God Calls Moses

Exodus 3:1-4:31

Key Verse:3:10 “So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

The movie “Calling” starts with the dreams of a car dealer in Seoul Korea. Mr. Lim, an honest and devoted Christian, dreams the same dreams for a few days consecutively such as dreams of a monkey, foreign children, a national flag, and so on. He does not know what the dreams mean. He also meets his old classmate who went to Indonesia as a missionary and stopped by his office to buy a used car. Mr. Lim ponders the series of strange dreams and the unexpected reunion with his missionary friend. Later, he comes to realize that they were signs of God’s calling for him to be a missionary in South-East Asia. God showed him signs before he called him. Mr. Lim resigns from his work, receives missionary training, and goes to Malaysia as a missionary. In Malaysia he meets his old friend missionary and works together with him, happily ever after.

God’s calling is a blessing. In Genesis 12 God called Abraham and promised him that he would be a blessing, a blessing for the whole world. Indeed, Jesus Christ came to this world as a descendant of Abraham. In Luke 1 God called Mary to be the mother of Jesus. Jesus called the fisherman Simon and made him Peter, an apostle and teacher of the world. Today God calls each of us to make us a blessing. God’s calling is a blessing.

Calling accompanies mission. When God calls his people, he has a purpose for them. When God called Moses, God gave him a mission to deliver his suffering people out of Egypt. When God called Mary, God gave her a mission to bear a child as a virgin. God does not call us for nothing. He calls us to do good works.

Calling requires obedience. When God called Abraham, Abraham obeyed and went even though he did not know where he was going. (Heb 11:8) Abraham trusted in God and obeyed his word. Mary obeyed the angel’s message when she was asked to conceive a baby as a virgin, saying, “*I am the Lord’s servant... May it be to me as you have said*.” (Lk 1:38) Therefore, God’s calling is costly because we have to deny our own desire and will in order to obey God’s will. Nevertheless, God’s calling is a blessing because the reward and fruit of obedience is not worthy of being compared to suffering and sacrifice. This is the reason why people in the Bible obeyed God’s calling even though it was painful and costly. The God who calls us is faithful. He makes promises and keeps them. He does not change his mind or regret his choice because of our unfaithfulness and weaknesses. He does not cancel his call. So Paul said in Romans 11:29, “*for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.*”

Today’s passage teaches us how God called Moses, why he called him, and how Moses responded to God’s call. Through God’s call for Moses we learn who God really is and how we have to respond to God’s call.

First, God called Moses when he was in the wilderness. God did not call Moses when he was in the palace as a young prince of Egypt, but in the wilderness when he was an old and humble shepherd. Look at verse 1. “***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 wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God***.” It had been 40 years since Moses had come to the wilderness as a fugitive, escaping from Pharaoh. In Midian he met his wife Zipporah and had two sons. He lived as a shepherd for 40 years with his father-in-law and six sisters. His life was not luxurious like the life in the palace, but safe, secure, and comfortable. While living in the wilderness, he must have forgotten Egyptian and Hebrew because he did not have the chance to use them. Later he said in 4:10, he became ineloquent and was slow of speech and tongue.

Why did God call Moses when he was in the wilderness rather than in the palace? God did this so that Moses might depend on God, not on himself. Moses was proud and able in the palace as a prince of Egypt. So he killed an Egyptian and hid him in the sand. God did not use the proud Moses as a leader. Delivering one million people out of Egypt was not a small job that could be done by Moses’ wisdom and ability. It could be done only by the power of Almighty God. God waited for Moses for forty years until he became humble so that he might depend on God alone, not on himself. When God calls us, God wants us to depend on him, not on ourselves. In fact we make many mistakes and cause troubles when we try to carry out God’s calling with our own willpower and ability. When Moses was young and powerful, he killed an Egyptian in his anger. He could not bear even one Hebrew who accused him.

