



What Else Did He Need?

Exodus 3

As I was preparing for this week, reading this story about Moses life in his second book, it always reminds me of when I was ordained into the pastoral ministry. God started calling me to preach at about sixteen years of age, and I did not want to preach the gospel. I had nothing against preaching, but in my day, to be called to preach meant you were called to pastor, and I just wasn't going to be a pastor. So for about three years, I just flat told God I wasn't going to do it. I did volunteer to be a deacon, a Sunday school teacher, or a singer. I told Him I would sing all around the country if He wanted me to do that. God wasn't interested in that...and finally, reluctantly, I surrendered to preach. I mean, surrendered, I waved the white flag. So it was early 1980 when I got called to be the pastor of Owen's Chapel Baptist Church. After I preached a few Sundays, they contacted my home church, Ledbetter Baptist Church, and requested that I be ordained as a pastor to the gospel ministry. I was very nervous...there were parts of that I was scared about. I was told that there would basically be this order; I would have to give my testimony of salvation (no problem), then my testimony of call to ministry (that was going to hurt), and then I would be questioned biblically, morally, doctrinally, and about the church. Anyone that made up the ordination council (which, literally, the whole association was invited) could ask a question. So as you could imagine, I was quite nervous. I got through the testimony of salvation by grace part great. Then sure enough, someone said, "Before we can ordain you, would

you share your call to pastoral ministry, and how you know for sure that God called you." This was the part I was really worried about because I knew that a lot of the other guys there on that ordination council also had a call to ministry, and if my call to ministry didn't pass their test, so to speak, they might not ordain me. So I just began. Now you have to remember that I was a farmer. I started being called to preach when I was sixteen years of age; I remember it well. My dad farmed in the Land Between the Lakes and we tended a ground in Tennessee called Rushing Creek. Now the size in those fields is the same size they were when the farmers originally tended it over there, so we had a lot of bottoms. There would be a fifteen or twenty acre field, a fencerow, a fifteen or twenty acre field behind that fencerow, then another twenty-acre field, and then another fencerow. In other words, all the bottoms still have the original fencerows. This was back in the day when we had an 856 International tractor open cab. It was during Spring Break week and a lot of my friends were in Florida getting a suntan. So I decided that I would just plow on that open cab tractor without my shirt and cap, and I would see if I could get as good a tan in Tennessee as they could get in Florida. I specifically remember that. I share all of this with the ordination council. So I have got my 856 tractor wide open and I have five sixteen breaking plows on the back, and we are turning dirt over as I go down that first field. I have always been taught that when you lay out a land not to look back. So I am not looking back; I am looking straight ahead and I get about halfway to that fencerow when all of a sudden, I see something really strange. It is the springtime of the year, but one of those trees is on fire. Now Land Between the Lakes has a lot of woodlands. And in a dry spring, a fire is not a good thing, especially a tree on fire in a fencerow! Well, I just keep the plow in the ground and I have my eye on the tree. I get closer to the tree and it is still burning. As I get closer and closer, it is kind of odd because it isn't spreading down the fencerow yet. By now I am getting close enough to shut the tractor down, turn it off, leave the plow in the ground, and I jump off the tractor and approach that tree. But as I get to it, I have never seen anything like it in my whole life. It had not spread to a tree on either side of it. As I get closer to the tree, I can feel the heat coming off of it and I noticed the though the tree had been on fire for several minutes, it

had not been consumed at all. It is still as it was! In all my life of farming, I know this is just not possible. So I get a little bit closer, and now I am breaking out into a sweat because the heat is so strong. About that time, I heard the tree say to me, "Ricky, Ricky." What do you do when a tree talks to you? I froze! I couldn't have even told you what kind of tree it was, but the tree knew me! Here I am standing, and the next thing I heard was, "Take off those boots. The place you are standing is holy ground."

The Burning Bush

No, I didn't tell that story at my ordination service. ☺ I didn't tell that. You know why I didn't tell that...I mean, even if it had happened, I wouldn't tell anyone that story because it just sounds unbelievable! Amen! But that is our story this morning. Moses is eighty years of age. He has spent the last forty years of his life in the wilderness of Midian. Look it up; it is the backside of nowhere. Do you know what he has been doing for forty years? He went from being a palace prince, in line to succeed his grandfather, to a shepherd. He is a goat herder; he is herding goats. Now in this particular time of year, he leaves his father-in-law's house and gets farther than he has ever been with the animals; he is at Horeb. That is the mountain of God. As a matter of fact, the Bedouins who live in the Sinai Peninsula still, to this day, call this mountain, Jebel Musa, the mountain of Moses.

