

January 7

“Turn the Page to New Purpose”

Focus on Exodus 3:13-14

13 Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

14 God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’”

Special Music: “Holy Ground”

Melodie Malone

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xU771D5AYWE>



Exodus 3:1-14

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 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, 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.”

11 But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

12 And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

13 Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

14 God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’”

TRUE PURPOSE

John liked his new job. He had just turned twenty and had started working for a local general contractor building houses. He didn't know anything about building houses, but he embraced the opportunity to learn. Being the newbie, he was tasked with supply and materials runs, generally assisting where more than two hands were needed, maintaining tools, and cleaning up at the end of the day. John wanted to make a good impression, so he did his best to keep up with the rest of the work crew and that meant jumping from one task to another with constantly shifting priorities. The work kept his mind active, and he learned all the various components and skills that were necessary in order to build a house. It gave him a good overview of the process and before too long he was able to anticipate the various needs of the workers. What had seemed to be menial to many people had become a source of skill and pride for John and he became a great asset for the contractor.

After working in this capacity for a couple of years, the contractor called John to his office. "John," he said, "You are so valuable to me in the capacity that you are working. You have been doing a great job. But it is time for something else." John feared that the man was about to lay him off. But instead his boss said, "You need to grow into this business, so I am moving you over to foundation work. Think you are up to it?" Well, John hadn't even thought about this. Doing foundation work wasn't even on his radar. But if his boss felt that he was capable and wanted to move him, so be it. "I welcome the opportunity, sir. I truly appreciate it."

So, John learned to build foundation frames, mix concrete, lay wire frames, pour concrete, and run the power trowel to smooth it all out. He learned how to know when the concrete was set, and the frames could be removed. He went above and beyond learning about how temperature and moisture affected drying times. John became quite skilled at laying foundations and after a time, the contractor called him into the office again. “John, you continue to amaze me with your dedication to learning and accomplishing new things. So, I have something new for you. Are you up for it?” Well, John had to think for a moment. He was really enjoying working with concrete. But if the boss has something else for him to do, he would do his best. “Yes sir, what would you like for me to do?” The contractor looked him in the eye and said, “This will be quite a change, but I know you won’t let me down. I am going to have you learn carpentry. How does that sound?” “Well sir, I hadn’t thought about it, but if you think I am capable, I will certainly give it a go and do my best not to let you down.” “I know you will, John. I look forward to watching you grow.”

So, John learned about wood. He studied the purposes for different kinds of wood. He learned to take measurements and how to run the saws. He started by working on frameworks for the houses. John spent time getting accustomed to having a hammer in his hand and learned about nails, screws, and all kinds of hardware and how it was used. He helped to raise roofs and install windows and doors. The smell of new wood became his best friend as his skillset expanded and he came to understand all the various things a carpenter did when building a house. Every morning he looked forward to getting up and leaving for work. He

learned to read blueprints and find ways to make the wood become what he needed it to be.

As his skillset grew, the contractor would call him in and give him new assignments. There were times when he was unable to master a skill but was still competent. He appreciated the dedication and hard work of the craftsmen that taught him about what they did and how they worked.

John spent time as an electrician's helper, and also a plumber's helper. There were times when he helped install cabinets and appliances. He worked with tile workers, carpet layers, and painters. The contractor would put him to work wherever he needed. John even spent time with HVAC installers and found himself supervising some of the work. He even learned to lay brick, and install ironwork and garage doors. As a matter of fact, there eventually was no job that he hadn't worked on in some way. His supervisory role grew with his accomplishments.

One day, the contractor called John into his office. "John," he said, "You have learned so much and have come so far. The company needs you to do something different. We have grown so much as a company and your hard work has been noticed and appreciated. Management agrees that we need to help you get your contractor's license. We will pay for you to do what is necessary to succeed in this. We need you and want you to keep doing the excellent work you have shown us." John was flabbergasted. Once again, he had never expected something like this. When he had started with the company, it was a job. Little

did he realize that it would lead to this. “Thank you so much, sir. I am humbled and yes, of course, I will do what you are asking.”

So, John worked hard and received his contractor’s license and became a contractor for his company. And there came the day that his boss called him in once again. “John, I need something from you.” “Whatever I can do, sir.”

“You know John, I didn’t know if you would be able to do what you have managed to do, and I am so proud of all that you have accomplished. I never intended for you to be a concrete guy, a carpenter, a plumber, or even a contractor. Those things you embraced because I asked you to, and you have performed beyond expectations. But those things were never your purpose. You see, I was actually looking for something else, someone who could do something special for me and all those skills were necessary for someone to accomplish this task. You see, I am about to retire. And yes, you will probably receive another promotion and a raise, but that is not what this is about. You see, my wife and I have worked so very hard all our lives, through both the good times and the hard times.”

The contractor pulled a set of blueprints out of his closet and laid them out on the table. The blueprints were for a beautiful home set on a hill near a lake. “John, I want you to build me a house. You see, you are the only one that I can trust this for me and do it right. I have provided you with the opportunities to learn all you will need to build this home. I place this project totally in your hands and I know you won’t let me down.”

“You are right sir. I won’t: I am ready to get started and you will love it when we are finished.”

“I know I will, John. I know I will.”

So very often when we think about Moses, we think of all the great miracles that God performed through him; the plagues in Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, the water and mana in the desert, the Ten Commandments, and his leadership of the Israelites in the wilderness. And all of those things are important and certainly worth our attention and discussion. And while we know about baby Moses in a basket coming to live Pharaoh's household, and the time he murdered an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, we don't generally find those moments in many sermons. The story of The Burning Bush seems to be the jumping off point for following the life of Moses, as if anything before that isn't really worth our consideration. Maybe because the early life of Moses lacks shock and awe.

