

Minding Your Business Exodus 3:1-5

I. INTRODUCTION

A. This Moment

1. The story is told of an explorer who was traveling through Africa some years ago.
2. He wandered into the village of a hostile tribe who immediately grabbed their spears and rushed toward him.
3. He took off and ran as fast as he could, staying just out of reach of their toss.
4. His path led to the edge of a tall cliff and as he came to a screeching halt, he looked down to see a pride of hungry lions at the base looking up at him.
5. As he looked back he saw that the natives were moving swiftly to within range and he had to make a choice, so he jumped.
6. As he fell through the air, he reached out and grabbed a sturdy root that poked out of the cliff face.
7. He just hung there in midair, with the natives gathered at the edge of the cliff, taking aim, and the lions at the base looking up, licking their chops.
8. Then he noticed right in front of him, growing out of the face of the cliff was a strawberry plant with a single, perfectly formed red berry.

B. Today

1. Now – I'm going to end the story right there; I'll conclude at the end of the message.
2. Take a look with me at Exodus 3

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-5

¹Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and

behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. ³Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn."

⁴So 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."

⁵Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground."

1. Without doubt, next to Jesus Christ, Moses is the greatest leader in all history.
2. Think about what this man accomplished.
 - a. he liberated an entire nation from cruel bondage within a powerful kingdom and he did it without military action!
 - b. he then led that group of people, numbering between 2 & 3 million, hundreds of miles through inhospitable territory for 40 years!
 - c. and they were not always *happy campers*.
 - d. he organized their journey, forged them into a nation, established a system of government and law, and laid the foundations for a religion which has come to frame all of Western civilization.
3. Moses lived to be 120 years old, and his life can be divided into 3 - 40 year phases.
 - a. his first 40 years were spent *becoming a somebody*.
 - 1) he was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and raised in all the culture and learning of Egypt.
 - 2) Acts 7 tells us he grew mighty in word & deeds, meaning he achieved proficiency in academics and in military prowess.
 - 3) Jewish traditions say that Moses was being groomed for the throne of Egypt and that he had led a successful military campaign against the Ethiopians.
 - 4) Moses was a rising star and looked to be the new golden boy in Egyptian society.
 - 5) but that all changed when he murdered an Egyptian one day.
 - 6) when word of the crime got back to Pharaoh, the official

attitude toward him changed dramatically and he had to flee for his life.

b. this brings us to the second 40 years of his life, which he spent *becoming a nobody*.

1) he fled Egypt to Midian, a region beyond the reach of Pharaoh's justice.

2) and there he became a shepherd on the backside of the desert.

3) what a come-down this was for Moses; for in Gen. 46 we're told that shepherds were an *abomination* to the Egyptians.

[v. 34]

4) in a matter of just a few days, Moses went from a place of *rank* and privilege, to what in his mind was a *rank place* of *reviling*.

c. at the end of that second 40 years, when Moses was 80! the 3rd and final 40 years began when he became a *model for everybody*.

1) stripped of his self-confidence and own ideas about how to serve God,

2) God then appeared to him and gave him his life's calling & mission.

4. So, Moses' first 40 years were spent – Becoming a *somebody*, in the world's eyes and way of thinking.

5. His second 40 years were spent – Becoming a *nobody*, at least, as the world reckons.

6. His last 40 years were spent – Being a model for *everybody*, because it's not about who we are or what we do, but who God is and what He does through us.

B. The Beginning of Phase 3

¹Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

1. This verse commences the last phase of Moses' life.

2. He's been tending sheep now for 40 years!

3. And as he leads them from pasture to pasture among the scant fields of the wilderness, he has lots and lots of time to think.