So while Moses is grazing the sheep and goats, he suddenly sees a bush of fire. Now he has seen many bushes on fire because that just happens out in the desert from time to time. But you don't have to worry about it because the bushes are so sparsely populated it hardly ever causes a wilderness fire. But as he looks closer, that bush doesn't even have a leaf falling off of it or a twig wrinkling up; that bush isn't being consumed at all. Now we don't know how many days it had been since he slept. We don't know how stressed out he was. But we do know that he checks out this bush, and when he gets close enough, the bush says, "Moses, Moses." I don't know if he knew what kind of bush it was, but the bush knew who he was. The Bible tells us that the angel of the Lord is in the midst of the bush and the midst of the flame. But when the angel begins to talk, it is the Lord talking, which means this is probably a theophany. A theophany is when

you have an Old Testament appearance of God. So God appears in the form of an angel. This is God, the Father.

- **Holy Ground**

God said, "Moses, Moses!...Here am I...(Stop!) Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." You have this picture now of Moses with his eye on the bush, reaching down, pulling those sandals off, and looking at this space. You see, when he penned Genesis, he knew that when God finished creation week and rested on the seventh day, God called a day holy. But now, God is calling a space, His space, holy. This is what we call an oriental custom. When you came into someone else's space or presence, especially their home, you took off your sandals before you stepped into their home. When you took off your sandals and stepped into their home, it was a sign of your respect for them and your humility of who you were. You were considering yourself a lesser in the presence of a greater.

At our house, we have designed a porch that has a roof over it. You can actually get out of your car, stand on our porch, and stand on the mat in front of our door where you can wipe off your shoes. But 99% of the people who come to our house for the first time step inside the door and then they take their shoes off and set them down. My wife says, "Don't do that; you don't have to take your shoes off at our house." We tell them not to take their shoes off, but 90% of the 99% still take their shoes off. We have to beg people not to take off their shoes! We say, "It is as dirty in here as it is out there; don't worry about it. You aren't going to mess up the floor." But they still do it because when you step into someone else's home, the home is holy to them. That is their space. And out of respect for their space, we take off our shoes, signifying that we are humble and recognize that we don't want to be the one to bring what is out there inside. They want what is out there to stay out there and what is inside to stay inside, so that is why we take off our shoes.

Answered Prayer

So this is a picture of Moses being humble before God. But God doesn't stop. We are getting ready to see an answer to a prayer. Have you ever

wanted to go and do something, but when you did it, you realized it wasn't the right time to do it? You messed it up big time. Have you ever felt like someone was ready to be redeemed, but no one went to tell them the story? What we are seeing here is that Israel has been enslaved for years, but we don't see until the end of chapter 2 where they begin to turn to God and cry out for help. Exodus chapter 1 begins with the thought that the Pharaoh did not know Joseph. But then you have to wonder if Israel has been in Egypt so long that they have forgotten who their God is, because the Bible doesn't record them crying out for help until the end of chapter 2 when it gets really bad.

- **God's Plan**

Isn't that the story of some of our lives? When things start happening we think we can handle it. We think it's ok and we can make the best of a bad situation. But when it gets unbearable, that is when we pour our hearts out before God. So as chapter 3 opens, we know there is an answer to the people's prayer. The answer is this man named Moses. There he is, out in the desert, keeping watch over his father-in-law's flocks, and now God has got his attention. Then in verse 9, God begins to reveal His redemptive plan to Moses when He says I have heard their cries for help. I have seen their oppression, I know their struggle, and I have come down...whoa! Did you hear that? You have this picture of God as high and lifted up! God said, *"I have come down (to where My people are) 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..."* Then in verse 10, God said, *"Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."* Moses says, who me? You've got to be kidding! Ok God, go ahead; joke is over! *"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"* Let me just interject a time old phrase here; God doesn't call the qualified, but He always qualifies the called. Now I want to believe that Moses is sincere here. I want to believe that he is so overwhelmed at the prospect that he is part of God's redemptive plan that he just knows he is not adequate. The question is did God make a mistake? Picture me going to someone and telling them I have a job for them in the church, and he says, "Who am I

that I should get this job?" Well, I have a list. I say, "You have a degree, ten years' experience; you have done..." I am telling him that he is more than qualified to do what I need him to do! God didn't do that with Moses. There is no recording of God telling Moses why he is qualified to do this. Some of you are prideful and you won't like this, but God's call to Moses isn't about Moses. God's call to Moses is about God and the people who need redeeming. If you have been called, it is not about you. One of the biggest mistakes we make is putting our eyes on ourselves instead of keeping our eyes on God. Let me remind you about our call to salvation in 1st Corinthians. It tells us that not many wise or powerful people, according to worldly standards, and not many who have noble birth are called. If you have an ego, God just popped your bubble. Have you ever looked around when it comes to the who's who in society? We aren't them! When it comes to the powerful elite movers and shakers of the community, it isn't us! Have you checked out your pedigree lately? You don't have a very noble birth, but that is why God called you. With the call of salvation and the call to serve, God decided to take the foolish to confound the wise. He decided to start with the weak to overthrow the strong. He started with the nobody to bring down the person that thinks he is somebody. The reason is so when it happens, God gets the glory, not us. When the world looks at what we are doing for God and says, "I don't know how they do it!" Praise be to God; they don't know how we do it because we are not doing it the way of the world, we are doing it because of God!