In verse 11 when God asked him to go to Egypt to bring his people out of Egypt, how did Moses answer God? “***But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt***?” (11) Moses knew who he was. If God called him when he was in the palace, he might answer, “Yes, Lord. No problem. I will kill Pharaoh and bring my people out of Egypt tonight.” Those who are called by God must know that our mission should be done by God, not by our ability and power. When God called Gideon to rescue his people from his enemies, he did not use 30,000 soldiers of Gideon, but only 300, so that Gideon might know that the battle belongs to the Lord, not to the numbers of soldiers and weapons. God does not weigh our ability or wisdom when we respond to his calling. God values our obedience and simple faith in God’s power and his word. When Jesus sent out his disciples, he asked them not to take any gold or silver or bags for the journey with them. (Mt 10:9) Jesus told them not to depend on money or other things, but on God alone. This is the reason why we depend on God alone when we go out for fishing on campus or when we do something for God.

Second, God called Moses to rekindle his vision. Look at verses 2-6. “***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.***” Mt. Horeb, called also Mt. Sinai, means “desert.” This mountain is known to be in Saudi Arabia today, but the exact location is still uncertain. God appeared to Moses in the flames of fire from within a bush. God who called Moses in the flame is the never-consuming everlasting God. The everlasting God is like the bush which is burning up, but never being consumed.

God introduced himself as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. This means that our God is the God of the covenant. Even though Abraham lived and died as Isaac and Jacob also did, God’s covenant lasts forever. The covenant had lasted for more than 600 years from Abraham to Moses. Now God wants to keep his covenant through (with) Moses. Look at verses 7-9. “***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***.” When God made the covenant with Abraham, he promised two things: descendants and land. (Ge 17:6-8; 26:3-4;28:13-14) Now Abraham’s descendants became as numerous as the stars in the sky. They needed land to live as people of God. God wanted to rescue them out of Egypt and to bring them into the promised land, the land flowing with milk and honey. Our God is a faithful God who keeps his promises. Our God is a compassionate God who has compassion on his suffering people.

So God wanted to send Moses to Pharaoh to release his people so that they might come to this mountain and worship Him. Look at verse 10. “***So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out Egypt.***” God rekindled his vision in Moses’ heart so that Moses might share God’s compassionate heart for his people. For the last 40 years while living in the wilderness Moses forgot his people. He lived an easy and comfortable life in the wilderness. He lost his vision of delivering his suffering people. God rekindled fire in Moses’ heart through his revelation in the burning bush.

Proverbs 29:18a say, “*Where there is no vision, the people perish*…” (KSV) It says in NIV, “*where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint*:…” The word ‘perish’ is *para’* in Hebrew, which means to loosen. This verse means that people without vision will live at random according to their physical desire without any goal and purpose of life. Moses lived in the wilderness for forty years without any life goal or purpose. Our life is more than just eating and drinking. As we studied last week, God created us to do good works for him and for others. (Eph 2:10) According to 1Peter 2:9 God delivered us out of darkness so that we may declare the praises of him who called us. We have a vision for the kingdom of God and receive the mission to share this vision with those who have no vision. As God rekindled his vision in Moses, he also rekindles his vision in our hearts. I praised God when I heard that women in our church begin to pray with one another every Friday and that missionary Luke Yang visits campus every Thursday to share the gospel with students. We have vision to see God’s kingdom coming into the hearts of young people on campus through our united prayer and diligent outreach. According to the Prophet Joel, our young men will see visions and our old men will dream dreams when the Holy Spirit comes on us. (Joel 2:28-32, Ac 2:17)

