

EXODUS 3:1-4 “HERE I AM”

Have you ever been to the Museum Center in Cincinnati? It's in the old Union Terminal - a terminal for train passengers, kind of like the airport terminals we use today. The Museum Center has some neat museums, but maybe the neatest part about the building is the huge arched entryway. Just as you enter the building, you can go to one corner of the room, and send your friend to the other corner of the room. You can then speak very quietly, and the acoustics of the archway will allow you to hear each other, even though you are probably a hundred yards apart in a very loud building. Your friend speaks, and you respond.

In Exodus 3, God speaks to Moses. Moses responds, “Here I am.” So we wonder, what is the call of God all about? Maybe it is God's call to full-time ministry. Maybe it is God's call to be a missionary in another land. Maybe it is God's call to lead in the church. Maybe it is God's call to participate in a ministry of the church. Maybe it is God's call to serve in the community. Maybe it is God's call to deeply love someone who needs to know Christ or grow in Christ.

I was asked, and so I ask you, are we ready to hear and heed God's call? What can we do to be ready? How can we say with Moses, “Here I am”? Do you know that this should be the heartfelt desire of every Christian? If you are a genuine believer in Jesus Christ, he is your Savior and your Master. If he calls you to serve him, you will long to say, “Here I am!”

I have chosen the story of Moses, because I think it illustrates some valuable principles for us. When we read stories like this in the Bible, we cannot and should not assume our experience will be exactly like the person in the story. But when the story reminds us of truths we see in the rest of the Bible, we can see our story in that story.

So here is Moses. He and God's people, the children of Abraham, are in slavery in Egypt. God calls Moses to lead God's people out of Egypt - first to worship, then to go to the land God promised to Abraham. Let's use questions and answers to enter this story and make it our own.

First, **WHAT STOPS US?** What hinders us from saying, “Here I am”? Maybe our heritage. Maybe our baggage. Maybe our courage.

Sometimes *OUR HERITAGE* stops us. We know where we have come from, and we believe our heritage means God cannot or will not use us. Moses was born a Hebrew, and he had to be rescued by the Pharaoh's daughter, because when he was born, the Pharaoh wanted all the Hebrew infant boys killed. He is part of an enslaved and oppressed people. He should not even be alive. With this heritage, how can he challenge the leader of the entire nation of Egypt?

Might your heritage stop you? As part of my wife's job, she interviews students and parents who want to enter the Richmond school district's early college program. It is designed for students who would be “first generation” college students. Part of the challenge is to convince these kids that they can go to college, because their heritage may persuade them otherwise. They may say, “I can't go to college. No one in my family has ever gone to college.”

Maybe you think of hearing and heeding God's call, and you think, “God can't use me.” I am not from a long line of Christians. Or I did not grow up in the church. Or I was raised by parents with strange beliefs. Or I have not gone to seminary. Or I am not as smart as other people. Or I grew up in a broken home. Because of my heritage, I do not believe I can do this.

Sometimes *OUR BAGGAGE* stops us. We think of what we have done, and we believe our baggage means God cannot or will not use us. Years before this, Moses saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, and he killed the Egyptian. He then had to flee Egypt. Was he right or wrong in this killing? We can't be sure, but we can be sure it would not look good on his resume.

Might your baggage stop you? The playwright Arthur Miller, as he neared the end of what seemed to be a Christless life, said, “Maybe all one can do is hope to end up with the right regrets.” What hopeless

words! You will have regrets, and you can do nothing to be rid of your regrets, and all you can hope is that your regrets are not as bad as the regrets of others.

Maybe you think of hearing and heeding God's call, and you think, "God won't use me." He knows what I did when I was young, so how can I minister to young people? He knows how I continue to fail, so how can I teach others? He knows what other people know, and he knows what other people will never know, so am I being a hypocrite by trying to serve God? I feel guilt, regret and shame for who I am and what I have done, so God better find someone else. Because of my baggage, I do not believe I can do this.

Sometimes *OUR COURAGE* stops us. We think of what may happen, and we believe we lack the courage for God to use us. After God reveals himself to Moses, Moses offers several objections. What if they don't believe me when I tell them about you? Why do you think I can do this, since I have never been a good speaker? Can't you just send someone else?

Moses fears people. He is afraid of Pharaoh, and he seems to be especially afraid of the other Israelites. I once read that the English word "fear" comes from an old English word that means "a sudden attack." It is like when you walk through your neighborhood, and you are afraid a dog will come from nowhere and suddenly attack you. This is what we seem to see in Moses.