- **God's Will, through Moses**

When you read the Scripture and the story, "*Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people out of Egypt,*" and Moses says, "*Who am I...*" God answers, "*I will be with you.*" Whoa...God is telling Moses that the key to the plan is not him; the key to the plan is God. God says, *you see Moses, you seem to have forgotten than when I firsts talked to you, I told you what I was going to do. Now I am telling you what you are going to do. You say you can't do it, but the reason you can't do it is because you are forgetting it isn't going to be you doing it anyway. It is going to be Me doing it through you. So all you need is Me to be with you.* Do you get this? The Bible says God came down and did it, then it will say

Moses is doing it, but it will end this chapter by saying God is doing it. Which is it, God or Moses? It is both, God doing it through Moses! So if God is going to do something through you, what else do you need when you have Him? Sometimes, the more you get of that other stuff, the more you rely on that other stuff instead of totally relying on God and His presence.

It's kind of like on the farm, sometimes Dad sends me to other places on the farm to do certain things and tells me what he wants me to do. I have to remind him that I'm a preacher and I don't know how to do what he just told me to do. He will follow that statement up with "I am going with you." "Why didn't you just say that in the first place? Why didn't you just say, Ricky I'm going over here to do this and I need you to come along with me to help me?" He says, "Because I'm not going to do it; you are going to do it. Yes, I am going to do it, but I'm going to do it through you."

You see, God didn't say, *hey Moses, I'm going to go redeem Israel, why don't you come along for the trip. It's going to be cool. You watch Me do My thing!* That is not how God works. God does what He does, but He does it through His people. Then God tells Moses the sign so he will know that God was doing it through him. He said bring the people back and they will worship Me on this mountain. Do you understand this? Moses ran from Pharaoh to the wilderness of Midian, and then after forty years of keeping his father-in-law's flock, he found himself on the backside of the desert, which was exactly the route that God was going to bring the children of Israel when He brought them out of Egypt. Now Moses says, *now hold it God! I want You to give me the sign before.* Isn't that just how we are? "Ok God, I'm thinking about being in on this, but You are going to have to give me a sign"; and we want the sign first because we don't want to walk by faith. Why did Moses make it into the Hebrew hall of faith? It was because it was by faith. So the assurance was going to come after the action, so that when Moses got to that mountain, he would think back and not write a book on how to be a great leader, thinking he was a great leader. Moses would know when he got there that they were there because of God's leadership in his life, because God did what He did through Moses. What Moses did, he did because of God using him.

YAHWEH

In the next encounter, Moses said in verse 13, "*If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers (the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?'*" Up until this point, God had only revealed Himself to the fathers by the name, El Shaddai, which means 'God almighty.' It is a description of God in His might. But God had not revealed His personal name to the fathers.

When we name someone today, we just name to have a label. But our names, even in English, have meanings. I want to believe my name, Ricky, is not just a label that my mom and dad put on me so I would know to respond when they called my name. As a matter of fact, I looked up my name and it means, 'mighty ruler.' I want to believe that when my momma looked at me when I was born that she saw such a beautiful, unique son that she said, "Wow, mighty ruler. I'm going to call him Ricky." Do I perceive laughter? Is there no one taking off their shoes at the feet of the mighty ruler? ☺ But you have to realize that in biblical days, it wasn't that way. Then a name stood for the character of the person carrying the name. Understand that Moses is saying, *God, you are calling me to do something, but I don't really know You. I don't know Your name.*

One of our kids began a really good friendship when they first started school. They would come home talking about their friend and all they had done together. We have never heard the name of their friend, so after about three days, we asked what their friend's name was. They didn't have a clue...they had never taken the time to stop and ask their name!

