**Exodus Lesson 3**

**THE CALL OF MOSES**

Exodus 3:1-4:31

Key Verse: Exodus 3:10

“So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

 In previous chapter, Exodus chapter 2, we studied about the misery of Israelites under the unbearable oppression from the slavery in Egypt and how God was deeply concerned about them. In today’s passage, God speaks about his plan to Moses that he would set his people free from the bondage. For this, God reveals himself to Moses as he calls him as his chosen instrument. Through the study of this passage, may we learn how Moses met God when he was called by God and mission Moses received from God.

**First: Moses’ First Encounter with God (3:1-22)**

In chapter 3, we see that God reveals Himself to Moses in various ways. Exodus 2:24 states, “God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.” Now, the time has come and God came to fulfill his covenant with Abraham. It starts as follows: “Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law---.” At that time, Moses had fled from Egypt and lived in the desert of Midian. He was tending his father-in-law’s flock as usual. One day when he approached Horeb, called the mountain of God, Moses saw something very unusual. He saw that even though the bush was on fire, it did not burn up. He became very curious and thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.” Moses approached the sight out of curiosity. It was the beginning of Moses’ encounter with God.

How did the first encounter between Moses and God happen? God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.” Then God said, “Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Perhaps, Moses wanted to come very close to the burning bush. But he had to stop very quickly. I believe that when Moses heard God’s voice saying, “for the place where you are standing is holy ground”, he must have felt God’s presence all around him. In fact, it’s important for us to be aware of God’s holy presence wherever we are; whether we are in the church, at home or at our working place because our God is omnipresent. Then the Lord continues to say to Moses, “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 (6b).

In verses 7-10, God said to Moses about His plan for the people of Israel and Moses’ role. Read verses 7-10. “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. 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. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.’” The phrase “SO NOW” indicates that God’s time had come to rescue his people from the bondage in Egypt and bring them into the land of promise. God wanted to send Moses for this purpose.

How did Moses respond to God’s call? Look at verse 11. “But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’” It’s interesting to see that Moses didn’t respond by saying “Thank you, Lord for choosing me as a leader. That’s what I have been waiting for.” Instead, we don’t see the old Moses, who used to be the prince in Egypt, a very self-confident and powerful man. He wasn’t sure of himself. His response sounded as if he had lost all his confidence in himself. Probably living in the wilderness, tending the dumb sheep of his father-in-law Jethro for the last 40 years, Moses had lost the confidence, ambition and hope. However, even though his response was passive, it could be a sign of his humility. It’s very possible that God was waiting for this moment. As a matter of fact, when Moses hit the rock bottom, God came to call him for his glorious work.

What did God say to Moses? Read verse 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.’” What God was telling Moses was that what God intended to do would surely happen. God would surely liberate his people Israel from the slavery in Egypt and enable them to worship Him.

At this moment, let us think about the purpose of God’s deliverance of His people. The words “worship God” have deep meaning to all human beings who bear the image of God (Gen 1:26). It reminds us of Luke 1:74 and 75 which states, “To rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.” Though people seem to live freely, they are under kinds of oppression. Many people are groaning and in miserable condition due to unavoidable circumstances. They have to engage in hard labor endlessly like slaves and perish someday. But God’s vision for His people is to set them free from the bondage and live and grow in the holiness and righteousness and serve Him always. This truly is the fantastic vision of God for His people.

I know a 94 years old gentleman who was well educated with much knowledge. His wife used to be a professor in a prominent College in Korea. They both worked very hard and have five children and many grandchildren. In his old age, he still makes funny jokes. So I thought that he was a very happy man. But he told me that now, his wife who was once beautiful and intelligent is sick and her health is getting worse day by day. And the worst part of his life is that he couldn’t have a good and healthy relationship with others due to his drinking habit, unacceptable behaviors, bad mouth and frequent emotional reaction, bursting into screaming to others; he has been getting weaker physically. Instead of experiencing happiness in honor, he feels he is being oppressed and experiences deep agony and troubles of his soul. Without God’s mercy, many of us could not but remain in such miserable condition. But God’s hope for His people is to set free from oppression and the power of sin, so that he can live a healthy and beautiful life as God’s children. This kind of hope is not just a utopian dream but spiritual reality in Jesus Christ our Lord.

How did Moses respond to God’s promise that God would be with him? Look at verse 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?’” I think it is an excellent question and very important to know. Who is God to Moses, to the Israelites and to us? We must always ask who God is instead of remaining in our old preconception indeed.

How did God answer to Moses’ question? Read verses 14-15a. “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.”’ God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob- has sent me to you.’” “I AM WHO I AM” and He also called, “The LORD,” is God’s name forever, the name people shall call Him from generation to generation. (15b)

What does it mean? The most important meaning is that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. He exists Himself. He is the God of history from the beginning to the end. He is not just a theological existence, but is a real person. And He is almighty, absolute and sovereign Ruler of all. God told Moses that he should remind the people of Israel of the God who made a covenant with their ancestors, such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In verses 16 and 17, God confirmed with Moses that the LORD, the God of their fathers would bring them up out of their misery in Egypt into a land flowing with milk and honey. In verses 18-22, God convinced Moses that He would strike the Egyptians and bring the Israelites out of Egypt with many possessions.

