

Lent 3
March 7, 2010

When God Calls, We Will Answer

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Exodus 3:1-8, 10-15

1) The alarm clock call 2) The call of grace 3) The call to service

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Do you screen your calls? A lot of people do these days. Caller ID is on nearly all cell phones and most have the service on their land lines as well. When you see who is calling, you may decide not to take the call, but to let it go to voice mail. You'll answer the call later... or maybe not at all.

Can you imagine your phone ringing and you take a look at the caller ID, and it says there, "Lord God Almighty." Hey, it's got to be a prank, right? But let's just say, you somehow knew it wasn't a prank. God is literally calling you. He has something to say to you. Would your heart start to pound? Would your mouth go dry? Would your thoughts race? Why is God calling? What is he going to say?

In our sermon today, we consider this thought. The truth is, God really does call each of us. In fact he calls repeatedly. And like it or not, we will answer. There is no way around it. Let's talk about what happens... when God calls. What we'll see today is that there are actually three types of calls from God. And they come in the same order: the alarm clock call; the call of grace; and the call to service. To help us through this, we'll take a closer look at an example from the Bible when God was calling... God called Moses at the burning bush.

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 desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 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. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up." 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." "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." 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. 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.

So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" 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." 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?" 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.’ This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.

Consider the setting of this story. About four centuries before this account of the burning bush, Jacob and his family had moved to Egypt during a time of famine. Jacob’s son, Joseph, was second in command of all of Egypt. Therefore his father’s family was given choice land in Egypt where they settled. However, as the years passed, the people of Egypt came to resent these foreigners living among them – especially since they had grown to a very large nation within Egypt. The Pharaoh made the Israelites slaves to the Egyptians. Therefore, the people were in a desperate situation. Many doubts must have entered their mind. Where had God been for hundreds of years? Why was he letting them suffer? God had promised to their forefather Abraham that he would give them their own land. Had God forgotten his promise? Certainly they thought, “Where is God?”

It was at this seemingly hopeless point in Israel’s history that the Lord God decided to call. And we see that he did so in a strange way and in a strange place. Moses had lived for 40 years among the Midianites – a people who lived east of Egypt, and south of Palestine. He started a family and became a shepherd for his father-in-law. Moses took the flock to the west looking for pasture. He came to a mountain range called Horeb, and while in the area, Moses saw something unusual. A bush was on fire – but it wasn’t burning up.

Although Moses didn’t realize it immediately, our text says that this was an appearance of the angel of the Lord. Who was this “angel”? When we hear “angel” we usually think of spiritual beings who are God’s servants. However, remember that the word “angel” literally means “messenger” or “one who is sent.” Later our text says, “**God called to Moses from within the bush.**” This messenger was himself God! The one sent by God to speak to Moses was himself God. This “angel of the Lord” was the Lord Jesus before he took on human flesh.

How strange was this situation! God hadn’t spoken to his people in hundreds of years. And at this time in an unusual way, in an unusual place, God spoke to the man who would become God’s instrument in fulfilling his promises first made to Abraham. This was God’s wake-up call to Moses and the people of Israel.

Dear friends, this also wasn’t the only time God revealed himself in an unusual way. The setting is today. The love of most people has grown cold. There are wars and rumors of wars. There is sickness and suffering throughout the world – and most likely in our own families. Evil people win and good people seem to lose. In your own life you may be facing circumstances and challenges that make you wonder and doubt: Where is God? Why is he letting me suffer? Why does it seem this world – and our lives – are out of control? Perhaps you have thought, “Where is God?”

It’s at times like these that God comes calling. I mentioned earlier we would talk about three types of calls from God. This is the first... the **alarm clock call**. You know this one all too well. You’re sleeping soundly, comfortably. Then that alarm goes off, disturbing you greatly, calling you to get up and get going. God sometimes sends alarm clock calls to us... when something happens in our life that knocks us off our comfortable routine and makes us think.

In our Gospel lesson today, we heard of one such alarm clock call. Jesus mentions an incident when Pilate had apparently killed some men from Galilee while they were in the temple. We really don’t know anything more about this incident, other than it was a horrible atrocity and the story was well known by all. Jesus also mentions a tower in Siloam that fell down and 18

people were killed. Apparently people were talking. “These people must have done something wrong! God was punishing them!” But Jesus says they are wrong. They were no more guilty and no less than anyone else. But there was something to take from these tragedies: **“Unless you repent, you too will all perish.”** These were a wake up call! Life is short! This world is sinful. You are sinful. *Now* is the time to repent and turn to God. It’s a wakeup call... and alarm clock call.

This alarm clock call can come in a wide variety of forms. The Twin Towers in New York collapsing after a terror strike and killing thousands. A massive earthquake in Haiti killing 200,000. An armed robbery or murder in your neighborhood. A health scare. Cancer, heart attack, high blood pressure... or the threat of any of them. Losing your job. The possibilities are literally limitless. Think back over the past week... the past month. What alarm clock call has God sent you? What has happened that made you stop and think about your eternal future?

For Moses it came in a burning bush. God was pretty creative with that one and it was unique. Other calls are not less effective.

Now, I told you there were two types of calls from God, right? The alarm clock call itself does not turn a person to faith. The churches filled up after 9-11, didn’t they? But it wasn’t long before they emptied back out again. There is a second type of call from God that’s even more important than the alarm clock call. And that is God’s call of grace.

