

PREPARED FOR HIS APPEARING

Who was he talking too?? Probably not a major theological issue, but for Moses, it was the turning point of his life. Here, on the backside of a place that rivaled the moon for least likely places to vacation, the man picked by God wandered with the flock of his father in law.

Who was he talking to?? Maybe he was just humming one of his songs or thinking to himself but it was the defining moment for David. Here, the man picked by God wandered amid the ashes of his town torched to the ground.

Did he really know who he was talking to?? Perhaps, it was a dream come true, but it was definitely D-day for Joseph. Here, after wandering for years amid the lonely forgottenness of prison and slavery stood the man picked by God before the most powerful king alive.

We can learn a great deal in considering these three men and especially how God deals with those he has called and chosen. First, Moses...

You remember the story from Sunday school no doubt. After 40 years of learning to be a somebody in Pharaoh's household, Moses then spent another 40 years learning to be content as a nobody. It's one thing to live in the desert wilderness with a bunch of smelly sheep and goats. It's quite another to be content there... especially after experiencing the pleasures of the court of a mighty king.

For Moses, it was a long and lowly road of preparation and God knew he was ready by a simple test. It was a bush, an ordinary bush with an extraordinary flame. Now, it was not uncommon to see a bush or scrub-tree burning in this desert wasteland, but this one was different – remember? It burned with fire but was not consumed. Now, in order to notice such a thing, Moses had to gaze upon it for some time. He probably did a double or triple-take. He may have wondered if it was a mirage.

But the scripture says that it wasn't until Moses said, "*I will go over and see this strange sight-why the bush does not burn up,*" and turned aside, that God called to him -- This really is fascinating – Moses, like most of us in this day could have missed it and probably would have years earlier. When life is full of business that makes us feel important, such things are either unnoticed or unappreciated. But Moses, after forty years of doing what his Egyptian upbringing taught him was abhorrent (that is, shepherding) noticed the supernatural within the natural. He was a big man in a big hurry to do big things back in Egypt. But here, there was no one to impress, no schedule to keep, no daytimers or PDA's. Half his life had been spent in humiliation.

Consequently, God chose a very unique way to come to him – not in a dream, not a vision – a flaming bush. Now, later, He would appear as a flaming mountain, but that was for the host of Israel. For Moses, it was a burning bush – hey, not even a tree. Nothing lofty but rather lowly. Nothing majestic but rather meek. Why?

Because the person God uses to lead or influence others only does so successfully when it is done in meekness and humility – that is, in the character of Christ. Moses was about

to be placed in the most challenging leadership position imaginable – to undo 400 years of slavery, to break the bondage of cruel tyranny, to manage the exodus of two to six million people, to establish the laws that would govern a nation, to replicate the worship of heaven via the tabernacle...on and on it goes. In order to accomplish so much, God needed a man who could do so little. Anyone else would mess it up and just get in the way.

He was ready so God spoke. "*So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, 'Moses, Moses!'*" Ever notice how God frequently calls out to his children emphatically -- Moses, Moses! (Ex 3:4), Abraham, Abraham (Gen 22:11), Jacob, Jacob (Gen 46:2), Saul, Saul (Acts 9:4)? In each case, there's a big change of direction coming. God didn't bring Moses to the bottom of the world to leave him there, it was simply preparation.

David probably had as many tears running down his face as any of his men. Ziklag, the town where they and their families lived was burning and in ruins. All the women and children were gone, presumed dead or taken into slavery, all their possessions pillaged. Remember, however, that this was not the whole situation – you see, David had been hunted by thousands of madmen, soldiers and spies, determined to kill him in obedience to their paranoid king, Saul. In Ziklag, David was an outcast from his nation, hunkered down with the enemies of Israel.

The heady days of glory following his slaying of Goliath were long gone. The kingdom of Israel was falling apart under constant attack by the Philistines. Much of the territory once occupied by the children of Jacob was

now given up to the surrounding nations. Saul had brought coherence to the nation but also a ruthless tyranny and bondage, and his warfare was not all that effective. David had expatriated his parents to protect them and had even feigned insanity to survive. The kings of the Philistines had sent him home from the battle with his old nemesis, Saul, fearing treason. Returning to their adopted home of Ziklag, they found it ravaged and destroyed by marauders. Now, the sometimes-noble group of ne'er-do-wells and malcontents that had gathered about him here amid the ashes of their home were about to stone him. Rejected by Israel, rejected by the enemies of Israel, rejected by the rejects of Israel – David was at the bottom.

Unlike Moses, David had received a great promise from God – one day, he would be king. But how in the world could that possibly come true given the circumstances he faced – his complete disgrace? After all, virtually half his life had been spent on the defensive. Was he ready? Again, God's test was painfully simple – take him to the 'gates of hell' and see. Would David hang on to the promise of God? Like Abraham with knife raised over Isaac, like Jesus in Gethsemane, would he, in the final analysis, esteem his God as trustworthy?

At that defining moment, the scripture says that although he "*was greatly distressed...David encouraged himself in the LORD his God.*" (1Sam 30:6) The language is descriptive of him being exceedingly cramped in grief and stress, yet he strengthened himself by considering the Lord. Previously, David had looked to his own trickery, integrity or resourcefulness to save him. Here, stripped of everything, he truly

realized his only salvation was his Savior.

