

*Series – Exodus: The God Who Guides and Provides*

*“The God Who Remembers”*

Introduction: It’s been said that there are three signs of old age: the first is memory loss . . . and I forget the other two! Certainly, forgetfulness is something we all experience as we advance in age, and it’s healthy to keep our sense of humor in the midst of it. Yet our humor can mask the distressing reality of those who suffer seriously from memory loss, as well as the pain it brings to their loved ones. As one writer puts it: “Life without memory is no life at all . . . Without it we are nothing” (Louis Bunuel). It’s why many will be willing to pay the \$58,000 I was recently told the new drug to treat Alzheimer’s will cost for a year’s supply!

That there is a drug at all is good news to some. But better news for all is that we are known and loved by a God who, as we’ll hear in this morning’s text, remembers. For all that we might forget, our ultimate source of identity and hope comes from a God who remembers us. So, let’s begin by hearing that truth declared as we read on in Exodus, and then consider what that meant for Moses, and for us.

I. A New Beginning at the Bush

A. When we left Moses a few weeks ago, he was 40 years old, had recently left the luxury and comfort of the palace of Pharaoh in which he had grown up, had noticed the injustice that was being visited by Pharaoh upon the Israelites, and had been forced to flee to neighboring Midian when Pharaoh began to seek his life. There, he married a woman named Zipporah, started a family, and spent the next 40 years of his life wandering in the mountains and the wilderness while watching over his father-in-law’s sheep. Not a bad way to spend your days, if early retirement is your thing! However, as it turns out, even though Moses was 80 years old, God wasn’t finished with him. In fact, he was just beginning.

B. God got the attention of Moses through a bush that was on fire, but which didn’t burn up. In all of his years of wandering, Moses had never seen anything like it. “Whoah, that’s freaky!” I can almost hear him saying. How does that happen? Well, probably only if the Lord of all creation is behind it in some way. Which is who Moses discovered when he went closer to investigate. And what God revealed to Moses at that bush was that back at the ranch (Egypt), things were still not going well for God’s people. What God wanted Moses to know is that he had seen their oppression, had heard their groaning, and was concerned about them.

C. Above all, we read that God “remembered” his covenant to Abraham, the promise he made to reverse the impact of sin and its consequences by forming a people, beginning with Abraham and his wife Sarah, through whom would bring blessing to all nations (Ge. 12:1-3). It was a promise, therefore, that didn’t just have an immediate rescue from slavery in Egypt in view, but for the eventual salvation from sin, offered to all nations. Looking back, we can see that mediating this blessing would be a promise that Israel struggled, and failed, to carry out, but that God didn’t give up; the task of rescue from sin and bearing God’s image—living a truly human life and properly stewarding all that God had created—was eventually taken up and fulfilled through the One who came out of Israel, Jesus.

D. That’s big picture, Now, back to the days of Moses: that God “remembered” this promise doesn’t mean that he had forgotten it. Rather, it’s a word that indicates, as we see in various other

places (e.g., Ge. 8:1; 19:29; 1 Sa 1:11), that God is about to act. It indicates that he's not just a God who sees, hears, and is concerned, but that he is a God who actually comes to the rescue. Can't you just hear Moses say, "Yea God! It's about time! I'm glad you finally woke up...You go get that nasty Pharaoh and finally free your people!!" To which God said to Moses, "I am sending you." "Huh, didn't see that coming!" I can now hear Moses thinking.

Can't we sometimes think in this way? Wouldn't we like to see God come down, stop our politicians from bickering and put an end to broken relationships, poverty, war, racism, climate change, and human trafficking, just to name a few?! But what God typically says in response is that he will do such, working through us. In response to Moses saying, "God, I'm so glad that you're here," God says, "Moses, I'm so glad that you're here and that you have a heart that cares for the injustice and oppression my people, and your people, are experiencing. So I'm going to call you out of retirement and put you to work."

E. It might be helpful to acknowledge here that there are three dimensions to God's "call" on our life. We are called by God to faith in Jesus, moving us from sin to salvation. We are called by God to mature in that faith, taking on more and more of the character of Jesus. And we are called to serve God, working to bring just a bit more of the kingdom of God into the kingdom of darkness.

