

October 13, 2019

Called
God Calls Moses
Exodus 3:1-10

Opening words: This is the definition of called: (according to CRU, formally Campus Crusade for Christ) Calling, is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion, dynamism, and direction lived out as a response to his summons and service. That definition reminds me of my calling. Personally, I have never questioned my calling. It is my greatest resource. I am both humbled and proud that God called me, with my unique combination of strengths and weaknesses. My calling is a big part of my personal identity. Daily, I am reminded I am paid by this congregation and serve within the United Methodist system, but I work for God. Let me say this clearly. You don't want a minister who hasn't been called.

In this sermon series we are looking at Old Testament characters who God called. We began by looking at Abraham's call. In his story we talked about purpose. Then, we looked at Samuel's call. In his story we talked about positioning ourselves to hear God. Then, we look at Jonah's call, "The Reluctant Prophet." In his story we found the themes of faithfulness and evangelism. Last week, we looked at Isaiah's call. The theme was making yourself available to God. Today, we look at Moses's calling. Our scripture reading for today is Exodus 3:1-10. Let me call this message *God Calls Moses*.

Exodus 3:1-10 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 wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² 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. ³ So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."

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."

⁵ "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ Then he said, "I am the God of your father, ^[a] 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.

⁷ The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way

the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was a Danish philosopher, theologian, poet, and social critic. He once said, *"The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays."* He is right. If you find some truth in that quote say, **"Amen!"**

We find ourselves today in the third chapter of Exodus. However, the story of Moses began in the first chapter of Exodus. You remember the story because you have seen the movie. Joseph's descendants, the Hebrews, were living in Egypt. They went to that foreign land to escape a great drought as favored people, but, in time, that status was replaced by slavery. The lives of God's Chosen People were hard, and they cried to God for help. Little did they know their relief would come from one of their own. Moses was born a Hebrew, yet he was raised in the palace of the Pharaoh. He should have had a good life, but it didn't happen that way. He takes a life and runs into the wilderness to escape the law. That is where we find him today.

According to the text, Moses had to re-established himself in that foreign land. He is married and working for his father-in-law. His occupation is a shepherd. One day while at work, he leads the sheep to a remote area. It is in that secluded area that the miraculous happens. There was a burning bush that was not being consumed by the flames. When Moses goes to examine the bush, God, Himself, began to speak to him. The Almighty tells Moses three things. First, he tells Moses to remove his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. Second, he tells Moses he is the God of his ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Third, he tells him he has heard the cries of his people, who are enslaved in Egypt. Let me say that another way. God heard the prayers of his people, who are enslaved in Egypt. That means God's Chosen People had not been praying to a deaf God. The Almighty heard their prayers and He hears our prayers too. If you are thankful God hears your prayers say, **"Amen!"** This is the problem, God may hear our prayers, but he does not always answer our prayers in a way we desire.

Luis Palau (born 1934) is an international evangelist, who had a close relationship with Billy Graham (1918-2018). He was born in Argentina, but today he lives in Portland, Oregon. He writes for Christianity Today. He says there are five different ways God answers our prayers. Consider these with me.

Yes, I thought you would never ask. Sometimes God answers our prayers yes, I thought you would never ask. Ron Wheeler is a Christian cartoonist. He prayed for a new computer to create his own evangelist tracts. Two weeks later, a friend offered him a new computer. A short time later The American Tract Society called to offer him a job. Wouldn't it be great if God answered our prayers that way all the time? Sometimes God answers our prayers yes, I thought you would never ask.

Yes, and there is more. Sometimes God answers our prayers yes, and there is more. David Smallbone was a bankrupt musician in Nashville, Tennessee. One day, he, his wife and six children prayed for help. It was at that moment things began to change for the better. They started to receive things to survive. However, the best change came through his fifteen-year-old daughter, Rebecca. She received a recording contract. Today, David promotes his daughters sold out concerts. Rebecca St. James is a bright light in Christian music. Sometimes God answers our prayers yes, and there is more.

Yes, but not what you expected. Sometimes God answers our prayers with a yes, but not in the way you expect. Sherman Smith was a Christian running back for the Seattle Seahawks. He was a local celebrity in Seattle, which made his trade to the San Diego Chargers hard to accept. A few weeks after the trade, he hurt his knee, and Smith wondered why he was traded. He got his answer when he led fellow player Miles McPherson to Christ. McPherson became a youth evangelist and has led thousands of youth to Christ. Sometimes God answers our prayers with a yes, but not in the way you expect.

