorious or praiseworthy about littleness. Given the choice between a little steak and a really big cut of identical meat for the same price, I’d order the big one. If I could live in a sprawling mansion for the same price as an apartment, I’d take the mansion. If I could raise a Great Dane for the same money as a Chihuahua, I’d say give me the BIG DOG!

There’s nothing inherently commendable about littleness. But when God is in it, that which is little can be much.

There are many examples in Scripture of times God used something insignificant to fulfill a great purpose for Him. For instance:

- God used a young boy with a stone in a sling to fell a mighty giant.
- God used a common donkey to talk to a prophet.
- God used a small measure of flour and a little bit of oil to sustain a prophet, a widow and her son for months on end.
- God used a small boy’s sack-lunch to feed a multitude.

Another such example is recorded in Exodus 3:1-15, the account of Moses and the burning bush.

3:¹ *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 desert 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.”*

⁴ *When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, 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.*

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.* ¹⁰ *So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”*

¹¹ *But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”*

¹² *And God said, “I will be with you. 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.”*

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?”*

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, 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.*

In some ways, the entire life of Moses is an illustration of the fact that *when God is in it*, that which is little can become very much, indeed.

- Moses’ father, Amram, was not a particularly noteworthy character. In fact, just about all we know of him is that he was the father of Miriam, Aaron and Moses.
- Moses’ mother was Jochebed and we don’t know very much about her, either. We do know enough to realize that she was unremarkable.

As you may know, Moses was born at a time when the Hebrew people were slaves in Egypt. The Pharaoh who ruled Egypt at that time felt threatened by this large racial and ethnic minority within his borders. They spoke a different language. They worshipped a different God. They ate different foods. And they would not intermarry with the Egyptians. So, in an effort to break the spirit of the Hebrews, The Pharaoh decided to oppress them and rule them with an iron fist.

But still the Hebrews multiplied and still they would not assimilate. So eventually, The Pharaoh decreed that all of the newborn Hebrew baby boys should be put to death by throwing them in the Nile River.

I have no way of knowing how many Hebrew mothers and dads complied with The Pharaoh’s order but I know two who did not: Amram and Jochebed. When their third child was born, their second son, they hid him for three months. But as he began to get bigger, he became more rambunctious and more raucous. When his family could no longer hide the infant, Jochebed got a papyrus basket and coated it inside and outside

with tar and pitch to waterproof it. Then she put the baby in the basket and hid the basket among the cattails along the bank of the Nile. Miriam, the baby's big sister, watched from a distance to see what would happen to her baby brother.

Soon, The Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe along the bank and she happened to select the spot right where the baby was. She had her attendant fetch the basket and when she looked inside, there was a crying baby. She recognized it as a Hebrew baby. And she decided to keep it.

The baby's sister, watching from a distance, came up to The Pharaoh's daughter and offered to get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for her. The Pharaoh's daughter thought that was a good idea and, of course, Miriam selected her mother, the baby's own mother, to nurse the child.

The Pharaoh's daughter named the baby Moses because the word "Moses" sounds like the Hebrew word that means, "to draw out". She selected that name because she "drew him out" of the Nile River.

Now that is a pretty inauspicious start to a life, isn't it? He was born to insignificant people. He was born into slavery. He was born under a death-sentence. He was hidden until he was released into the Nile. He was brought-up as a foster-child by people of a different race and was raised in a foreign land.

No one should have expected this kid to amount to much. But he did when God was in him.

As I have said, the name "Moses" sounds like the word "draw out" in the Hebrew language. Moses got that name because he was drawn out of the Nile when he was an infant. But, in a very real sense, God was drawing Moses throughout his life. Note, for instance:

I. Moses Was Drawn Near By A Burning Bush

For forty years, Moses lived in The Pharaoh's household in Egypt. But he knew he was not Egyptian and one day he saw an Egyptian beating one of the Hebrews. Moses was enraged by what he saw and he killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. He thought no one saw him do it and figured no one would ever know. But the next day, he found out that his crime had been witnessed and his guilt was known.

When word of what Moses had done got back to The Pharaoh, he tried to have Moses killed but Moses ran away and hid out a long ways away in the land of Midian. While there, Moses got a job shepherding the sheep of

a man named Jethro. Eventually, Moses married one of Jethro's daughters, a girl named Zipporah.

