

"MOSES AT THE BURNING BUSH"

Exodus 3:1

INTRODUCTION:

There is an experience which I doubt not has been the experience of many of us. The first chapter of Exodus pictures a hopeless bondage. The second chapter, a failure and despair. A third chapter, the almighty deliverer appears. The King has died, and darkness, sorrow, and oppression is fast covering Israel. God knew to find a man suited for his gracious purpose.

Moses was now in 80 years of age. But he was not too old for God. He was really more fitted for the work now. He was born in the low lands of Egypt. The child whom men sought to destroy. He died on a mountain top in Moab - buried by the hand of God. He was not destined to live his life in obscurity. And between his birth and his death, for 120 years, full of thrilling incidents.

The family and their descendants enjoyed the hospitality of Goshen. Where Joseph and the family had settled near the Nile. But in the rise and fall of political fortunes, there came to the throne of Egypt the ruler - who knew not Joseph. And who had an evil eye toward the Hebrew refugees. And he was determined to stamp them out. Taskmasters were appointed. They used whips to force them to build cities. One of the cities, Raamses. Named for the ruler's son. But even under this treatment, they continued to grow. And their were attempts to make murderers of the Hebrew's mid-wives. This failed, and the final order - every male child born should be cast into the Nile and drown.

Look at this family of slaves. Amram and Jochebed were already parents of two fine children. And Aaron, Miriam. This was before the evil days. Now they were concerned

about the third child that they were expecting. The tragic decree had been sent out. And they had prayed that it might be a boy. And when the boy was born, they had some careful plans which they tried to carry out. They were able for three months, to hide the baby. But still there was the possibility that the baby would be destroyed. So they proceeded with a plan, a water-proof basket, and they placed this little treasure in the Nile. And left it to the mercies of God. This was a venture of faith.

The precious cargo was placed in the area where Pharoah's daughter was known to bathe. While the mother went home to pray, the sister, Miram remained hidden near-by to watch. She was rewarded. The princess came. And prepared for her bath. It had not taken her long to see the contents in the basket. She was overcome with desire for the child. She could claim him for herself. She took him up in her arms. And about that moment, a Hebrew girl tugged at her skirt. Should she find a nurse among the slaves to take care, of this baby, until the princess was ready to raise him. The idea was appealing. And she accepted the offer. Faith always seeks the wisest plan possible. And never takes (unnecessary) risks. And so, the baby was handed back to the mother, the plan had worked. But the boy was given a name, Moses. (It means drawn out). And it meant her son. When Jochebed and the other members of the family planned for things to happen as they did, they also planned for the second heart-break, which would be a separation for the beloved child. But they acted in hope and faith. And after they had weaned the baby, he was to be handed over to the foster-mother. A new life was to begin for him. He was no longer in a slave's cabin but he was in the Palace. Where he would be trained and educated.

The whole story is faith. The mother training him. She gave him the very best that she had - the best advantages. That is a real mother in action. True mothers are the happiest when they are able to present their children to God for service.

And I can imagine while she attended his clothes and getting him ready in the best, or tucking him in bed, she would tell him -- that all of these blessings were coming to him in answer to her prayers. And to prepare him for a great life of service that Jehovah God might have.

It may be that you will be chosen for our deliverer. Therefore when the boy was old enough, he entered the Palace and then the University. He learned math, astronomy, medicine, government, and all that could be taught to one that was to become the leader and head of a mighty nation. Now this was not by chance, that this happened. And somehow if you can look at your own life, and study some of the keys that unlock the doors to your life, some of the hardships, some of the forms, and if you go back in the past -- you will look and you will say - well, that's just like the history of my life.

I. FAILURE

The story of Moses is a story as you know. First of failure. We sometimes read the stories of these old books and how some individuals live. And the name Moses is a thread that we cannot forget. That in real life - the history of that man. Though it was often dramatic. If you should place yourself along side of Moses for a moment. And try and re-collect and revive the early life - you will have an appreciation of the strange and painful experience of failure.

First, consider his development. There are two great streams of influence in his life. One was, the Egyptians. In his early days. The other was from the Hebrew side. His mother's teachings - when he was drinking his mother's milk. And the other world was a world of majestic power. Of brute force - where the speech less ideals of

Egypt looked down upon him. But on his Hebrew side, there is another thought. There came a belief in the governing providence of God. There was faith, and there was majesty in that force.