Third, God who called Moses was patient. What was Moses’ response 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***?” Moses’ first response to God’s call was defiant. He was not sure about himself. While living in the wilderness, he lost confidence and vision. He made excuses for his reluctance because of his lacking human qualifications. How did God answer him? Look at 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***.” God promised to be with Moses, who was not confident about himself. The presence of God was the sign for Moses. The signs and wonders which God would perform on the Egyptians would be the sign for Moses. Indeed, the presence of God is the best sign for those who are called. If God is for us, who can be against us? (Ro 8:31). God promised Abraham to be with him. God said to Abraham, “*Do not be afraid. I am your shield, your very great reward.*” (Ge 15:1) After God called Gideon, God said to him, “*The Lord is with you, mighty warrior*.” (Jud 6:12) Jesus promised his disciples to be with them always to the very end of the age. (Mt 28:20). With this promise of Jesus, David Livingstone went to Africa as a missionary and lived there for more than 30 years. Jesus will be with us when we preach the word. He will be with us always through the Holy Spirit to the very end of the age. He will protect our lives from our enemies and provide all things necessary for our mission. Our lives are in God’s hands. In doing God’s work fear is our worst enemy. Fear of rejection, fear of persecution, fear of failure, fear of loss, and so on. But God did not give us the spirit of fear (timidity), but the spirit of power, love, and self-discipline. (2 Ti 1:8) We are not afraid of sufferings because of Jesus’ promise that he is with us and his faithfulness for his disciples. God promised to be with Moses.

What was Moses’ second reaction to God’s promise? In verse 13 he said, “***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***?” The Israelites wanted to make sure if Moses was really sent from God. They would ask God’s name to verify Moses’ emissary. How did God answer him? Look at verse 14. “***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***.’” The word “I AM WHO I AM’ or “I AM THAT I AM” is not God’s name, but revelation of his being. God revealed his name in Exodus 6:2, “I am the LORD.” He meant “I am Yahweh (YHWH). The words “I AM WHO I AM” reveals God’s character which is faithfulness. God *who is* is God *who shall be*. The God of Abraham is the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob and the God of Moses. This reminds us of Hebrews 13:8, which says, “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*.” , and Revelation 1:8 which says, “*I am the Alpha and Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty*.” God’s faithfulness is revealed in his name. God’s faithfulness is also revealed in the redemptive history. God wanted to keep his promise to save his people the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. God wanted to keep his covenant with Abraham and with Isaac and with Jacob and with his people. This is why God called Moses and revealed himself before him.

In verses 15-22 God sent Moses again to the Israelites, and he told Moses what would happen in the future and what Moses should do at that time. Look at verse 15. “***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 you shall call me from generation to generation***.” God reassured his calling on Moses by keeping his covenant with his fathers through delivering his people from Egypt to the promised land---a land flowing with milk and honey. (17) God foretold to Moses that the elders of Israel and Pharaoh would not listen to him, but God would deliver his people out of Egypt after he strikes Egypt with many plagues. (18-20) At that time the Israelites would come out with the gold and silver of Egypt, like victors’ plunder in wartime. (21-22)

What was Moses’ response to God’s word? In chapter 4:1-17 God shows three signs to Moses, who was stubborn to his call. Moses repeated “*What if*?, but God patiently explained how he would perform signs before the elders of Israel and Pharaoh. God changed Moses’ staff into a snake and then, the snake back to the staff when Moses obeyed God’s word. God made Moses’ hand leprous and then healed it back. God also changed the water of the Nile River into blood. Still, Moses made excuses before God in 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***.” Indeed, Moses lost power and wisdom in speech and action while living in the desert. How did God answer Moses? Look at verses 11-12. “***The Lord said to him, “Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say***.” There is no excuse for God’s servant to complain about their human ability because God is with them and helps them. The Almighty Creator God will teach them how to speak and what to say. Yesterday Kit and several missionaries had a meeting for effective outreach. The common challenge for all of us is communication with students. We often don’t know what to say and how to respond to students who say ‘no’. But in today’s passage the LORD God encourages us to trust in him and depend on him. “*Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.*” Jesus said to his disciples, “*For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict*.” (Lk 21:15) We can overcome this language gap when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will help us to know what to say and how to continue conversations with strangers.

In today’s passage we learned about God who called Moses. Our God is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of the covenant. He is a faithful God who keeps his promises. He is a compassionate God who cares for the suffering people. Above all, God calls for a shepherd who will take care of his sheep. Let us respond to God’s calling as his disciples “Yes, Lord, here I am. Send me!” Amen!