Names are important, and God is going to tell Moses His name. Now if there were a time to take off our shoes, it is right now because we are in a holy time, a holy space. Moses is saying that he won't know what to tell them when they want to know His name when they ask. God tells Moses, "*I AM WHO I AM.*" That really cleared it up, amen! ☺ But in the Hebrew, it is a verb that either means, 'to be, or to cause to be.' Then God said to tell them, "*I AM has sent me to you.*" Before Moses could say anything else, God said, "*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 God said I have heard and come down to deliver out of and take you to a land flowing with milk and honey. Wow! The Bible is revealing the personal name of God. It is translated in our English bibles as LORD, all caps. It is the famous Tetragrammaton, the personal name of God. When you see Lord, it is the word, *Adonai*. It talks about God being the master, sovereign Lord of the universe. But when you see LORD, it is God's personal name. It is the name, Yahweh. It is a name that means I am the ever-present One; I am the One who always is. This says He is always in this moment of time, while He is outside of time at the same time. The One with you is in this very moment of time, but He is also at the same time, out of time. Being out of time, He sees the past, present, and the future all at the same time. And He is with you. Let me ask you this...If Yahweh is with you, what are you worried about? If He has called you and told you He would be with you, what are you worried about? Why are you still frozen in the past? Why are you still worried about the future? Why are you so paralyzed today? It is because it is really all about you. Why are you feeling that weight on your shoulders? Why are you feeling that stress? Is it you doing it or Him doing it? "Well, it is Him doing it, but He is doing it through me." I get it...but if He is doing it through you, He is still doing it! He is not doing it the way you want to do it because if He did, everyone would say, "Oh wow look at you!" God says *I am a jealous God and I will share My glory with no one*. He is not going to share His glory with anyone!

In the biblical world, God had to share His glory with false gods. In our society, He has to share His glory with deified Christians. You know what I mean by that. It is those Christians we have put on a pedestal and think they are it. We give more glory to them than to the God they serve. No! God does not call the qualified; He qualifies the called. But when you get that call, it means you are part of His redemptive plan. You are not the plan; you are part of the plan. So what is the plan here? It is for Him to come down, get people out, bring them up, (He doesn't leave them where they are) and He gets them through so that He ultimately gets them into the land flowing with milk and honey.

Now I have had a wrong picture of the land flowing with milk and honey. For years, I thought this was a poetical expression, and I imagined this land with milk flowing in the river instead of water. I saw just drip off the trees. That is not what this means. You see, Moses has been goat herding for forty years, out in the wilderness. Now he is going to go to a land that flows with milk. You have to be a farmer to get this...but God is telling Moses that He will take His people to a land that flows with goats, because goats were a mini milk factory. In the biblical world, the goats were called 'the little man's cows.' The poor person milked his goat. God is telling Moses that he hasn't seen goats until he gets to the land flowing with goats and honey! This may have been the honey that comes from bees, but more than likely it was that syrup that came from the dates that was all over the land of Israel. God is saying He is taking them to a land where what they need most (protein and carbohydrates) will be flowing in abundance. You will not have to do anything for it; He would supply it for them.

Planning the Journey

Now God tells him to go to Pharaoh and tell him they were going on a three-day journey out in the wilderness to worship their God. I want to clear something up, because I hear people say that if it is true that God intended to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, then isn't God deceiving Pharaoh when He tells him to let His people go for three days to worship Him.

You see, sometimes we don't understand figures of speech. But you will understand this. I asked Celisa the other night for the remote, and she said no. Now she told me no because she was watching one of those touchy, feely, ladies movies. She had the remote right beside her, guarding it. I had just come home after a busy day and I wanted to catch up, so I wanted the remote to change the channel. When I say, "Can I have the remote?" Celisa knows I am not asking for a little box that has buttons on it. She knows I am asking for control of the TV. Have you ever asked for the key to their truck? I am just not going to give the key to the truck to anybody! I know when you want the key to the truck, you are going to take the key and put it in the ignition, and you will have control over my

truck for a period of time. Have you ever asked someone how much money they have on them? That phrase isn't asking for information; it is saying that whatever money you have on you is now at my disposal and I need it. Why don't we read our Bible that way and understand they use language the same way? If you stand outside the door outside my office and Casey tells you I will be with you in a minute, don't set your watch. She is trying to tell you that I am busy and will get to you as soon as I am free, but it might be a while. How many times have you caught me right before I was going to preach and asked for just a second of my time? Really, you just need a second? No, you are asking for my undivided attention until you get through telling me what you want to tell me. And sometimes, that takes hours!

Three days journey into the wilderness meant we are leaving. We are going on a major trip and when you let us go you will never see us again. Wow! God said..."By the way Moses, make sure you tell the people that they will get paid well for all this labor they have been doing for nothing, because by the time I cause Pharaoh to let them go, the neighbors will give you their jewelry, valuables, and clothes when they see you packing. When you leave, Egypt will be plundered." I would be in, amen! But you know that Moses wasn't in.

You know you are not in, because you still sit here after having a call from God to salvation and to service, and you still say, "Who am I?" You still say you don't know God well enough to represent Him to other people. It's one thing to start out noble, but it will get pathetic next week. It's one thing for God to come in the form of an angel, but another when the same God came down in the person of His Son and put Him on a tree to take the sin of the world upon Himself. Then He called us to be a part of the plan and go and tell others about His Son. Let me close with this thought...What else do you need? That list you have made out; just tear it up and realize that He has said, "I'll be with you." What else do you need?