



One Page Sermon

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Exodus 2:23-25; 3:1-15; 4:10-17 God's name is revealed at the burning bush

When we think about Moses, it is easy to picture him as a great leader, standing bold and strong in front of Pharaoh, demanding that he “let my people go.” We love to picture him standing with his staff raised as the sea splits apart and the people can walk through on dry land, or standing on Mount Sinai with the two great tablets of God’s Law in his arms.

We don’t often picture Moses as a fugitive of the law, exiled from his home for the murder of a man. It is easy to forget that Moses found refuge in the household of a foreign man, married a Midianite woman, and tried to disappear into the anonymity of being a shepherd east of Egypt. In this passage we see him with his feet bare, bowed down, pleading with God to pick someone else for the impossible task God has assigned.

The first question that Moses asks of God is, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” He could just as easily been asking simply, “Who am I?” Was he an Israelite? Was he an Egyptian? Was he a shepherd? Was he a Midianite? Was he a murderer? Was he a fugitive? Was he a husband? At this point in Moses’ life, he had no one true identity. So he asks, “Who am I?” How interesting then, that when God shares God’s name, it is simply, “I Am.” While Moses had no idea who he was, God simply is.

The story of Israel’s liberation however, begins, “God heard their cry of grief, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked at the Israelites, and God understood. Renowned scholar Robert Alter renders these verbs of God to be “God heard. God remembered. God saw. God knew.”

While Moses was questioning himself, God saw him and knew him. God understood who Moses was before Moses did. God saw not a fugitive shepherd, but instead saw the perfect choice to lead the people to freedom.

And what about these people? What kind of people were they? The Exodus story uses two words to describe the people: Israelites and Hebrews. Israelites comes from their father Jacob who became Israel. Jacob was that trickster and heel who wrestled with God and was given a new name, Israel, which means literally “wrestles with God.”

Hebrew though, is a tougher name to pin down. There are many theories, but one significant one is that the word He-

brew comes from another word, *Apiru* or *Habiru*. The word *Apiru* was used widely in ancient documents, but usually in reference to a non-descript

bunch of people. Rabble-rousers, outcast, mercenaries. They were undesirables who had no particular claim or nationhood. They caused trouble and were a source of frustration to Pharaoh. In the Bible, the word Hebrew was only used in relation to the Pharaoh. This is what the Israelites were to Pharaoh—a nuisance, non-people who weren’t worth an actual name.

This is the people God heard, God remembered, God saw, and God knew. God took this group of rabble-rousing, outcast slaves, *Hebrews*, and made them into a nation, *Israel*. These were the people that God blessed so that they would be a blessing to the world.

This is the beginning of the liberation. This is the beginning of the Hebrews—the discarded, outcast slaves—becoming the Israelites, a nation with promise and a history. It began with God hearing their cries, remembering their promise, seeing their state, and knowing who they were.

We as a people of God are heard, seen, remembered, and known. We live in a world that is all too often blind and deaf to the cries of the needy, to the cries of the neighbor, and even to the cries of our own heart. How often do we ignore our own pain and suffering? But God sees you. God remembers you, and God knows you. Not just who you are, but who you have been and who you could be.

You are known by God. You are loved by God, and you are called by God to enter into the story of transformation and liberation that began when God said to Moses, “Go.”



Jacob