But there is a reason I told you the story that I did today. I could easily have written a story about the house that John built for his mentor, the contractor. I could have told you about all the great features of the house, how warm and wonderful it was, all the pain and struggle that John went through to get it built, all the battles he had to fight with subcontractors and city authorities. I could have focused about how happy the contractor and his wife were when they finally got to move into the house and how grateful they were. I could have expounded on how John continued on his journey and became a highly sought after contractor himself. It probably would have been a good story if I had just started with John building the contractor's house and how John became a partner at the business where he worked. And all those are good things that show how far John went on his journey. But that wasn't the point of the story.

And while Moses achieved many great things and became a hero to his people, none of it would have been possible if his early life had been different. His mother saved him from a violent death as a baby by putting him in that basket so that Pharaoh's daughter would find him. He would never have known who he was if his mother had not been allowed to nurse him and raise him in Pharaoh's palace. He would not have received the education that he received if he had not grown up among Pharaoh's children. He would never have gained his leadership skills if he had not served in Pharaoh's court. He also learned about the inner workings of the Egyptian government and administration. He would not have understood the oppression of his people if he had not seen that oppression with his own eyes. He would never have known how much his own people resented him if he had not experienced that resentment which he faced it after he killed the Egyptian taskmaster. He learned about acceptance as he came to live among strangers after fleeing Egypt. He learned about family and responsibility from his fathers-in-law, Reuel and Jethro. And yes, he even learned about shepherding. As a shepherd he learned how to keep his flock moving in the right direction, something that would become invaluable as he managed to keep the Israelites moving forward in the desert.

Not one of those things that he learned was actually about what God had purposed him for, but they became important as Moses stood near that burning bush in a deep conversation with the Creator of the Universe. None of those early lessons and experiences would go unused in the mission that God had made ready for him.

Moses would have been perfectly content to remain with the household of Jethro until his death. But God didn't go through all this trouble of preparing Moses for this purpose just to happy and content, far away from his fellow Hebrews in Egypt. This plan that God had for saving his children from oppression was much bigger than Moses, even though he was to play a significant part.

But God knew that Moses was content. We don't even know if Moses was a practicing Jew while he was with Jethro. He was a stranger living among strangers. After all, Moses didn't know anything about what God intended for him. So, our creator had to get his attention. And he did so with a burning bush that wasn't consumed, a bush that he could speak through and get Moses to listen. And when God told Moses what he wanted him to do, Moses could have said no. As a matter of fact, he tried to. Exodus 3:11 reads this way:

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

"I'm a nobody, God! Look at me! I am out here tending sheep for my father-in-law. I've been in the palace of the Pharaoh and I have seen its magnificent halls. I don't belong there. As a matter of fact, Pharaoh would probably kill me if I showed up. I'm pretty sure that the Egyptians haven't forgotten that I killed one of their own. I haven't got the chops for this. And even if they don't kill me, why would they listen to me, a renegade shepherd living among strangers? And talking to the Israelites won't be any easier. They resented me for being raised in

the palace. They felt I was a traitor to them then, and they will think of me as a traitor now.”

“Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

Should I say, “Hey guys, remember me. You know. The Hebrew that killed the Egyptian and then ran away? I’m here because God sent me. I am here to save you!” You are going to have to help me out here, God with no name. They never saw me as a religious leader and now I seem to be representing God. So, I ask you, God, who should I tell them you are? Who can I say sent me. I don’t even know your name!”

God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

“I AM has sent me to you. I AM gave me this task. I AM told me to say these things. I AM has sent me to deliver you and your children out of the hands of Pharaoh. I AM did not ask me to come here, I AM told me to come here. I AM has given me this new purpose.”

God prepares us for the purpose that he has for us. Some of those lessons and events may be small, and not seem like much to us at the time. Other lessons and events may be extremely painful and difficult and could include great losses in our lives. But each and every thing that God places in our path is meant to build in us the character and skills that God gives us to serve his purpose for

us. We may not know what that purpose is. But we may find it early in life. We may not discover it until the later days of our lives. The things we think are our purpose, may be only a lead-in to what our purpose actually is. I will tell you that it is also possible that we can go our whole lives without discovering the purpose that God has for us, only to learn from him what it was when we arrive in heaven. We may serve our purpose without ever realizing we have done what was needed and what God prepared for us to do.

God is not looking for our input into our purpose. We are called to serve I AM in whatever way he chooses for us to serve. Jesus speaks some hard to hear words in Matthew 10:37-39. Most of us want to skip over these words and land on something a little more pleasant. But Christianity is not a buffet where we can take what we want and leave the rest. Listen closely to these words found in Matthew:

37 “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

38 Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

39 Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

I talk to so many people that put Jesus in a box. “I am totally sold out to Jesus,” they say. “He would never ask me to move away from my children or

grandchildren. He would never ask me to change professions. He would never ask me to do anything dangerous or humiliating.” I hate to tell you this, but that is not being sold out to Jesus. God gives us the ability to say “NO” to him, but we can’t do that and still get his blessing. God has to be number one in our lives, above all else. That also means that it cannot be just lip service.

This week, as we face the new year, let us all examine our lives to see if God really is number 1. Are we listening to God and moving in the direction he has planned for us? Or are we defining our purpose for God ourselves? Are we putting on blinders and saying “God, I am going in this direction, so use me this way.” Or are we actually letting God determine our paths? Let us lay down our personal purpose at his feet and take up the yoke that he offers. Let us examine the ground-work he has laid out lives and listen to his voice as he guides us to the purpose for which he created and nurtured us.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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