

# Journey to Freedom.

## PART VI

### Introduction

We're continuing with our "Journey to Freedom" series this morning as we make our way through the book of Exodus in the Old Testament.

This morning we're going to continue together with Part 6 in our *Journey to Freedom*.

Exodus is a book about God revealing Himself to humans; making Himself known, making His desires and priorities and plans known, making enough about Him known so that people can approach God and experience interaction and a relationship with Him.

Today we're going to look at the first direct interaction between God and Moses and we can learn some fascinating things about how we go about seeking God, about where we stand in relation to God and where we can expect to 'find' God.

Let's turn in our Bibles to the text for today:

### Scripture – Exodus 3:1-6

<sup>NIV</sup> **Exodus 3:1** Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup> There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. <sup>3</sup> So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight-- why the bush does not burn up." <sup>4</sup> When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." <sup>5</sup> "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." <sup>6</sup> Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

## Overview

We've called this series of messages *Journey to Freedom* as the focus of Exodus is God redeeming the Israelites from slavery and bringing them into freedom. This is one of the enduring characteristics of God and this passage, I believe, reveals some amazing truths that can bring freedom to a whole other area of our lives.

The first thing that we can notice in this passage is that God revealed Himself through something seemingly INSIGNIFICANT. A burning bush is not an unusual sight in the wilderness; it's hot and dry and things burn. Of course, what was unusual was that it did not burn up but continued burning. Regardless, God was present in the INSIGNIFICANT. God revealed Himself in the ordinary, the everyday, the uncomplicated and natural world of Moses.

The second point I'd like to highlight is that initially we read that the "Angel of the Lord" appeared in the bush and it wasn't until Moses went over that God spoke to him and revealed Himself to Moses. God responded when Moses was INQUISITIVE. Moses recognised that 'something' was different about this everyday and normal burning bush and God revealed Himself to Moses because Moses was INQUISITIVE.

The last aspect we'll look at today is that when God introduced Himself He was INTIMATE. God revealed Himself as the God of Moses' father. He set the boundaries and maintained His holiness but God demonstrated a desire to have an INTIMATE relationship with Moses.

## Insignificant

One of the things I find fascinating about Church History is the amount of things we yo-yo on – going from one extreme to the other. Rectifying an excess on one level and then ending up at the polar opposite of where we'd intended to be.

One example of this is the two extremes of religious, well, let's call it paraphernalia, as opposed to asceticism – which is the whole monk thing in solitude with no possessions.

It is the cathedral in the city versus the cave in the desert.

In Jesus' day there were groups already doing this; on the one hand there was the glory and the splendour of the temple and all the rituals and special clothing and procedures – all stuff which God had commanded – and on the other hand there were people like John the Baptist who denounced all that and lived in the wilderness eating bugs and wearing animal skins – again, this was something in-line with God's desires.

Hundreds of years later, there was an identical scene where these huge cathedrals were being built complete with new ceremonies and rituals and then there were groups of monks living in cells or caves or on top of poles to try and reconnect with God away from all that carry on.

There are examples right throughout history of these two extremes and, I guess, today we could say that with all our lights and sound and technology that this is the modern day cathedral and just like a cathedral there are some really awesome things about the way we 'do' Church and they're all intended to help us connect with God in a way that we can relate to. The danger comes when we begin to forget that we actually don't need all this 'stuff' to hear from God or to worship God or to experience God.

This isn't something I believe we're in danger of doing, but, I think we can easily forget to find God in all the other areas of our life too.

NIV **Exodus 3:1** Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.<sup>2</sup> There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.

Moses grew up in Egypt with all its amazing temples to the various Egyptian gods and all the priests and rituals and sacrifices and worship and ceremonies and wealth and splendour and here he ends up, more than forty years later, on the far side of the desert away from his adopted home and family, hanging out with a bunch of sheep and he finds God in a plain old, boring burning bush.

Actually, one of my commentaries on this says that not only was a burning bush an insignificant sight, it was possibly despised. I guess in a wilderness area any form of vegetation is precious and, perhaps, a burning bush could spread, or maybe it scared the sheep – regardless of the reason this raises another interesting aspect about the way God works or reveals himself.

