

## HERE AM I, SEND SOMEONE ELSE

Exodus 2, 3

The text on our notice sheet today is from one of the high spots of biblical revelation, the vision of God in Isaiah chapter 6. It was a vision of God in sovereign majesty, in fearful holiness, in overwhelming glory. Isaiah was overcome by a sense of his own sinfulness. He felt guilty. He felt dirty. And in a wonderful way the Lord made him clean and took his guilt away.

The prophet goes on: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

It may seem like a rather flippant, typically 21st century irreverent joke to put that side by side with the title of today's sermon: Here am I. Send someone else. But in fact these words are also taken straight from scripture. We find them in Exodus chapter 3 verse 4 and chapter 4 verse 13. And who spoke these words? They are the words of Moses.

My guess is that today we may find ourselves identifying more with Moses than Isaiah when we hear the call of God. So we're going to stay with Moses.

Exodus chapter 3 begins with a very strange picture. It probably doesn't strike us as strange because we're so familiar with it from Sunday School stories, but this is how it begins: 'Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law.' He was working as a shepherd, looking after sheep.

'What's so strange about that?' you say. Well, it's Moses we're talking about, the Moses who was adopted by the Egyptian Pharaoh's daughter, the Moses who was raised as a prince in Egypt, educated as an Egyptian, groomed for the very highest levels of Egyptian society. And what did the Egyptians think about shepherds? The answer is in Genesis chapter 46 verse 34: 'All shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians.'

Moses was one of the most exceptional human beings who has ever lived. He was immensely gifted and yet he was truly humble. I think one of the ways in which God kept him humble was to make him live with terrible tensions. He was a pure Israelite and yet he had a thoroughly Egyptian upbringing. He was a royal Egyptian prince and yet he found himself working as a detestable shepherd. Concern for his own people was burning in him like a fire and yet he had been forced to flee about two hundred miles away, seemingly a spent force, a damp squib that had failed to go off and had been thrown away.

I think there was tension there. I think there was frustration. And it was all part of God's strategy to bring this firebrand under control, to tame him, to make him humble and usable.

If life seems to have dealt you a tough hand then this message is for you. The tensions and frustrations and sufferings we experience are part of God's strategy to make us fit for his service. Jesus said the same thing, but in a slightly different way. 'Every branch that bears fruit the gardener prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.'

Moses had had ambition. He had been destined for the highest office the world could offer. Now he found himself relegated to the lowest of lowly tasks. 'Now Moses was tending the flock.'

But then something happened. Having been denied the best the world could offer and having been consigned to the worst the world could offer, Moses was suddenly to be confronted by the best that God could offer. 'He led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.'

## GOD'S CALL

It was here that God called to Moses from the burning bush. God's call came to him while he was doing the job God had given him. It was lowly. It was unspectacular. But he was doing it faithfully. Never despise the value of faithfulness in small tasks. Moses was to lead

a flock of sheep before God entrusted him with leading Israel.

God's call was unmistakably clear. If you open your heart to hear God's voice you will hear him speak. Our problem so often is not that God is not speaking but that we are not listening.

God called Moses by name (verse 4). He knows each of us by name. He knows us individually and he knows all about us. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

God challenged Moses to recognise his holiness, verse 5. 'Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.' That was the whole point of the burning bush. Fire purifies and cleanses but it also destroys. In the same way God's holiness draws us and yet has the power to destroy us.

God revealed himself as the God of history, verse 6. 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' These words would also remind Moses of God's covenant promises. But what had happened to those promises? Verses 7 to 9 provide the answer.

Verses 7 and 8 record a series of statements by God: I have seen ... I have heard ... I am concerned ... I have come down to rescue them.' In these words we see a picture of God's saving grace: his compassion, his condescension. 'I have come down.'

God's purpose in salvation is seen in four prepositions: *from*, *up*, *out of* and *into*. His purpose was to rescue his people *from* the hand of the Egyptians, to release them from slavery and misery. His purpose was to bring them *up*. In every sense they were 'down'. God's purpose was to bring them *out*. It was to be a complete deliverance, right out of that land, that awful environment *into* a good and spacious land.

In a far greater salvation in which God came down to us in the person of his Son Jesus Christ, he delivers us out of slavery to sin. Sin always brings us down. God lifts us up. God takes us right out of the ways of sin and evil and brings us into a completely new way of living, the way of love and light and lasting joy. This is the ultimate fulfilment of his promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, blessing for all people everywhere.

The climax of God's call is in verse 10. 'So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.' Go. I am sending you.

### **MOSES' RESPONSE**

What would be Moses' response? Verse 11 'But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"' There's that tension in Moses again. Compare verse 4 with verse 11. 'Here am I ... Who am I?' He was ready and yet reluctant. Everyone who has heard the call of God has experienced this tension, that readiness and yet that reluctance.

Verse 11 is the first of five excuses which Moses made to God. The second is in verse 13. The third is in chapter 4 verse 1. The fourth is in verse 10. And the last piece of almost pathetic resistance is in verse 13. 'O Lord, please send someone else...'

God was like a great fisherman. Moses was on the hook but he was trying every way he could to get off the hook. But for every excuse which Moses made God had an answer.

Chapter 3 verse 12: 'I will be with you.' Verse 14: 'I AM has sent me to you.' Chapter 4 verse 2: 'What is that in your hand?' Verses 2 to 9 describe three miracles which God was able to perform. Verse 12: 'I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.'

Finally, when all Moses' excuses ran out and all he could say was, 'Send someone else,' God was angry. God did send someone else, Aaron, but he didn't let Moses off the hook.

God's call: God's holiness: God's love: God's power: God's patience.