**Second, Moses' Staff (4:1-31).**

Look at 4:1. “Moses answered, ‘What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, “The Lord did not appear to you”?’” We see that even after God’s convincing promises, Moses wasn’t sure if people would listen to him. It seems that Moses still had a deep sense of doubt and failure due to his past experience in Egypt when some people rejected him by saying *“Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?”* (2:14).

How did the Lord help Moses? It’s very interesting how the Lord help Moses to gain the confidence back. In verses 2-5, the LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” “A staff,” he replied. Then the LORD said to Moses to throw the staff on the ground. And when he did so, it transformed into a snake. Moses got really scared so that he screamed and ran from it. I know many of us really don’t like snakes. But the more challenging came to Moses afterwards.

The Lord God said to Moses to reach out his hand and take the snake by the tail. Wow! It was even scarier thing to do. I am sure Moses had to overcome fear of being bitten by the snake. But he trusted the LORD and followed his direction by taking the snake by the tail, not by the head. When he did so, the snake was changed back to a staff in his hand. Verse 5 says, “‘This,’ said the LORD, ‘is so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob--has appeared to you.’” God wanted Moses to know the power of God who was sending him.

God showed Moses another miracle. He asked Moses to put his hand inside his cloak. When he did so, he instantly became a leper and being restored again. God’s demonstration of these two miracles was to help Moses to be sure that as he would trust and obey God, the people would recognize him as the Lord’s servant and surely listen to him.

Was Moses convinced? Nay. He made another excuse. Look at verse 10. “Moses said to the Lord, ‘Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.” Probably, while Moses was tending dumb animals in the wilderness, he realized that his speech was getting even worse. So he was saying to God, *“Lord I am not really qualified to lead people due to my poor language skill. My Egyptian sucks.”*

How did the Lord respond to Moses? Read verses 11-12. “The LORD said to him, ‘Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives the sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you to speak and will teach you what to say.’” The Lord wanted Moses not to depend on his human ability or language skills but to depend on God who created all things, including mouth, ears and eyes. But it didn’t seem to have convinced Moses.

Look at verse 13. “But Moses said, ‘Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.’” At this, God’s anger burned against Moses. It was because of his stubborn reluctance. The Lord God became angry toward Moses because of his constant unbelief. Why do some people become so unbelieving and reluctant to obey God’s will? One main reason is that they focus on their weakness not on God Almighty. Moses felt so inadequate of himself because he only thought about his own past failure and weaknesses and shortcomings. However, we see that God still didn’t give up on Moses. Look at verse 14b. “What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see you.” Wow! God was so persistent in helping one man Moses. He didn’t give up on the reluctant Moses.

Around 35 years ago, when I was a freshman in college, I met Christ personally and also received God’s calling to share the wonderful gospel- the beautiful story of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. In 1993, when God sent me to New York City, I served NYU ministry with great passion and energy. While serving the ministry, I also completed long years of nursing study and has worked as a RN to take care of family and ministry. Recently I realized that even though I wanted to serve God as a faithful and fruitful servant of God, I have become like a mundane man, working like a slave with full of stress and anxiety. I also realized that I lost God’s calling, for setting free people from their bondage to sin through the gospel of Jesus. But through the study of today’s passage, I was renewed of God’s calling for me to be a shepherd for people who are suffering under the oppression of sin, guilt and shame. God does not give up on me. Instead, He still wants to set people free through my absolute faith in his wisdom, power and love.

In general, how does the Lord God accomplish his work? He chooses and sends his servants. Though God himself can do everything by his own power, he wants us to participate in his redemptive work. In sending Moses to Egypt, God gave him only a wooden staff. What does the staff mean? To Moses, the staff was the reminder of God that God is with him. In fact, God calls his servants to do what they cannot do with their own strength, but only with his power. Therefore, what we really need to do is to trust and obey Him and His words. It is God’s promise that when we trust and obey, he will provide all things and lead us.

In verses 18-31, we see that Moses finally returns to Egypt. After getting the permission from Jethro, his father-in-law, he started for Egypt with his wife and sons. Moses and Aaron arrived in Egypt and brought together all the elders of the Israelites. When they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped. Before God came down to rescue them, the Israelites had no tomorrow. Every day, they lived with only survival mentality, with groom and despair. When they heard the message from the Lord that He came to rescue them, the hope of new beginning sprang up in their hearts. They could think of future and were able to hold the promise of God’s marvelous vision.

 In today’s passage, we see how God appeared to Moses and called him. When Moses thought that his life was over due to his past failure and current circumstances, God called him in the burning bush; “Moses! Moses!” 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.’” Moses was hesitant and unsure of himself. But when Moses received God’s calling by faith, it became a turning point in his life. He no longer lived in regret but began to live in assurance and confidence in God Almighty.

In the light of God’s calling, Moses took the staff of God in his hand. When Moses fled to Midian, he didn’t have anything in his hand. The privilege as a prince of Egypt, his human ambition or passion had been crushed. For 40 years in the wilderness, Moses has been changed from a man of self-confidence and pride into a man of humility and into a man of faith in God Almighty. Now, only with the staff of God, he goes to Egypt.

God has hope for all people throughout generations. God also calls his servants today. God, in his compassion, mercy and unchanging love for His people, might be calling some of us here today. May God bless us to accept and renew God’s calling and go and tell the people the great deliverance of God. Amen.