

The Great I Am and the Great Commission

Reading: Matthew 20:16-20 Text: Exodus 3:10-22

Why has God revealed himself to us? Why has he saved us yet still keeps us here. One reason he reveals himself to us is so that we may worship him properly in spirit and in truth. Without us knowing him and his will we would be left to our own devices, making God in our own image and inventing all kinds of novel ways to worship the deity of our making.

But then there can be no better worship of God than the worship of the elect in the new heavens and earth, a multitude no-one can count all singing in unison, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb" (Revelation 7:10) So there has to be another important reason God has revealed himself to us and our text provides that. We're here in order to carry out the Great Commission.

So the theme of the passage then is that God reveals his glory and his Name and gives his servant his commission.

1. The Commission

In verse 8 & 9 God had spoken of his concern for his people and his intention to deliver them from the Egyptians and bring them to a good land a land flowing with milk and honey. Moses listening to God speak out of the burning bush will have wondered how God would accomplish this. He had tried to do this in his own strength 40 years ago and failed miserably. Well, he had his answer there and then, "Come now I will send YOU to Pharaoh that you may bring my people the sons of Israel out of Egypt."

Salvation history shows that this is how God normally brings about his saving purposes. It was through Joseph that his brothers and their families were saved. It was through Moses' mother Jochabed that Moses was saved from Pharaoh's rule that all baby boys be thrown into the Nile, it is through ordinary people that God works out his plan of salvation in history. In fact the commissioning of Moses teaches us that every believer shares in the great commission.

The calling we have from the Lord is actually a two-fold calling. a) First we are called to believe in him by his word and spirit. We hear the word and the Holy Spirit convicts us of its truth and who ever believes, receives Christ and has the right to become a child of God (John 1:12). That's the call to faith. b) Then comes the call to serve the Lord. There are two ways we do that. First, according to whatever our gifts are. Some are called to be carpenters, teachers, doctors, bridge builders preachers and IT experts. As those who have been redeemed by God we are called by God to joyfully serve him and glorify him in whatever our vocation might be.

As well as being called to serve God in a vocation we are also called to serve God as an apostolic church in other words with in our outreach because like Moses we have also been given a commission. Jesus said in Matthew 28 "All authority has been given to me in Heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations baptising them in the name of the Father and The Son and The Holy Spirit." It is true that God is sovereign matters of

salvation but as it was with Moses so now, He sends us to accomplish his saving work on earth. The church is God's appointed agent of evangelism today. So in Ephesians 4:11 "he gave some to be prophets some apostles some evangelists and some as pastors and teachers." Philip the deacon and Timothy the pastor were both engaged in evangelism.

Furthermore 1 Peter 2:9 says "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into His marvellous light." So it is the duty of every believer to proclaim the excellencies of his saviour and thereby contribute to the work of evangelism. You know the word of God and the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and you have the Holy Spirit who enables you. Besides we confess in the Nicene creed that we are a holy apostolic church. Apostolic means a church God sends into the world to promote the word of God and preach Christ.

Tell your neighbours about Christ, or those you work alongside wherever you work. Invite them along to church, distribute Bibles, teach Bible in schools. When you do, you are sowing a seed, or as the teacher in Ecclesiastes puts it, "casting your bread on many waters" and who knows what the end result will be. That is up to God. But it is all our responsibility to be sowing that seed and sharing our faith because next to the worship of God that is why the church remains here on this earth.

And what we can't do as individuals we can do together with others, by supporting our overseas mission board, contributing to whatever outreach program our church may be involved in.

In any case, if God has called you to be a Christian he has also called you to contribute to the Great Commission. We each have our gifts, and we won't all be involved in the same way, but no Christian can say, "It is not my responsibility."

2. In order to serve God faithfully we need to know him and know ourselves.

Calvin put this well at the beginning of his Institutes book 1 chapter one. He wrote, "Nearly all the wisdom we possess ...consists of two parts the knowledge of God and that of ourselves. Man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked on God's face and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself."

- a) So Moses, judging by his questions to God, needed this information as well. His first question was **Who am I?**

At first Moses seems ready to place himself at God's disposal. God called him from the burning bush and Moses answered "Here I am" He seemed ready willing and able as it were. God says take off your sandals and Moses did as he told, so far so good. But then when God give Moses his commission, "Go to Pharaoh and bring my people out of Egypt" Moses started to have some doubts.

First he doubted himself. **Who am I** that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt. In saying "who am I?" Moses was saying that he didn't think he had what it takes to either tackle Pharaoh or lead his own people to liberty. Egypt was at the time a

world superpower and Moses was an obscure shepherd living in the wilderness at Midain. Sure he tried to lead a revolution 40 years ago but he failed miserably and that was along time ago anyway. Besides the Israelites will have long forgotten him or, if his Moses name was remembered it would probably be that he was once a prince in Egypt who murdered a slave driver and then ran away.

So Moses will have thought about this and surmised, “*who am I* that I should go to Pharaoh?”

If we were to stand in bare feet where Moses was we probably would have said the same thing. Moses was a man like us who had doubts. We are not up to doing something which is foolishness to some and a stumbling block for others. We can't do it in our own strength and don't even want to!

But its encouraging to see how God answered Moses . “Certainly I shall be with you.” Moses may have had his doubts and under-rated himself, he was after all trained in Pharaohs court, as well as a man who loved his own people the Israelites. Plus he had 40 years preparation in the wilderness! But be that as it may, the liberation of God's people didn't really depend on Moses but on God. It was the Spirit of God who would make Moses the leader and the presence of God which would make the Exodus possible. All things are possible with God.