What we can observe is that as we think about this last dimension, about serving God, contrary to what we might think, God is really not looking for extraordinary people, like only seminary students or Red Cross relief workers, or priests can be called in this way while the rest of us muddle along. Actually, God is looking for ordinary people who have a heart to love and trust and serve an extraordinary God. As a writer named Frederick Buechner once put it, "The place God calls you [to serve] is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." What is tugging at your heart? Justice for the oppressed had been tugging on Moses' heart. Pay attention to yours because it may very well be the place God wants to act, through you.

## II. No Beating Around the Bush

A. Of course, this doesn't always make things easy. Moses, for one, wasn't convinced. Though he had the oppression of his people in his heart, he was pretty sure he would not be up to the task of leading a rescue operation. As we read on, we can identify at least four excuses, all of which I think will be familiar to us. But notice, too, that God wasn't about to let Moses beat around the bush!

1. *I'm a nobody*. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (3:11). Most of us, when we think of Moses, think of Charlton Heston, don't we? Chiseled features, long beard blowing in the wind, a muscular body standing tall and shouting at the Red Sea, "Let's go for it!" But Moses is just an ordinary guy, more like a John Candy, Danny DeVito, or Bob Uecker. "Get real God. I'm not the one to go!"

To which God says, "I will be with you" (3:12). God never calls us to do something without also promising to be with us. Even when Jesus says go and make Christ followers of all nations, and we say, "Wow, we can't do that; who are we?!" Jesus follows it up with: [Fret not] "Surely I am with you always, even to the very end of the age" (Ma. 28:19-20).

2. *I don't know what to say*. "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?" (3:13). In other

words, when people ask who you are, I won't know what to say. Do we ever feel that way? Tongue-tied, or theologically unprepared, or even fearful when the topic of God comes up in conversation?

To which God says, "Tell them my name...I AM WHO I AM" (4:14). This comes out of the Hebrew verb, to be, and essentially means "I am the one who acts." In other words, we know who God is, we come to learn of his character, by what he has done. The Israelites had come to know him by what he had done for their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. What has he done in your life? What difference has he made? If you don't know what else to say, share your experience. Your experience is authoritative.

3. *They'll never believe me.* "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you'?" (4:1). How am I to convince them, Lord? Well, God says to Moses, you don't. God goes on to turn Moses' staff into a snake, and then back again, and then to make his hand leprous, and then whole again (4:2-7). It was to show him, and us as we look on, that sharing our experience is our job. Convincing others is God's job. If there are any hearts to be softened, it is God who has the power.

This is really a freeing truth. Our job is not to worry about whether people believe us. It is to simply communicate the good news as it has impacted us in as honest a way as we can and let God do the rest.

4. *I have no gifts.* "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent . . . I am slow of speech and of tongue" (4:10). Some think Moses struggled with stuttering. Either way, he didn't feel equipped to speak, either to his people, and certainly not to an audience that included Pharaoh. Our own variations might go something like this: "I can't think on my feet, I don't know all the answers, I've never been very clever. . .

God says, "Who gave human beings their mouths? . . . Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say" (4:11-12). God knows exactly who you are – he made you. God knows exactly what you need to do what he has called you to do and he promises to equip you. Often, it seems, God asks us to step out where we are feeling weak or powerless so that we can experience his presence with us. As Paul once discovered about God, when struggling with an illness that he called a "thorn in his flesh": "My grace is sufficient for you; for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

And then, when Moses starts to object yet again, God tells him he's going to send along his brother, Aaron (4:14-17), which puts an end to Moses' objections. This is very interesting when you think about it. How does God fulfill his promise to come alongside us? Often, at least in part, it is through someone else who joins in with our call and helps us not to feel so all alone. We become the body of Christ for each other, we become the face of God (cf. Ge. 33:10).

We are loved by a God who remembers, who acts, who is faithful to his promises, who equips and accompanies us when he calls. Are you ready, and willing, for him to act, through you?