a. the shepherd's life is a lonely one and Moses spent not only

- many hours, but many *days* all alone.
- b. how often do you suppose during that 40 years, his mind wandered back to his life in Egypt?
 - c. Acts 7 tells us when Moses was still in Egypt, when he had killed that Egyptian, he'd thought he was launching his mission as a redeemer of his fellow Jews.
 - 1) he'd a sense of destiny and divine purpose on his life –
 - 2) to free them from bondage – to be their champion who would release them from their cruel oppression at the hand of the Egyptians.
 - d. as Moses looked at his life and upbringing, he couldn't help but see it all as God's miraculous preparation of him for some great role.
 - e. but he didn't wait on the Lord to understand when and how he should start.
 - f. he had his *own ideas* about how to fulfill God's call and plan for his life –
 - g. and when he saw an opportunity that fit his thinking, a thinking by the way, that had been shaped by Egypt rather than the Lord, he went for it and slew the Egyptian –
 - 1) hoping this would spark an uprising by the Jews against their harsh taskmasters.
 - 2) all it did was engender fear on the part of the Jews toward him.
4. So Moses fled Egypt, and spent the next 40 years dying to his own ideas about what it means to serve God and fulfill his destiny.
5. But Moses had to earn his keep and having settled down in Midian, he took on the occupation of being a shepherd for his father in law.
- a. while it had to seem like a terrible come-down for Moses, to go from the palace to the wilderness →
 - b. and from leading chariot's in battle to leading a flock of dumb sheep,
 - c. all the while, God was in fact teaching him the principles and giving him the tools of *true leadership*.
 - d. Moses learned far more in those years of tending sheep than he ever learned *in* the schools and *by* the tutors of Egypt.
 - e. of course, Moses couldn't see it at the time; to him the years

- seem wasted.
- f. in fact, he came to the place of *forsaking* the idea God had some great plan for him.
 - g. this was precisely the place God wanted to bring him, so that he would look to and trust in the Lord rather than himself as he led the flock of God out of bondage and into the promise.
6. It took Moses 40 years to come to the end of himself; to arrive at the place where he let go of his *own ideas* of greatness and became content to simply surrender himself into the Lord's hands.
 7. *Now* he was ready to *become* great because no longer had a desire for it.
 8. So one day, as he has now accepted his role and identity as a shepherd, he sees something that peaks his curiosity – a burning bush.
 9. To be frank, burning bushes are not all that rare in the desert.
 - a. desert lightening often kindles the dry scrub,
 - b. and the nomads who are native to the region light them to provide warmth during the cool evenings.
 10. But Moses decided to check out this particular bush. And that's when we read in v. 4 -

So 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."

11. God initiated the 3rd and final phase of Moses' life at this moment, and He used this bush for good reason.
12. There's a profound object lesson in God's use of the bush that was meant to give Moses a picture of what it means to serve Him and to walk with Him.
13. The lesson is this: The Lord can use me.

C. The Lord Can Use Me

1. Why did God use this *bush*? He could have just appeared to Moses in a vision or dream.
2. He could have given Moses a majestic vision of His glory, ushering him into the throne room of heaven itself.
3. But He didn't – He came to where Moses was tending sheep and used - a bush!
4. The word is "seneh" and refers to a common, desert thorn bush.

- a. this wasn't even a nice green shrub; it was a little, scantily-leaved, prickly, scraggy plant.
 - b. if God decided to a plant for His revelation, we'd expect Him to use one far more worthy of His glory; like a stately & sturdy *oak tree*,
 - 1) or maybe a tall and majestic *pine tree* or a towering and fragrant *cedar*
 - 2) but a *thorn bush*?
5. God used the throne bush as He called Moses into his role as deliverer because it was the concluding lesson to the last 40 years the school of the desert had been teaching him,
 6. That God doesn't need or use *Somebodies*, as the world esteems them.
 7. He uses *Nobodies*, so that when they do *something*, it's *God* that gets the glory.
 8. The Apostle Paul spoke of this in 1 Cor. 1 -
- 26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence.**
9. 40 years before Moses had thought of himself as capable of delivering his fellow Jews from bondage because of his background and training.
 10. 40 years later, his *self*-confidence has been stripped away.
 11. No doubt, he felt very much *like* that little throne bush;
 - a. an 80 year old has-been,
 - b. a dried up old man who may have had great potential at one time but now was disqualified.
 - c. yeah – Moses had been in the *major leagues* in his youth, but now he was in the *bush league*!
 - d. and as an older man, he was just plain *bushed*.