Now these two strains - the world and the spiritual are mingled somehow in his life. You know then what took place. It was what might have been expected.

There was satisfaction for while. It was magnificent for a season to live in the life of the Palace. The comforts, the position. All of this thrilled him. By and by, the better part of Moses began to assert itself. And he was drawn from dissatisfaction of the Egyptian life, in the world. And he said to himself, why should this brute power triumph. How do we justify a nation of dictators. Why should one race surpress the other race. Does the heritage of strength carry on obligation, or oppression.

It came into his heart to visit his people. That thrill within his bosom and desire to take up a noble attitude of life.

A second thing in the life of failure was disillusionment. He had general expectations. He goes to visit his people. What does he meet. An experience which goes far to break down young faith.

There is one thing that chills the best aspirations. That is, to be confronted by the world which does not believe in the genuineness of self-sacrifice and love.

When this noble, generous impulse went forth and here was the high-minded and generous devotion of a sturdy faith in manhood. So that when Moses came that day to see the oppressions of the people, the sufferings were painted upon his mind. He saw the injustices.

And this led him to the rash act that caused the post-ponement of the deliverance. He said, I will carry on some improvements and some reforms. The purpose of which he had in view.

But the worst thing about it was it was not viewed this way by the people. When he sought to deliver them, and felt that he ought to get some gratitude for his work, they said to him - wilt thou slay me. As thou didst the Egyptian yesterday.

He thought that men would read his heart as he read it himself. He thought they would have known that his purpose was deliverance and would understand that he was casting in his lot with the people who were opposed and oppressed. And that they would appreciate his self-sacrifice. They did not understand it. Nevertheless and stricken down, into entire disbelief at the generosity of men. They did not believe the devotion of Moses.

What did they expect - better things among themselves. It was only meant with doubt, coldness, and refusal to follow.

Now this failure led him to exile. And an exile which was not simple. An exile in the wilderness of Midian. But an exile from his early dreams and hopes. From the

splendid position that they had in Egypt. Exile from the future that was bright. From the confidence that he once had. And he thought that he would strike a blow for freedom. And now he is in exile - and his highest hopes have come to failure.

II. REVELATION

Now from the failure - we want to take a moment to look into his vision. And the thing that restored his faith and his energy. He was very simple. The best revelations of God sometimes are the simplest.

People who look for wonders will be disappointed. There are those who treated the very familiarity of things of our Lord Jesus - the simple and natural things. The men who have little faith look for wonders. But men whose faith is king, find answers in their faith in everything.

The great secret was the sign of Moses. Only a little bush that burned. Such a thing might have been seen by a shepherd. Pasturing his flock on the hillside, that had taken place because of a prolonged drought. And the burning sun had caused the shrub to dry and to burst into flames. But that which Moses saw was to him a revelation.

He watched the bush resist the fire. The determination not to yield itself. To the devouring elements. And this became a parable.

It burned and yet it lived before his eyes.

He turned aside to see this great sight - why the bush was not consumed.
And in this simple experience, he found God's message.

Now if you follow me, what I am trying to say is -- that you can put your life right along beside Moses in his failures, in his exile. And you can come right along and find some simple truth in which God is giving you a revelation. Now this revelation to Moses was three-fold. It had something to say about permanence, he had something to say about purity,² and had something to say about personal power.³ This was something of the deep meaning of this revelation.

Even a voice obeyed him. Put off your shoes. From off your feet. For the ground that you stand upon is holy ground. The revelation - this voice talking to him about purity. And then about his personal power. That I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac. And this is a startling manifestation. The angel of God appeared to him in the flame of fire, in the midst of a bush.

First, a vision of permanence. Moses was suffering. From that which is a common experience in life. He was exposed to temptation to cry vanity of all vanities. Everything had slipped out of his grasp. A while ago, he had some young dreams. A while ago, his manhood and his noble purposes were before him. Now the temptation was to sit down and to adopt a synagogue attitude in a world where all things change. And where nothing abides. And where it is safest and the wisest to curse and laugh at your existence. And take up the language of despair. And cry out vanity of vanities.

It might be that Moses felt like some people say - my life is just a big joke.