Moses worked for his father-in-law, Jethro, for forty years until one day, he saw a curious sight: a bush that was on fire but it never burned up. Moses thought it so strange that he went over to investigate. Now this was not just any bush. It was not even just any burning bush. Exodus 3:2 says that the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in flames of fire from within the bush.

I don't know what kind of a bush it was. It may have been rose bush or a hydrangea. It could have been an azalea, a boxwood or a yew. I don't know if it was a little bush or a big bush. And it doesn't matter. What matters is that the Lord was in the bush.

Moses was drawn near by something unexpected and because of something unexpected, he was drawn near to God.

The unexpected happens to all of us. We didn't plan on being laid-off. We hadn't expected to be divorced. We weren't thinking about ill health. We weren't anticipating our loved-one's death.

But the unexpected happens. And when it happens, some people allow the unexpected to drive them away from the Lord. And some use it to draw near to Him. Moses was drawn near by a burning bush.

II. Moses Was Drawn Up By The Voice Of God

When Moses was drawn near to the burning bush, he was drawn up by the voice of God. Exodus 3:4 says that when Moses got close to the bush, "God called to him from within the bush." God spoke to Moses and told him to take off his sandals, as a sign of humility and reverence, because the place where he was standing was holy ground.

It was holy ground because God was in that place. Wherever God is, is holy ground.

Moses was a full three days' journey from Egypt in a land that had been unknown to him but God met him there and identified Himself as that God of Moses' ancestors. Moses was also about three day's journey from the land that had been promised to Abraham and his descendents but God met him there and identified Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God got Moses' attention with the fire in a bush that never burned up. God got Moses' reverence by speaking to him from within the bush.

When Moses heard the voice and identified it as the voice of God, he was drawn up short. He removed his sandals and hid his face because He knew he was in the very presence of God.

Listen people. When we know we are in the presence of God, we are to respond in the same way: with awe and reverence. Scripture says that where two or three are gathered in the name of the Lord, He is with them. We've got more than two or three here today and we have gathered in the name of the Lord so I know He is here. What is the appropriate attitude when we are in the presence of God? It is awe and reverence.

The Psalmist says that God lives or abides in the praise of His people. We've been praising Him today so I am assured that He is abiding among us. What is the proper response when we are in the presence of God?

At this table, we participate in the very body and blood of Jesus. We are in the presence of the Lord when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. What is the proper mindset when we are in the presence of the Lord?

I'm all for friendliness, laughing, high spirits and a "shake & howdy time". But I hunger for the awe and reverence that reflects the fact that we know we are in the very presence of the very God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Just once in a while, I'd love to see us drawn up short by the realization that we are standing on holy ground!

III. Moses Was Drawn In By God's Commission For Him

When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, He called him into His service. He commissioned him to become the deliverer for 2.5 million people who had groaned under Egyptian bondage for several generations.

Moses was not an eager recruit. In fact, he told God he could not do what God called him to do. (May I just make a brief aside here to point out that it is never a good idea to tell God that you cannot do what He has told you you are to do? NEVER!)

Moses said, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" And God said, "I will be with you." Who are you, Moses? You are my partner in this great task.

Moses said, "What will I say if they ask me who sent me?" And God said, "Tell them that the I AM has sent you." That is, the only God who really is God, He's the One who sent you.

Moses said, "What if they don't believe me?" And God said, "let me show you some signs you can use as proof." He turned Moses' walking stick into a snake. He afflicted Moses with leprosy and then cured him again.

He told Moses that He would turn the Nile River into blood. God was saying, "Moses, they don't have to believe you. They will believe me."

Moses said, "I'm not good with words." And God said, "I'll send your brother along and he can do the talking."

Never once did God tell Moses that he was wrong in his doubts about himself. But God kept saying that Moses, with all of his limitations, would still be much if God was in him.

CONCLUSION:

Moses had lots of excuses for why he was not able to do the task to which God was calling him. But, in the end, that's all they were: excuses. Any bush will do when God is in the bush. Any rod will do when God is in the rod. And any person will do when God is in the person. So the question is not, "What are your abilities and your capabilities?" The question is, "What is your availability?" Are you willing for the Lord to fill you so He can use you?

INVITATION: # 389 – *"Spirit of the Living God"*