12. Now that he's died to his own ideas of greatness, God comes in the bush to make him great!
13. The story is told of Paganini, the famous violinist who appear on the stage of the concert hall in Vienna.
 - a. he began by purposely breaking a string on his violin; the audience gasped.
 - b. then he broke another; what was he doing?
 - c. a third string was broken; and the hubbub grew.
 - d. then the master retuned the final string, tucked the instrument under his chin and began to play.
 - e. for 18 minutes he played the sweetest and most magnificent melody many in the hall had ever heard.
 - f. when he ended there was wild applause and a standing ovation.
 - g. then the master raised the violin and the bow, and said, "Paganini and one string."
14. You and I are the one-string in the Master's hand!
 - a. we do not make the music, He does.
 - b. you may feel *strung-out*; too broken to be used by God.
 - c. maybe you see yourself as *3rd-string* with so many others who are smarter, better looking, more gifted, and that He'll use them long before He needs or will get to you.
 - d. no friends – God delights in using one-string violins because He wants the glory to go to the Master and not the instrument.
15. That's the lesson we learn from this – ***the Lord can use me.***
16. JFK gave my generation an important word of advice.
 - a. baby-boomers were growing dangerously *dependent* on government assistance,
 - b. so Kennedy said – "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."
17. That came to be a kind of mantra or motto for an entire generation that has unfortunately bled over into our *theology* as well, so that many say, "Ask not what God can do for you, but what you can do for God."
18. That was Moses' thought when he was 40. Now at 80, he's learned that the right perspective is, "Ask not what you can do for God, but what God can do *through* you."

D. The Fire Is In The Bush

1. Look at v. 2 –

And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed.

- a. catch this – it’s important –
 - b. the bush was not **ON** fire / the fire was **IN** the bush.
 - c. it was God’s awesome power and presence in the common thorn bush that attracted Moses’ attention.
2. As God called Moses now to his great mission, that little bush was an object lesson to him – he was the bush, the common, prickly little nobody through whom God would make Himself visible to the world.
3. What an amazing lesson for us!
- a. listen, you may not be “on fire” as we usually mean that.
 - b. but if you’re a believer, the fire is **IN** you!
 - c. you may not have a burning zeal to go to Bible college or go out on the mission field,
 - d. but if you’re a Christian, the Holy Spirit is **IN** you and is seeking to reveal God to those around you.
4. Therefore, realize something crucial; right now, God is at work in your life to mold and shape you to be the agent of His love and truth.
5. You may not be able to see *how* He’s at work, just as Moses couldn’t fathom how that 40 years of tending sheep was actually the school of the Holy Spirit training him to lead God’s flock.
6. Your life, your circumstances right now may seem wasted in terms of the purposes of God. I tell you this, and our text affirms it – God wastes nothing!
7. God used an unimpressive bush to show Moses how He can use even common things to reveal Himself in power.
8. God is not looking for our ability, only our availability.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Ready!

1. God renewed Moses’ call when Moses let go of his *own* aspirations to greatness, his *own* ideas of how to serve God, and simply accepted where he was and sought to be faithful *right there*.

2. God renewed Moses' call when Moses came to the place of realizing God didn't need or want *great* people, but *common* people through whom He could do great things!
3. And we prove ourselves ready to be used, when we're faithful with what's right before us, right now!
4. And so we end with that man hanging from that cliff face,
 - a. the natives above are taking aim with their spears
 - b. the lions beneath are licking their chops
 - c. and in front of him is a strawberry plant with single, ripe, red berry.
 - d. he leans forward, takes the berry between his lips and bites into it, enjoying the sweetness.
5. End of story!
 - a. "But what about the natives," you ask?
 - b. "What of the lions? What happened to the man?"
6. That's the point – How much of our lives do we spend *running* from the *troubles of the past*, and freaked out about the *dangers of the future*?
 - a. we're so consumed with worry and fear, so busy in our pre-occupation with the past & future we never take time to enjoy the present, this moment.
 - b. it's when Moses turned aside to investigate the sight of the burning bush that God spoke to him.
7. Friend, turn aside from your busy-ness and listen to the Lord.
8. Don't worry about the past and quiet your anxiety about the future.
9. Take time right now to enjoy the sweetness of time spent with the God Who made and loves you, and Who has an incredible plan for you - and call on you.
10. You see, God has promised that if we'll be faithful with *this* moment, to look to Him, He'll take care of all the other moments; our past, our future, our eternity.

B. You're In Bible College

1. You realize what this passage teaches us don't you?
2. You're in Bible college right now! This is your training.
3. The textbook is the Word of God and the Instructor is the Holy Spirit.
4. Your classes are your marriage, your family, your job, the mall, church.