But to Moses, when this revelation came, in the midst of changing things - there is something that must abide. Do not believe that there is no answer to the cry of your heart. Though all things seem to perish. The powers decay. Do not touch everything in your life. There is the unconsumed bush, there in the midst of change, in the decaying world. There is an element of permanence.

But this alone would not satisfy, any human heart. There are hours in which the very permanence of things mock the sorrow of our heart. When our hopes have been devoted to some noble cause, some dream. That has come to our souls. And the power of material things that we have thought were permanent things to console us. And then those whom we have held dear to our hearts, have been taken from our grasp. And we wake up to see in contrast - between the permanent things, the material things, that have been dear to us.

An Italian poet exactly expresses it - he describes a sea fight between vessels on the Blue Sea. The whole world of waters seem for the moment to vibrate with the power of human passion. With the roar of guns and the sky is clouded, and fiery with smoke. Then comes one terrific blaze and the magazines of gun powder explode and nothing is left but the blue sky. The clear calm sea. And all the energies of patriotism, the hopes, the lives, and the fears of the contending crew have gone down beneath the waves. For he says, eternal is nature. And vanishing and passing things are passing beneath the waves. The scene that we are tied up in - this cause looks good. Are we happy in such a picture of permanence, as the hills. And yet these things perish.

The revelation of Moses is that his soul was bound up in the life of Israel. And here he is - on the desert sand. The bush is not consumed. It is a revelation of permanence.

Do we not sometimes make question with ourselves and ask - as many an American today has ask himself, is the great old American way of life of this nation, and this empire, something that we hold dear - to pass away. Following the sad procession of civilization of history that has been dominated from East to West - go to Assayria, Persia, Greece, Egypt, Venice or Rome. Will America follow them to the grave. Morally we are decaying. Will someday travelers conduct tours to the ruins of this land of ours. And they will come to the borough of South Norfolk and say, now this is a memorable old church building here. It is kept up today by the government. Or will they see some other stately buildings. That have been destroyed. Christians arise, in every land, on every hand, every church.

We say that they need not perish.

There are fires which will burn, but the things which are decayed, and purged to dross. The cry of Moses' heart is the cry of every earnest man. There is no need that they should perish. Will the church perish. Will our allegiance perish. If she too is to perish, she need not to perish. There is an eloquence of permanence about this burning bush that is high and is lofty.

Second, purity. We must look beyond this revelation of permanence to purity. Outside of the range of material things, we see intellectual and moral things passing away. Material things seem to remain. But here is a revelation of faith. That in

purity the secret of permanence is found. Now this revelation was given to Moses. Was not simply that of the burning bush.

But the voice said to him, thrust thy hand into thy bosom. And he thrust it in and drew it out leprous. And again, the voice said, thrust thy hand into thy bosom, and drew it out clean. Now the significance is clear - it was the design to remind Moses that the cause for his failure lay not in the want of high purpose. But in the lack of pure methods.

The failure was not the failure of Moses' purpose, nor the high hopes, the cause of failure was within his heart - that it was not right. There was a leper stain within his breast. He understood his soul. He learned the supreme importance of purity. The nation's strength lay in righteousness. He was to teach this to his people. And when he had led the people out from beneath Pharaoh, into the wilderness, he brought them down to the mount of God and there the holy code of moral right - he gave them that which had permanence. Built upon the eternal rock. The law. These Ten Commandments were engrafted into the people's lives. Made part of their aspirations, part of their feelings, their intellect, and their social life. And this was the thing that guaranteed the nation permanence.

It shall be your life if you shall observe and do these things. The vision had taught him that permanence was to be found in purity.

This is true - do you doubt it. Do we doubt it. God shows it to us in an abundant way. Material is permanent - was a mistaken one. The very mountains will

purity. Third, personal power. This is the final thing that we will comment on. Behind the purity is a personal God. Why is this. If I have this moral law, and possession of righteousness that gives permanence, why this personal God behind it. The answer is simple, this comes from Him.

To tell Moses that there was no reason why Israel should perish, because permanence was secure by righteousness, he might well have said -- all hope is gone. But he needed some revelation of power. The answer is that God cares. These people that seem God-forsaken, have yet God as their God.

Righteousness is not a dead letter.

