**Session 5: Week 3b**

***God of Deliverance***

**Start at 13:30**

**Exodus 3:1-22**

**12-13 September 2022**

**Slowing the Narrative** – Exodus chapter three begins by telling us that Moses led his flock to Mount Horeb, which is another name for Mount Sinai. This is a very significant setting: it is where Moses is to bring the people of Israel when they come out of Egypt, and it is where the Law will be given to them. The narrative slows down greatly at this point. The first two chapters cover about 80 years in the life of Moses; chapters 3-18 cover only about two and a half months! [Commentators tell us that the time between Passover and arriving at Sinai and receiving the Law is a period of about 50 days. When you add in the time needed for the ten plagues to happen, you get roughly two and a half months.]

**An Object Lesson: the Burning Bush** – Moses is doing what he will be doing for the rest of this book and most of the rest of the Pentateuch: he is leading his flock in the wilderness towards Sinai. There he encounters a bush which is on fire, yet isn’t being burned up. This event is a *theophany*, i.e. God taking on a physical form to reveal something that is true about Him. The fact that the bush is not consumed conveys that God is *self-existent* (nothing gives Him life but He gives life to all). It is a picture of His *self-sufficiency* (He needs nothing from anyone); and it is a picture of His *eternality*.

**Familiarity** – When God calls out, “Moses, Moses!” He is showing a *deep familiarity* with Moses, and that Moses is a special person to Him. (Think about God calling out, “Samuel, Samuel!” and of people in the end times who will cry out, “Lord, Lord!” In the case of Moses and Samuel, God indicates that He is intimately acquainted with them; He knows them through and through. But the people in the end times were just feigning a close relationship with God that had no basis in reality.”)

**The Significance of Feet and Sandals** – When God reveals Himself to Moses and tells him to remove his sandals because he is standing on holy ground, Moses hides his face. This is an appropriate response and shows that Moses now understands that he has come face to face with God Himself. But why did God command him to remove his sandals? Our feet, in biblical imagery, are a sign of our creatureliness, showing that we are created, while God is not. Our feet are what connect us to the dust to which our bodies will one day return. So when God says, “Take off your shoes”, He isn’t just implying, “Give me the reverence due Me.” He is saying, “Remember where you came from.” The fact that Moses is now barefoot before the Lord reveals something about how he is to serve Him: not with the velvet slippers of a prince, or even the practical sandals of a shepherd, but with the bare feet of a *servant*.

**Delivery and Restoration –** In verse six God tells Moses that He is the God—not just of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—but also of *“your father”*, i.e. Amram. He wants to link Moses to his heritage and remind him that he is *not* the son of Pharaoh. God places himself at the center of the narrative seven times in verses six to ten. In so doing, He has reiterated that the Midwife of heaven has heard the cries of His people, and that labor has begun.

**A Broad Land, Flowing with Milk and Honey –** When God describes the land of Canaan as a “land flowing with milk and honey”, He intends to make Moses—and the original audience—think of the Garden of Eden. That is, God is not only promising to *deliver* the people, but also to *restore* them. He also describes Canaan as a “good and *broad* land”, which would have had special significance to Moses’ original audience. The name for Egypt is “Mizraim”, which means “a tight, cramped, narrow place”. So the children of Israel are presently in the birth canal of Egypt, a tight, cramped, narrow place. But they will soon be delivered and come out into a good and broad place.

**What’s in a Name? –** Birth metaphors fill this narrative. The Chief Midwife has delegated the work of delivery to His under midwife, Moses. But Moses responds with “Who am I, that I should do this?” He is focusing on himself and his feelings of inadequacy. God’s response to this is to restore Himself to the center of the narrative: “I will be with you.” Moses’ next request if for God to reveal His name, which God does by saying, “Yahweh…I am who I am.” The name Yahweh can also be translated, “I will be who I will be” and, significantly, *“I cause to be what is.”* God is saying something about Himself that none of us can ever say. We are all, as A.W. Tozer put it, contingent and derived creatures. We can only say, “I am because He is.”

**Importance of Repetition –** We as modern day readers may get a little bored with all the word for word repetition found in Moses’ writings (e.g. 3:6, 15, and 16. Also 3:8 and17). But remember that most of the people of Moses’ day did not have written scriptures, and so all this repetition was a gift to them, so the truths of the Word would stick in their minds. The use of formulaic phrases allowed them to hold God’s promises in their hearts, even though they had never had opportunity to read any of them.

**Bargaining with Pharaoh –** Were you surprised at the way the request to Pharaoh was worded in verse 18: “Let us go *a* *three days’ journey* into the wilderness”? This is an example of an ancient Near-Eastern bargaining technique. People of that day would never start with the full request. It was customary to begin with a smaller request, and then as the conversation progressed, to reveal more and more of what was really wanted the whole time. This was an understood mode of communication. Also note that God tells Moses exactly what will happen (e.g. the elders will listen to him, but Pharaoh will not) so that when these things happen, Moses will continue to trust God.

**A Strong Hand –** God uses the imagery of a hand many times in this narrative. At this point He tells Moses that He will stretch out His own hand to strike Egypt and force Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. He also says that they will carry with them all the wealth of Egypt. Why? They will need the gold, silver, cloth and other goods to build the Tabernacle. In other words, the very things that the Egyptians used in self-worship and pagan worship will now be used to worship the one true God.

**Mercy and Grace –** Not only will God cause Pharaoh to allow them to leave Egypt, but He will also cause the Egyptian people to look on them with favor. There is *mercy* in being freed from slavery, but there is

*grace* in being granted favor as an additional blessing. The Israelites didn’t just get freedom from slavery, they received abundance. Similarly we don’t just get delivered from death to life, we get abundant life.

**I Am, Our Sufficiency –** God gave the same answer to Moses’ first two objections, “Who are You?” and “Who am I…?” His reply was, “I AM!” He wanted Moses to understand that the success of his mission depended in no way on who Moses was, but in *every* way on who God is.

**Holy Spirit, Holy Fire, Holy Ground –** We who desire to serve God and His people today also need to understand this. We have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. This is another significant aspect of the imagery of the burning bush. The holy fire that should have *consumed* us in our sinfulness instead *indwells* us, and we carry it wherever we go. And this means that for us, *all* ground is holy ground.

**To GOD Be the Glory –** Our ministry efforts must be about “I AM”. All glory should go to the One who is self-existent, self-sufficient, and eternal, so that every breath He gives us as a contingent and derived being would be offered the way it was intended to be offered in Eden—and that it will be offered again one day in the Promised Land that awaits. All glory be to Thee, O Christ!