Joseph was really spruced up – shave and a haircut. He probably smelled good too. You didn't come before Pharaoh looking and stinking like you've been in a prison for years. But that's exactly where he'd been. You remember the story, don't you. Like David, Joseph had an early indications of greatness, but unlike David's they were disputed and put down from the beginning. Recall, he twice dreamed of ruling over his family, even over his parents, and that didn't sit well with them -- especially his brothers, ten of whom were older than he and incensed by his swagger.

But before Joseph could be lifted up, he had to be taken down...low down. Far from the family's camp, his brothers tossed him down into a pit to ponder how they should kill him. Then they sold him into slavery, and he was taken down into Egypt. There he served faithfully an officer of Pharaoh's court but was unjustly thrown down into prison. In jail, he served faithfully the other prisoners, and one day he met the butler and baker of the king, put into prison during a purge. Recall how he interpreted their dreams and as he predicted, the baker was hanged while the butler was restored. Ah, but two more years passed; it was probably something like 15 or 16 years since he'd seen home. The butler forgot all about him. Had God?

Joseph had inspired dreams. He discerned the messages in others' dreams. Dreams were Joseph's deal. But his life was more like a nightmare. He was humbled, forsaken and forgotten – God took him from the place of privilege to the pits of prison. Half his life was spent in bondage.

Was he ready for God's call? Again, a test.

Pharaoh dreamed a troubling dream and then another. It wasn't bad pizza; they were the kind of visions that make you really distraught. None of the court's wisemen could interpret them. But then, the butler finally 'came to' and remembered the Hebrew prisoner that had interpreted his own dream. Test time for Joseph. If he was to rule Egypt, he had to have no fear of man and no self-reliance – characteristics that would not have come naturally to a son of Jacob. But then the last half of his life had been supernaturally humbling.

Cleaned up to emphasize the fact that he was before royalty, God's man was brought to Pharaoh, and he said to Joseph, *"I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream, to interpret it."* Standing before this menacing monarch, given the opportunity to either shrink in fear or boldly boast his talents, Joseph boldly proclaimed, *"It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace."*

Yes, Joseph interpreted the night visions and rendered sage advice, but it wasn't Pharaoh who promoted him to Prime Minister – it was the Lord. (Psa 75:6,7)

Each of these men traveled the low road of preparation. It's a long road meant only for pilgrims. It leads through sorrow and grief, it weaves through humiliation and brokenness, it traces its way through loneliness and despair. But it has an end. It halts abruptly at the point of departure.

For Moses, one day he was an utterly obscure desert herder of sheep and the next, the man commissioned by God to do the impossible before the 'whole world.' For David, one day he

was a gutter-scraper – at the very bottom of the social ladder and very shortly after, he becomes king. For Joseph, one day he was a forgotten filthy foreigner in prison and the next, second only to the most powerful man on earth.

Now, you may never lead the nation. You may have plenty of challenge just balancing the family checkbook! Nevertheless, this all applies to you if you're a sincere believer in Christ. The day is coming in which you will likewise be exalted, raised up from the bottom and set on top. In like manner, it will happen quickly, as a matter of fact, in the blink of an eye. Now, your road has probably been long; you may have had illness, death of loved ones, poverty, abandonment, addiction, abuse. You may have wondered at the trials you've faced – 'Lord, what's going on?!?' Preparation.

Moses, David and Joseph – they each came from wealthy families and were driven by their circumstances into meagerness. They picture Christ who left the paradise of God's presence in heaven to walk among us 'penniless' and abandoned. Like Christ, they were exalted in due course and so will you and I; it's called resurrection or rapture. Either way, we're going up, just like our Savior. This life? It's not just about God working through you to accomplish His will but about God working in you to prepare you for what's waiting in eternity. The end result is what it's all about for the man or woman of God.

Joseph knew that when he said to his brothers, *"I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."* And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, *God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from hence.* David knew

that when he said to the Lord, *"As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."*

And God made that clear when He said to Moses, *"I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."* Think about it – the blood, the hail, the frogs, the lice, the plague, the death of the first born, even the parting of the Red Sea – those weren't signs for Moses – those were for Pharaoh and the people of Israel. The sign for Moses of God's choice was the end result – "You will worship me here on this mountain."

Joseph said, "Just take me home." David said, "I'll be satisfied when I'm truly like You." And Moses? God said, "You'll worship Me on My mountain." (a picture of heaven) They all spoke of eternity – the end result if you would.

Dear ones, everything God weaves into the fabric of your lives is to prepare you and bring you to a delightful end – not in 'Egypt', not in 'Ziklag'. Your destination is heaven. May your hearts be knit with His along the way, content in the desert if that's where He's got you, at peace in the prison, if that's where He's got you, encouraged amidst the ashes if that's where He's got you.

One way or another, He's preparing you for His appearing. Through seasons of joy and times of sorrow, through blessings and under burdens, set your desire upon the Lord and know that without fail, you will make it. God has great things for you to do in heaven, huge things! But, the end result is His responsibility, and when you're there, along with Moses, David, Joseph (and even me), you'll agree, it was worth it all!