But this expression of living - Moses was led to see that not just a lonely man struggling against the unresponsive hearts of others, but here was a living power of love that was going to co-operate with him, in his aspirations. And here is an echo of the purposes of God. The best sense of a man's inspiration.

The revelation given to Moses is a revelation of God himself. In this lies the guarantee that Moses asked when he said, who am I that I should go. Because the God who sends him is the God of Abraham. God of Isaac, God of Jacob. I am, that I am. I am the God of this people. And they seem to be a God of people with no God. But I am here to regenerate - and it is possible.

This people who did not respond to the appeal of Moses, men who refused to believe him, can yet be stirred up.

The Spirit and the strength of Almighty God may be theirs. They may realize the vision. They may see the revelation. Their hearts may be nerved to co-operate with the prophet. Because the eternal God is with him.

Now this revelation, if you will notice, is very orderly. And very much in succession. Three things. First, there is permanence. Then there is purity. And then there is a personal God.

Now that is the revelation as it comes to man. Your thoughts of God, and the early thoughts which a man tries to seek. He hears him come to a small voice in his conscience. And the trials of life contend for the souls of men. And men cry out, who'll tell me that these eternal hills will perish. Tell me not that the moral laws that hold us can be changed in this world. The answer is, I am God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And it ends in slow degrees that God gives this revelation to Moses.

Now this has new meaning. It is the God who is a consuming fire. The eternal flame - God's righteousness and love burning up, all that can die, and deserves to die. That which is perishable is made to perish. But the eternal element remains, God who enters into lives and nations. Purges them in fire. And our decay in commerce, in wealth, are caught up in flames that will purge away the dross.

You say, who is this for? Is this just an empty dream. Is this revelation just for Moses. Or for men of the past? But it could be for some dwarfed person. One who has

found himself in the wilderness. His early hopes frustrated.

Alton Lock, the poet, wished to go to the South Pacific. And find an inspiration for a song. And this keen Scotchman took him to the slums of the great city. And he said to him, there is poetry there. If you will turn your poet's eye upon it.

Now it is the same thing with religion. There is a very common bush, the light of God. And only those who see it draw up their shoes. It is the old story again. God is in this place.

But you may say, it is worse with me. You don't know what has happened to me. I once had a vision that was mine, and it was dimmed. My heart is numb from it. And I am living in a spirit of wilderness. There is little fruit. And no flowers.

I hope to dedicate and concentrate my life to the service of God someday. I hope to be really active in the church but all of my ventures seem to dry up now. And there are no flowers, and I am in the wilderness.

Do you ever feel a sense of dissatisfaction. Have you not said, I meant to make more of my life. I meant to work more on the purpose of life. I am dissatisfied. What I meant to be, a living agent. I have just become an idol dream. Only look back on my wasted, unprofitable years, and say - whoe is me.

All of the bright, hopeful views have gone. And here is a ship-wreck of things.

It is not - is that not the pain and the failure that you have witnessed. But here is the fire of God - he lets it burn. And this discontent may be revived once more. And God may come.

Let us turn aside to see the great sight about us. We need to give our hearts today, a little time to meet with God. And God will meet with us. We need to give our soul the opportunity to letting the light of God's vision shine upon your own life, let the fire glow and the bush burn. And the revelation will come.

Now in your thought today, you are like Moses. We can achieve something worthy. We can regenerate society. We can become the leaders of the great movement. And we can find strength in God who will help us by your humility. He looks to us and he will give us back our dreams.

I know that you all have excuses just as Moses had, at the burning bush. First, he said, my own unworthiness. V. 11. Who am I, that I should go.

The unbelief of the people. Chapter 4:1. They will not believe me nor harken to my voice.

The infirmities of my body - I am not eloquent and cannot speak. V. 10:4. And even down to the unwillingness of his mind. Oh Lord, send somebody by thy hand.

4:10. But God meets all of these. 4:2-9. The rods was turned into a serpent. A sign of his overcoming power and judgment. Secondly, the leper's hand was healed. The sign of restoring power. And third, the water turned into blood. The sign of his transforming power.

And finally today turn aside, to see this great sight. Bring your need to him. Think of what Moses would have missed if he had passed on by the bush. Turn aside today with some purpose in your life. Moses said, I will seek it out. Turn aside today with Moses and hear God's voice. God seeks and sees every turn we take. And he acts accordingly.