Moses grew up as an Egyptian and ends up becoming a shepherd. The ancient Egyptians despised shepherds and they were segregated from 'decent' society. Later on in Exodus we'll see Moses, a shepherd, rocking on up to the Royal Palace and telling Pharaoh that God says he's got to let his entire public works crew go.

Throughout the Bible there is this consistent pattern of God using the mundane, the ordinary, even the despised and insignificant to change the world.

One thing I believe we can be encouraged and reminded to do is to, by all means, enjoy and thrive on the opportunities and freedom we have to enjoy and worship and experience God when we meet together like today – but don't forget to look for God in the INSIGNIFICANT things in life too.

NIV **1 Corinthians 1:27** But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

We can add that God chooses the INSIGNIFICANT things of the world to speak to those who are INQUISITIVE.

## Inquisitive

And that's our second point this morning.

God chooses the INSIGNIFICANT things of the world to speak to those who are INQUISITIVE.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Exodus 3:4** When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am."

Initially it was the Angel of the Lord who appeared in the burning bush. The meaning of this phrase is quite probably that the Angel appeared in the form of flames in the bush.

And that was it, just a burning bush, *until* Moses went over to have a look and then God spoke.

God revealed a hint of something different, something special in the burning bush, but nothing over-the-top. And when Moses took an interest, when Moses was inquisitive, then God revealed Himself.

We see that Moses had to be observant of his surroundings, aware of his environment. He must have actually spent some time observing the burning bush before realising that it wasn't going to burn out.

When we're talking about the insignificant or ordinary and everyday things in life – I wonder if, perhaps, this is a hint to us to look closer. Now, I'm not suggesting that if we stare at something long enough it will miraculously turn into something spectacular – but I wonder if there aren't 'burning bushes' all around us but either they don't seem special enough to grab our attention or perhaps we don't spend the time actually observing our environment long enough to notice that what seems to be rather ordinary has an air of wonder about it.

We can't make God reveal Himself to us but we know that it is His desire to do so anyway. What we can do is ensure we are observant enough to notice what's going on around us and INQUISITIVE enough to pursue those seemingly insignificant things which may turn out to be God speaking to us.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Psalms 14:2** The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.

There's this sense that God puts out 'teasers' I guess you could say and then waits and sees who will respond, who will inquire, who will investigate and then He reveals Himself more fully.

Being INQUISITIVE demonstrates a hunger and a desire for more of God. Being prepared to seek God and to expecting to find Him and hear from Him in all and any situation often leads to a burning bush that is far more interesting than it first appeared.

## Intimate

The final thing we're going to look at in relation to this passage this morning is a wonderful example of what I find the most beautiful paradox in the entire universe.

It's what Matt Redman describes as the "Friendship and the Fear" of God.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Exodus 3:5** "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." <sup>6</sup> Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

One thing that many people get a bit nervous about in regards to seeking God is how far they can go or what might happen or what if they do something wrong and so on.

In this passage we see that Moses was, essentially, ignorant about God but was inquisitive and so sought Him out. God then set the boundaries for Moses and let Him know where he stood in relation to God.

God said "Don't come any closer" and set guidelines for how Moses was to interact with Him. This reveals the holiness and awesomeness and reverence of God.

God then introduces Himself by saying that He is the God of Moses' father and his ancestors. What this illustrates is a beautiful concept with God who is holy and by nature unapproachable and to be revered, but who also desires to be INTIMATE with us.

"Hey Moses, I know your old man" is, in this sense, what God is conveying to Moses.

There's this sense of familiarity and security, even though, seemingly paradoxically, there exists this holiness and need to have the utmost respect and reverence of God.

The Friendship and the Fear. Intimacy with Almighty God.

## Conclusion

This passage in Exodus teaches us that God exists in every facet of our worlds and is often revealed more clearly in the seemingly INSIGNIFICANT aspects of our life, world and experiences.

If we truly desire to experience more of God and are seeking a greater revelation of Him then the account of the burning bush reveals that we must be INQUISITIVE, maintaining a consciousness of God at all times and being prepared to be aware of what may be going on around us at any given time and then decide to pursue those events or situations or experiences that seem to have more there than meets the eye.

Lastly, we need not be afraid of making a wrong step when we're truly seeking after God – if we listen He will guide us, He will put up the stop signs and red lights and boundaries and let us know if we've reached a point where we are to come no further, however, in all our dealings with Him, God desires that our relationship be INTIMATE and close.