Yes, but wait. Sometimes God answers our prayer with a yes but wait. Recently, I read a story about a young woman, not yet thirty years old, who suffered daily with seizures. Her husband felt helpless and prayed for a healing daily. One night he was out in their backyard pacing and praying. At one point he fell to his knees and asked God to help his wife. Suddenly a doctor's name popped into his mind. He found the doctor and made an appointment for his wife. That doctor discovered her seizures were cause by a certain chemical imbalance. Today, that woman lives seizure free. Sometimes God answers our prayer with a yes but wait.

No. Sometimes God says, "no," because our prayers are ridiculous and selfish. We pray to win the lottery, or we pray for a date with a special love interest, or we pray for our favorite team to win. Sometimes, God says, "no," and our prayers are genuine and heartfelt. How many healing prayers have you uttered for a sick loved one and the person dies? It is at that time we have no other option, but to trust God. The spiritually mature accept no, because they know death is a better option than life. The spiritually immature grow mad at God. The Apostle Paul was spiritually mature. When he wrote Philippians 1:23, he was torn between what was better, life or death? Do you remember that verse? It says, *"I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is by far better.* Sometimes God answers our prayers with a no.

This is the problem. Many misunderstand prayer. Prayer isn't about getting what you desire. God does not need our advice about running the universe. You are not going to change God's mind. Prayer is about spending time with God and if you spend time with God you will change. Are you more interested in changing God's mind or changing yourself?

Your attitude about prayer should be the same as Bobby Richardson (born 1935). He played second base for the New York Yankees from 1955 to 1966. He was once asked to speak at a meeting of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He prayed this short and poignant prayer:

Dear God, Your will, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Amen.

However, let's be honest. Isn't it wonderful when God answers yes! If you agree it is more fun when God says, "Yes," say, **"Amen!"**

There is a story which echoes through the halls of this church late at night. It changed this church and it changed me. It all began on an Easter morning. After the final service I stood in the back and dismissed everyone. When the last few remained, a young couple walked up to me. They were strangers, with a little girl in tow and a baby in arms. Physically spent, the father asked me to pray for his son. I will be the first to admit, I didn't completely understand the medical condition. In layman's terms, the baby head was growing too fast. All the father wanted was for his son to live a full normal life. In the next few minutes, I prayed with the couple and arranged a home visit. A few days later I was in their home and prayed for the child once again. They thanked me for my time, and I said, "We can do better. Can you bring the child to church, so the entire congregation can pray for him?" They agreed and a few days later they arrived at church. Before I uttered the pastoral prayer, I told the congregation the baby's story. I confessed, I really didn't know the family well, but the baby needed our prayers. I looked at the congregation and said, "I was looking for prayer warriors to help this baby." I didn't know how the congregation would respond. Their response surprised me. It seemed like the whole church stood up to pray for the infant. I remember laying my hands on his head and others pressed forward to touch him. Those who could not touch the baby placed their hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them. The spirit was so genuine, the Holy Spirit began to leak into our prayer. When we ended with the Lord's Prayer, the Holy Spirit poured over us. When the prayer ended, we all returned to our seats and I prepared to preach. My message was not necessary that day, because we all had experienced God and knew God had touched the baby. Can I tell you the truth? That has been my most humbling experience in the ministry. How powerful was the Holy Spirit that day? The next week, a woman came up to me and asked, "I wasn't here last week, but what happened? I feel the change in this church." She was right. This church had changed. I changed too. I can still feel the Holy Spirit in this place.

The day after the miracle, I had a funeral in the morning, so I drove to Cleveland for the baby's surgery in the afternoon. By the time I arrived, the surgery was over. I was told by the woman at the information desk his room number. When I found the room, I was there alone. A few seconds later they wheeled the baby in a crib into the room. I was expecting to find all the intimidating hospital equipment, but there was none. The

only sign of a procedure was a small band-aide on the back of his head. The baby reached through the bars of crib and stuck out his finger to touch mine. When I touch his finger it was like touching God's finger. Later, I was told the doctors were shocked he was treated so easily. I wasn't surprised because I knew God had heard our prayers. Do you know where that baby is today. The father got what he wanted. His son is living full normal life. In the last few months, the baby, now a man, graduated from college and last week he began a new job as a chemist.

I can't guarantee God will always answer your prayers with a yes. However, I can guarantee you that God hears your prayers. God heard the prayers of the Hebrews and he hears our prayers too. Do you remember what Kierkegaard said? He once said, "*The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays.*" And, all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" I know that quote is true because it happened to me.