Let’s turn back to our lesson because we see the call of grace in the story of the burning bush. God gets Moses attention, didn’t he? The alarm clock definitely sounded. Moses was now listening carefully. And next came the call of grace.

God answers **four questions** for Moses in this call of grace. And it is vital that we ask these same four questions and hear their answers. We got the alarm clock call and now we ask: 1) Who are you, God? 2) Who am I? 3) How do you feel about me? 4) What do you do for me? Now I’m not saying that everyone is aware enough to formulate and ask those four questions. Very often God answers those questions before a person is fully aware he should be asking them! But all four are vital in the call of grace. We see them in our text.

God said, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.” “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” 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.

In this section, Moses has already found out 1) who God is and 2) who he (Moses) is. First, God clearly identifies himself. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God has not changed. And neither have his promises. He is the one, true, unchanging God. Moses also rapidly becomes more aware of something about himself. As he becomes more aware that he is standing before the almighty, eternal and holy God, and that this was the very same God that spoke to the Patriarchs some 400 years earlier, Moses understands his own unworthiness. He hid his face because he was afraid to look at God. Moses knew he was a sinner.

By the way, Moses was also going to serve as the one sounding the alarm clock call to the Israelites. And he knew that they would also have the four questions in the call of grace: “Who is God? Who are we? How does he feel about us? What does he do for us?” God told Moses to tell the people of Israel, **“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.’ This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.”

But there are two questions left that must be answered. How does God feel about Moses and the Israelites? What does he intend to do for them? God answered this for Moses as he stood before God terrified. **“I have seen the misery of my people... I have heard them crying out... I am concerned about their suffering. I have come down to rescue them.”** How did God feel about his people? Love. Mercy. Grace. They didn’t deserve it. We’ll see by their grumbling soon how little they deserved his love. But he loved them anyway. And his love was moving them to action. God was going to rescue them from the hands of the Egyptians.

Friends, today you are hearing God’s call of grace. Not through a burning bush but through the burning word of God. **“Is not my word like fire,” declares the LORD, “and a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces.”** The hammer has fallen. Who is he that calls you? The eternal, unchanging God. The great “I AM.” He is the one and only God... the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For that matter, the God of Adam and Eve, Noah, Moses, David, Isaiah, and Peter and Paul too. He is eternal and unchanging and holy. That is who HE is. And who are you? He wants you to know that you are a rebel, unholy, and inadequate in your efforts to please him. It’s scary but true.

We might suspect that God is angry with us and intends to destroy us. But let’s ask the questions and let God answer instead of assuming things. “What do you feel about us, God?” (*We cringe awaiting fiery words of righteous condemnation and judgment.*) But he says, **“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.”** Jer. 31:3. You are **“brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.”** *2 Thessalonians 2:13.* And we see already how hard it is to talk about how God feels about us without also talking about what God does for us. He saved us. He delivered us. He redeemed us. He removed our sin and guilt forever.

God’s call of grace sounds forth from a most unusual place. In the small town of Bethlehem, a baby was born and laid to rest in a manger. Angels proclaimed to shepherds that he was the promised Christ! The Savior! The Lord of all the earth.

Although most didn’t recognize it immediately, Scripture tells us that Jesus was the “Word”. Jesus was God’s call of grace. **“For God so loved the world he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.”** God gave his Son to live perfectly and holy for you. Jesus was totally adequate before the Father... for you, and on behalf of you. God gave his Son to perish... to die... for you and on behalf of you. For your sin and your guilt... for the times you refused to answer God’s call and obey God’s will... Jesus died. He perished so that in him you will not perish, but have everlasting life.

This is the **call to grace** to know and believe that God is God, holy, unchanging, just and righteous. To know and believe that you are sinful, rebellious and inadequate. To know and believe that God for reasons we can’t fathom loves us anyway more than we can imagine. And to know and believe that God’s love moved him to give his own Son for you and for your salvation. And through his Son’s sacrifice, he gives you forgiveness, salvation and eternal life. You have heard the call of grace.

There is one more call which we’ll cover very briefly. Those who hear the alarm clock call and those who receive the call of grace... they also receive God’s call to service. Moses did, didn’t he? God called him **to lead his people out of Egypt** to the land he had promised. Did you

notice that Moses had lots of objections? “Who am I to do this? What if I can’t answer all the questions? I can’t speak very well!” Moses didn’t feel he was up to the task. Did you see what God answered for each one? “I will be with you. I will prove to them that I sent you. I give you the words to say.” Essentially, God assures Moses by telling him, “I will fully equip you to do what I have called you to do, Moses. Trust me.”

Friends, God has called you to service too. With your unique combination of resources (time, talents and treasures), in your position and circumstances in life, among the unique mix of people you come into contact with, God has called you to serve him. He’s not always as specific in how he wants us to serve as he was with Moses. But make no mistake, God has called you to serve him. I bet you can come up with a hundred reasons why you’re inadequate to the job. But God says to you, “I am with you. I am sending you. I will help you. I will fully equip you to do what I have called you to do. Trust me. Now go, and serve.”

Friends, God has called. You’ve heard all three of them today: The alarm clock call, the call of grace and the call to service. The great “I AM” has called you, and he sends you now to your home, to your work place, to your community, to serve him and do his will. God almighty has called, and we will answer. Let us listen, believe, worship, serve and obey... that his name may be glorified here and everywhere, now and forever. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”(Php 4:4-7) Amen.