The call to service in the Kingdom of God always comes with that promise, “I will be with you.” When Joshua took over as spiritual leader of Israel God promised him “Just vs I was with Moses so I will be with you (Joshua 1:5) When Jeremiah was called by God to be a prophet and Jeremiah doubted he had what it takes because of his young age, God said to him “Don't be afraid for I am with you” (Jeremiah 1:8) This is also the promise extended to us in the Great commission “Behold I am with you always to the end of the age.”

So the point is that in order to serve God effectively we need to know our own limitations and trust in the God who has promised to be with us. When came down to it, that's what Moses did . It says in Hebrews 11:27 “By faith (Moses) left Egypt not fearing the wrath of the king for he endured as seeing him who is unseen.” And we can add by faith Moses returned to confront Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

And its not a blind faith. We notice in verse 12 that God gave Moses a sign. “This shall be the sign that it is I who have sent you, when you have brought the people out of Egypt you shall worship at this mountain.” That may seem strange since a sign is usually given beforehand to encourage the man of faith to go ahead. If that's the case then the burning bush would certainly have had that function but since the sign is a future event, i.e. the Israelites worshipping God after the Exodus at Mt Sinai, then the sign shows God's faithfulness. So when the Israelites left Egypt and found themselves wandering in the Sinai desert, rather than wonder why they were milling around in such a desolate place, they would realise that they were at the place God wanted them to be and be reassured that God's word cannot be broken.

For you and I this is also a call to faith in an unseen God sure but also the One who has fulfilled his word time and time again since the days of Moses . He fulfilled it with the Exodus, and the formation of the nation; the giving of the law; the establishment of an everlasting kingdom the promise of the Messiah and the subsequent establishment of a world wide church, sure signs of God's faithfulness. Our faith is not a blind faith. He now calls us to go and continue with the task of spreading the good news. Go trusting in Him!

b) **Who are you?**

To serve God we need to know ourselves know that we cannot serve in our own strength but are called to serve by faith in Him. As well as that ***we must also know who the God we serve is.*** Moses asked "who am I that I should go..?" and God said "I will go with you" And then Moses asked a second question was ***who are you?*** Verse 13 "Then Moses said to God Behold I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them the God of your fathers has sent me to you. Now they may say to me what is his name what shall I say to them?"

God's answer to Moses was a revelation of His very being and attributes when Moses heard the reply "I am who I am , Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, I am has sent you; The Lord the God of your fathers the God of Abraham, Isaac and the God of Jacob has sent me to you This is my name for ever and this is my memorial name to all generations."

The way God's name is translated most often in our Bibles is the LORD (capitalised). In Hebrew God's name is the noun form of the verb I AM, consisting of four consonants which can be pronounced YHWH.

In a way that mysterious Name tells us that God is inscrutable and there will be things about God we can never fully understand as much as we understand his name I am the One who is.

God's name is in the present tense; not "I was" or "I will be" but "I am". You could say that God an eternal present. He is always who he is, The God of Abraham , the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of Amram, the God of Moses the God of Israel and your God and my God. The same God yesterday today and tomorrow, the eternal Triune God.

The name YHWH also tells us that God needs no help he is not co dependant. The Westminster confession of faith puts it this way. "God has all life, glory, goodness and blessedness in himself. He alone is all sufficient in and to himself, not standing in need of any creature which he has made nor deriving any glory from them but rather manifesting his own glory in, by, to and on them. He alone is the fountain of all being of whom, through whom, to whom are all things." Like the burning bush he is the flame which never dies his resources are inexhaustible, his power never fails. He needs no rest for recuperation. His gifts don't diminish. His love is never spent.

Finally since God revealed this name to Moses in order to call him to liberate his people the name YHWH also stresses the covenant faithfulness of God.

This is the Great I AM, mysterious unchanging, eternal self-sufficient ever faithful to his covenant promises

And so Moses would go back to the Israelites and say “I am has sent me” and the rest of the story of the Exodus is God living up to his name proving that he is the eternal God of covenant grace.

Knowing this Name is also a great help to us. It’s comforting to know that God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow and that we serve the same God whom Moses served. What is even more wonderful is that we can know God by a new name, the name of Jesus which means “God saves.”

In fact His the *only* name under heaven by which people can be saved (Acts 4:12). Yet he is the same God who revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush. Jesus said as much to the leaders of the Jews who rejected him. “Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was I AM.” (John 8:38) Jesus was claiming to be the God of Moses the Great I am, the eternal self-existent, self-sufficient faithful covenant God. The religious leaders knew exactly what he meant but didn’t believe him. Instead they accused him of blasphemy and threw rocks at him. But what Jesus said was true. Rev 1:8 says that He is the one who is who was and who is to come.

Do you believe that? That Jesus Christ is the God of Moses, the Lord of the burning bush? In John 8:24 Jesus said “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I AM he (*ego eimi*, the emphatic I am) you will die in your sins.” Jesus went on to say “When you have lifted up the son of man then you will know that I am he,” Jesus was speaking about his death on the cross saying that would prove that he is the true God of our salvation.

A Christian is someone who believes that Jesus is the great I am.

As with Moses then, what Jesus wants for us now, is to put our faith in him. He has called us to himself to be children of his heavenly father and co-heirs of the kingdom together with him of eternal life. He has also called us to participate in the Great Commission; to share our faith by word and deed with friends, classmates, workmates, neighbours whoever. But he wants us to put our faith in him, going where he sends us and trusting in his promise I will be with you till the end of the age.

Amen.