Maybe you think of hearing and heeding God's call, and you think, "God, don't use me." I am afraid of what my friends will think, if I stand for truth in school. I am afraid of what my co-workers will think, if I resist the culture of gossip. I am afraid of what my parents will think, if I worship every week. I am afraid of what my children will think, if I start taking seminary classes. I am afraid of what my husband or wife will think, if I minister to that young believer. I am also afraid of what they will do. Because of my courage, I do not believe I can do this.

Our heritage. Our baggage. Our courage. The gospel speaks to each of these stop signs.

The gospel is for all sorts of people from all sorts of backgrounds. When we read the gospels, we see Jesus talking to all sorts of people. In Paul's letters, he writes against the snobbery of those who believe the gospel is just for a certain kind of person. No matter your heritage, you can come to Jesus in faith, and you can hear and heed his call to serve him.

The gospel is for people with guilt, shame and regret. Jesus said he did not come to call the righteous - those who think they are good. Jesus came to call the sick - those who know they are sinful people who need a Savior. No matter your baggage, you can come to Jesus in faith, and you can hear and heed his call to serve him.

The gospel is for people who fear people. Jesus said you should not fear people who may hurt your body. You should fear only the God who can send your soul to hell. But because of Jesus, he won't do that, so your fear is trusting fear, not terrified fear. No matter what weakens your courage, you can come to Jesus in faith, and you can hear and heed his call to serve him.

What stops us? Heritage, baggage and courage. **WHAT FREES US?** What frees us to hear and heed God's call? We have started to see this in those gospel truths, but let's discover this in the life of Moses. As he sees and knows his good and great God, he is free to say, "Here I am."

A GOOD GOD frees us. At the end of chapter 2, we read that God hears the groaning of his people, and he remembers his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Then in chapter 3, as God speaks to Moses, he tells Moses that he has seen the misery of his people, he has heard their cries, he is concerned for their suffering, and he has come to rescue them.

God gives Moses a vision of his goodness. God shows Moses how much he loves his people, and how much he loves to be good to his people. As God's heart becomes our heart, we are ready and able to hear and heed God's call.

This is important, because we have to be sure our sense of call is not just another form of pride. Jonathan Edwards called pride the "worst viper that is in the heart." It is like a snake. You may not like snakes for a lot of reasons, but snakes really bother us because they slither into where we are or what we have, without us ever knowing it. It is the same with pride.

The viper of pride enters here, when we think we are following God's call, and we are really just doing something to puff up our pride. I will enter full-time ministry, and people will see how much I love God. I will do this ministry in the church, so that I can demonstrate how much I care about this place. I will love this person, so people will love me. I will make a stand for Jesus Christ in the public schools, so people will see how strong I am.

It is pride. It is a viper that God does not need, and God does not want. Do you realize that God cares about his kingdom and his people far more than you do? He doesn't need you, and he doesn't need your pride. He doesn't need you to do his work, to prove how good you are. We are truly free to truly answer God's call, only when we are following his heart.

How do we know the difference? It is not always easy. But here is a question to test this: am I willing to serve God in this way, whether or not people notice or approve? Am I willing to preach the Word, whether or not you praise me? Am I willing to serve that meal at the soup kitchen, whether or not anyone thanks me? Am I willing to minister to that person in need, even if no one ever knows? Am I willing to give up my job and go to seminary or the mission field, even if people think I am crazy? If I lust for praise or thanks or attention or approval, I may be simply feeding my own pride. But when this good God places something on my heart, and I know it is from his heart of goodness, I am confident it is good for me to hear and heed this call.

What frees us? A good God. What else frees us? *A GREAT GOD*. Notice his greatness!

* He appears in a bush that burns, but is not consumed.

* He orders Moses to remove his sandals, because he is there - so Moses is on holy ground.

* He declares to Moses that "I AM WHO I AM." He is the everlasting God - the sovereign ruler over all he has made. The Creator - not the created. The Master - not the servant.

* He displays this greatness to Moses with three signs - a staff that turns into a snake, a hand that turns leprous and then is healed, and water that turns into blood.

God is demonstrating his greatness to Moses. We wish he would speak to us this way, and show us these neat signs. But notice that even with these signs, Moses still struggles to trust God. We think if we just had these signs, then we would trust God and do whatever he calls us to do. But instead, we need hearts that believe in his amazing greatness, whether or not we see what Moses saw. Then our hearts are ready to hear and heed his call.

Several years ago, in a small town in Ohio, an evangelist was preaching. He wanted the people to repent of their sins, so he asked for a sign from God. At that moment, a lightning bolt struck the church's steeple. The church caught fire and suffered 20-thousand dollars damage.

Is that the sign we want? Is that the sign we need? No! We need the sign that Jesus talked about - the sign that on the third day, he would be raised from the dead. We have it! We know the amazing greatness of our God, because we know Jesus has conquered death.

