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## God Is: Able to Use Anyone, Anything, Anytime

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TEXT: Exodus 2:23-3:15, 4:1-17 (ESV)

During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, “I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.” When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” And he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the LORD said, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” He said, “But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘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, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

Then Moses answered, “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you.’” The LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” He said, “A staff.” And he said, “Throw it on the ground.” So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it. But the LORD said to Moses, “Put out your hand and catch it by the tail” —so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand — “that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.” Again, the LORD said to him, “Put your hand inside your cloak.” And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. Then God said, “Put your hand back inside your cloak.” So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. “If they will not believe you,” God said, “or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.”

But Moses said to the LORD, “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.” Then the LORD said to him, “Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.” But he said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.” Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs.”

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Dear friends,

Back in the 1960s, probably the most popular campfire song at the time was “Kumbaya, My Lord, Come by Here.” The second verse of that song goes like this: “Someone's crying, Lord. Kumbaya.” Our story from Exodus begins with this kind of situation, someone was crying. It was the Hebrews. They were living in the land of Egypt and the king of Egypt, being afraid of them, made them slaves. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob cried out for help. God heard their cries, saw their afflictions. He was moved with compassion for his people, and he went into action to set them free from this terrible ordeal. He made up his mind to bring them to the land he had promised their ancestors, in order that they might possess it.

God heard their cries. Isn't that wonderful? Have you ever wondered if God hears your cries or if he sees your sufferings? This story reminds us that God does hear our prayers. He remembers his own. He's watching over us and compassionately answers our cries, sometimes in the most unexpected ways. Such is the case in today's story. Moses was out in the wilderness taking care of his father-in-law's sheep. Now Moses was a Hebrew who had grown up in Egypt, but had to run for his life into the wilderness because he had killed a slave taskmaster who was beating a fellow Hebrew. Now, Moses was a wanted man. Well, one day he was near the mountain of Horeb and he encountered a burning bush. Wasn't unusual, I suppose, to see a bush catch fire in the midst of that desert heat. But this bush was different, was not consumed by the fire. Moses, being curious, of course, started to draw close to the bush to see what exactly is going on. Suddenly, a voice cries out from the bush. "Moses, Moses, don't come near. Take off your sandals and approach carefully." Moses did as he was told and soon realized that he was standing in the presence of God Almighty himself, the God of his ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God told Moses about the situation, that he had heard the cries and seen the suffering of his people, and he was about to deliver them from slavery and bring them back to the promised land. And then he told Moses that he wanted Moses to be his point person and do the leading. God said, "Come and I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring my people out of Egypt." Moses politely declined the offer, didn't he? He a lot of excuses. "But God, I can't. I'm a nobody. Who am I? I'm an ordinary person. No one will listen to me. [Pharaoh] is a mighty king who'll laugh at me. Your people won't believe me." God said, "Yes you can Moses. I will go with you. I will work through you. I'm promising you that soon you will bring the people to worship me at this very moment and someday."

But Moses asked, "What if they ask who sent me, I don't even know your name, what do I tell them?" "Tell them I am who I am. Tell them I am sent you. Tell them the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob sent you to deliver them and lead them to the promised land. Then go and confront Pharaoh and tell him to let my people go." Moses said, "Well, what if they need a sign to believe me? I mean, I don't have any special powers." And God said, "What's that in your hand?" Moses said, "It's just my staff." "Throw it on the ground," God said, and the rod became a snake. God said, "Now pick up the snake by the tail." And when Moses did that, it turned back into his staff. "That'll show them," God said. "Now put your hand inside your cloak. Pull it out." Moses did that and his hand became full of leprosy. And when God told him to put it back inside his cloak, when he pulled it back out, the leprosy was gone. And God said, "If these two

signs don't work, then take some water from the Nile River, pour it on dry ground, and the water will turn into blood." That will really wow them.

So Moses tried his last excuse out on God, he really didn't want to do this. "I'm not a good speaker, Lord. I don't speak well in public. I kind of stutter. I can't do what you're asking me to do." God said, "I made the mouth. I'll be with you and give you the words to say." Moses wasn't convinced. So he said, "Please, Lord, just send someone else. I can't do it." But God said, "Your brother Aaron, the Levite, speaks well. I'll send him with you. Now go." So Moses went with God's assurances: "Moses, you can do this." It was a difficult assignment, of course, you know the story. He got knocked down a few times, but he kept at it. After a few serious plagues from God on the people of Egypt, Moses found himself leading God's people out of Egypt and himself trusting God to part the Red Sea for them to pass safely through. He touched the water with that staff and God parted the waters for his people to go through, and when they'd gotten through it, closed it up on the Egyptian army that was pursuing them to bring them back to Egypt.

We learn a surprising thing about God. Not only do we see his compassion and his power and his might in this story, but we also see his strange way of doing things. He seems to want to recruit the least likely candidates to accomplish his purposes, and he uses people in remarkable ways to his honor and glory. We learned this in the Moses story today, that God is able to use anyone, anything, at any time. He recruits a stuttering fugitive from the law, tending sheep with only a staff in his hand and 80 years already behind him. That's God using the least likely, isn't it? That's a consistent theme throughout scripture, by the way. Like Gideon: the youngest, smallest from the smallest tribe of Israel, and yet God chose him to drive out the Midianites. And God needed spokespeople to bring his people to repentance when they were walking away from God, and who did he pick? A young and inexperienced guy like Jeremiah, who kept saying, "I can't do that." And God said, "Yes, you can." And same with [Amos], a farmer he pulled out of the field and tapped on the shoulder to preach judgment and repentance. You can do this, Amos. God called ordinary Mary to be the mother of the savior of the world. When she said, "How can I? I am a virgin," God's messenger promised, "You can do this." When the disciples of Jesus were telling him to send the crowds away, that were with them in the wilderness and Jesus said, "You feed them," they said, "We can't do that. We only have five loaves and two fishes." And yet Jesus said, "Yes, you can." And he prayed. And the disciples began to hand out the food and

handed out and handed out handed out until 5,000 people were fed, and there were even leftovers!