Why serve a small God? If God is just a little bigger than you, you will never hear or heed a call to serve him. The great God we worship is worthy of anything he calls us to do, and we are made bold to serve him as we see and sense his greatness. You don't need a lightning bolt. You need an empty tomb. Be amazed, and be open to hear and heed God's call.

What frees us? A good and great God. Always remember and never forget this: every genuine Christian call is absolutely, positively, magnificently centered on God. It is not about me and what I can or cannot do. We glory in the goodness and the greatness of God, and God uses that to stir our hearts and spur our hands to serve him.

What would lead a man to uproot his family and take them to more education or a mission field? The goodness and greatness of God. What would urge a man to become a leader in the church, with all of the sacrifice of time and energy and hassle? The goodness and greatness of God. What would drive you to participate in a ministry of the church? The goodness and greatness of God. What would embolden you to serve in this community, in the name of Jesus? The goodness and greatness of God. What would free you to

give your heart to the heart of a hurting person? The goodness and greatness of God. Nothing more, and nothing less. Moses didn't need new eyes. He needed a new heart. So do we.

What stops us? Our heritage, our baggage, and our courage. What frees us? Our good and great God. **SO WHAT DO WE DO?** As you read the story of Moses, you realize God spent a long time preparing Moses. This does not mean we have to wait forty or eighty years to hear and heed God's call! But it does mean that we have to cultivate heart habits that will prepare us for what God calls us to do. What are those heart habits? A daily walk, and a daily willingness.

Let's jump ahead to Galatians 5 to ponder this *DAILY WALK*. There Paul calls his readers to live by the Spirit, so that we do not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. Paul is well aware of the tug of our hearts. We should want to hear and heed God's call, but often we do not. So he urges his readers to faithfully and consistently walk through life, close to God's Spirit.

How do we do this? We use the tools he provides to enable us to remain close to him. We use the Word of God, prayer and worship. With the Word, God speaks to us. With prayer, we speak to God. In worship, God speaks to us and we speak to God.

Married people, I have a question for you. Do you know your spouse? I hope so. If the answer is yes, it is because you have been with your spouse in all sorts of situations. Whether it is a birthday celebration or an overnight sickness or just the routines of life, you know your spouse because you have steadily spent a lot of time with your spouse.

In the same way, you know God as you walk with him every day. This is the heart of the Christian - I want to know Christ, better and better. I have warned you that I have said this before and I will say it again: the most mature Christians, the ones who produce the most spiritual fruit, are the people who walk daily with God. As you walk with him, he reveals more of his goodness and greatness. He frees you from the shackles of a tough heritage, heavy baggage, and weak courage. He tunes your heart to his heart, so that when he calls, you hear it and heed it.

Are you walking daily with God, in the Word and prayer? Is worship central to your life? At the Museum Center, you can't hear your friend unless you put your ear in the right place. Is your daily walk putting your heart where it needs to be?

That daily walk will develop a second heart habit: *A DAILY WILLINGNESS*. In Galatians 5, Paul also writes that those who belong to Christ have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. This is both a secure reality, and an ongoing call. We live in a world that does us no favors. We have so many opportunities, and so many distractions. Our hearts are like little Gumbys, being stretched in every direction. In our culture of prosperity, it is easy to settle into a comfortable life, where we are too busy and too amused to hear or heed the call of God.

That is why every day, we need to emphasize and express a willingness to put to death what we should not love, and to offer all we have, all we are, and all we ever hope to be, back to the Lord. Do you ever do that? Or do you have the whole rest of your life planned out? I will do this. I will live here. I will enjoy that. I will serve in this way, but no other way. I, I, I.

This is the heart of the willing Christian: "God, give me grace to be faithful to you today, and give me wisdom to follow you tomorrow. I know much about now, but I don't know much about later, and I want to hear and heed your call to me, whatever that is, wherever that is, whenever that is."

Believer in Jesus, God blesses this. He opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. He delights in those who delight in him in their daily walk, and he is rich in blessing for those who profess and express a daily willingness and say, "Not my will, but your will. Not my plans, but your plans. Not my agenda, but your agenda. Not my call, but your call."

I think of my wife. Since I have known her, she has known Jesus. But over the years, I have seen her turn into a woman with a daily walk and a daily willingness. I have watched this "non-morning" person re-shape her life so that now she is daily walking first with the Lord, and I have seen her willingness grow so much that she is

now in a place she said she would never go: Africa.

I think of my wife, and I think of myself, and I think of you. We don't need burning bushes or lightning bolts. We need to daily walk with the risen Jesus, and we need a daily willingness to follow him. What will a good and great God do, with a heart that beats for him? Are you ready to hear and heed his call?