Listen, if you have placed your trust in Jesus Christ for salvation, experienced the grace and love of God in your life through him, then you are also called. It's a holy calling upon you – you were called into God's service, the service for his kingdom. He says to us today, "Listen, someone's cryin' that I care about. I want you to do something for them in my name. You can do this." Maybe you're wondering: how do I become aware of these kind of assignments? It's really quite simple. It's a matter of being still before God and also listening and observing what's going on around you. It's asking for God's leading in prayer. God will point you in the direction he wants you to go in his name. And the same promise to Moses is ours to count upon as well: that he will go with us and work through us if we'll go. And there really are so many people crying out in need. You don't have to look far, they're all around you. For instance, there's Frank, who says, "I used to go to church, but I quit after confirmation. I probably have friends in Heaven and Hell," he jokes. "Sometimes I wonder what will happen to me, though, when I die. Sometimes it bothers me to think about that." That's the cry of someone who's lost and longing for assurance, there are a lot of Franks all around us. There's Barbara who says, "Since my husband died a year ago, I still feel so empty and tired and alone. The phone calls and cards have pretty much stopped coming my way. I wish someone just someone would ask me how I'm doing." That's the voice of grief and loneliness, needing a friend. There's Bob sitting in his room at the nursing home, his family lives far away, so he hardly ever sees them. He's having a hard time adjusting to this life of dependence because of his health. And now he feels so weak and alone. There are all kinds of Franks and Barbaras and Bobs in this world of ours, and they need someone like you and me to show them the love of God. Friendship.

He says to us, "You go and help them." But like Moses, I don't know about you, but I'm prone to try and tell God that, "Listen, I don't know if I can do that." We might use the excuse: "Well, I'm not a trained counselor," or "I don't know how to witness," or "I lack the time or the resources to do something like that." We have a dozen reasons why I can't do this, but God says to us, "Yes, you can, because I can use anyone, anything, any time to help someone else."

God is asking each of us today, "What's in your hand?", because he'll use whatever is there. Maybe what's in your hand is your past experiences. God can use that. Maybe it's

your connections, your network, your friends. God can use that as well. Or your money, resources, spiritual gifts: God can use all that, all of that to serve his purposes in the world. You may find this hard to believe, but God can use you to make a huge difference in the world that needs him. You and I need to start believing in this and in his ability to work through you and believe that, yes, we can.

Allow me to call upon a few more witnesses from God's can-do army. "Samson, where are you going?" "To fight the Philistines." "What's that in your hand, Samson?" "It's the jawbone of a donkey." "Samson, you can't do that." "Oh, yes, I can. With God." And he did. "David, where are you going?" "I'm going to fight Goliath, the giant." "What's that in your hand?" "A slingshot and five stones." "Oh, David, don't be silly. You can't win." David said, "Yes, I can." And Goliath fell. "Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, where are you going?" "To the fiery furnace – we're standing up for God before King Nebuchadnezzar and his gods to prove that God, our God, is the only God." "You can't do that." "Yes, we can." Listen to the words of the king after they were thrown into the furnace: "Didn't I throw three tied up men into that furnace? And there they are loose and they're walking around – and there's a fourth one with them. He looks like the son of the gods." And Nebuchadnezzar blessed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's God. "Jesus, where are you headed?" He replied, "I'm going up to Jerusalem to be rejected and suffer and die for the sins of the world." "What's that in your hand?" "It's cross. God's going to raise me up, give me the victory." "Jesus, that's crazy, you can't do that." Jesus says, "Yes, I can and I will." And he died on a cross and was raised again on the third day, and through him and him alone there is forgiveness for all people who will turn to him and receive everlasting life from him.

So God is still recruiting people like you and me to be a part of his can-do army, and oh, what a difference they are making. Over 50 years ago, for instance, a young millionaire named Millard Fuller gave it all up, gave it away to the poor, searching for a new focus in life. And he sensed God saying to him, "There are people living in inadequate housing in this country. I want you to do something about that." And when Fuller shared his vision, at first, of course, there were skeptics. "You can't do that." Millard [Fuller] said, "Yes, I can." Today, we know that organization as Habitat for Humanity, which has put up thousands upon thousands of homes in Christ's name for people who are financially challenged all over the world. Two retired friends of mine recently saw the need for transitional housing for women who were coming out of prison. They felt called by God to buy an old house and remodel it and open it for these women to live

in. "That's crazy," when I first thought, "you can't do that." They said, "Yes, we can," and they did. It's been hard and challenging, but that home is opening this month for three women to move into, and compassion and gospel witnesses is going to fill that home. And oh, what a blessing. Another retired friend of mine had a career in helping employees and employers and leaders and followers discover what their strengths and passions were, as well as helping large Christian organizations find leaders to lead them. He now uses his experience and expertise to help coach all kinds of people he meets along the way to discover their God-given strengths and passions as they consider career choices – try to figure out what they are to do. God has used him to touch so many lives in positive ways with help, and then gently sharing the gospel in the midst of all of it.

So, have you seen any burning bushes lately yourself? Heard any cries for help? You don't have to look far. God's calling you and me to mission and service. He's surrounded us with opportunities galore to change people's lives. Don't you tell yourself or let other people tell you that you can't do that. Yes, you can, because God is able to use anyone, anywhere, any time to do remarkable things for his glory. Yes, he can.

Amen.