

CHRIST CAME BEFORE CHRISTMAS

EXODUS 3:1-12

JESUS CAME TO SYMPATHIZE



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever felt down and out? So down and out that you've thought you'll never be up and in again? You had great hopes and dreams, but now you feel like a nobody, doing a nothing job, with a nothing future. Life is hard, worship is cold, loneliness is your only friend. You're down and out. **How do we get up and in when we're down and out?** I've asked that question more than once in my life.

No one was more down and out than Moses. Turn to Exodus 3:1-10 and watch as God helps him up and in again.

BACKGROUND

Exodus 1 ends with Israel suffering cruel oppression under a new Pharaoh. Exodus 2 ends with Israel crying out to the Lord in agony. Exodus 3 opens with Moses shepherding sheep in the desert. All looks bleak and hopeless both for Israel and Moses.



How can God help people who are at their lowest point?



1. GOD COMES DOWN (1-6)

Moses was down

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God (1)

It's forty years since Moses fled from Egypt in Exodus 2. He was a prince in Egypt and now he's a poor shepherd in the desert (1). He'd fallen from a great height to a great depth. He's 80 years old and his life and usefulness looks over.

God came down

And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush (2)

God came down at the most unexpected time and in the most unexpected way. Although Moses did not realize it initially, this was the Son of God who came down to the deep hole he was in. How do we know this was the Son of God?

- The narrator (Moses) writes that it is God (4, 7, 11)
- The Messenger says he is God (6)
- Moses calls him God (13)
- Moses required to remove his shoes in the presence of God (5)
- Moses is afraid to look at God (6)
- Deuteronomy 33:16 says it was God present with good will towards his people.
- God only communicates with people through his Son (Jn. 1:14, 18; 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 1:3).

This was God, yet he came down to a desert bush. He didn't speak out of a stately cedar, out of a beautiful flower, or out of a fruitful tree, but out of a desert thornbush, the kind of worthless bush that Moses had grown so familiar with in his 40 years of shepherding in that barren wilderness. Other Old Testament passages use branches and bushes as emblems of humiliation (Jd. 9:15), and especially of the future Messiah's humiliation (Isa. 11:1; 53:2; Jer. 23:5, 33:15; Zech. 3:8).

As Moses asked the meaning of this bush that burned without being consumed (7), so must we. Fire was a frequent evidence of God's presence (pillar of cloud and fire), but also of God's judgment. Was this perhaps a prophetic picture not only of the Messiah's humiliation but of his suffering God's wrath?

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

No matter how far down we are, God can come down to our level. He comes to where we are, he comes in a lowly condition, he comes to our level. How amazing for the Son of God to experience this 'coming down' even before he came down at Christmas. What insight he must have gained into his great future work as he humbled himself and was burned without being consumed. How encouraging for all of us who are down that Jesus comes all the way down to us.

WHEN WE CAN'T GET UP,
GOD COMES DOWN.



What does God actually do when he comes down?



2. GOD COMES NEAR (7-9)

Moses had powerless pity

Moses asked many painful questions as he wandered the wilderness for 40 years. He had seen the awful conditions of God's covenant people in Egypt. He had heard their bitter cries under the lash of their tyrannical Egyptian masters. From meeting in the wilderness with those who travelled through Egypt, he would have known that, forty years on, conditions were no better only worse. Where was the Lord? Did God not see this? Did God not hear? Did God not know about his people's sufferings? And if he did see, hear, and know, why was He doing nothing about it? Moses had lots of pity but no power. He could come near in his heart but not with his hands.

God had powerful pity

Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them...And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them." (7-8, 9).

God answers Moses' questions right away. "I've seen, I've heard, I know, and I've come." He saw, heard, and felt every lash, every pain, every cry. He had not forgotten them but he didn't step in earlier because he wanted them to get to the point where they all wanted to leave Egypt and never return. Now the time was right.

But he didn't only pity, he also exercised his power. He not only saw, heard, and knew, he was now acting to deliver them. Having assured Moses, of his eyes, his ears, and his mind, he now assures them of his almighty hand. He could not only feel pity like Moses he could do something about it (unlike Moses).

Moses is sitting back, saying, "Great, I can't wait to see this deliverance!" But God says, **"Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt"** (10). These were the last words Moses expected to hear. Instead of, "Come, watch me deliver Israel," it was "Come, I will send you to deliver Israel." God could do this himself directly but instead chooses to save through a go-between. When everything's broken, God sends a broker.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Some of us lack pity. We find it hard to enter into others' suffering. Instead of drawing near, we run away and avoid. Instead of putting our arm round the suffering, we give them a hand-off. Jesus is the most sympathetic person that ever lived, even more so now that he's actually lived in human flesh in our fallen world. The pity and compassion that brought him to earth, and showed on earth has been multiplied by his time on earth.

We all lack power. We can have lots of pity but be unable to help. Our hearts are moved but we can't move a hand to help. Jesus combines perfect pity and perfect power (Heb. 4:15-16). There's no lack of pity or power. He has the power not only to deliver from the slavery of sin but to bring us into the freedom of worship (Ex. 3:12; Lk. 4:18, 19:10; Heb. 4:15-16). Pity without power is as bad as power without pity. Christ had and has both.

PERFECT PITY + PERFECT POWER = PERFECT SAVIOR



Hear God's Story > Change your story > Tell the story > Change others stories



SUMMARY



PRAYER: Super Sympathizer, come down to our low level, and come near with your powerful pity, so that the down and out can get up and in.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What Bible passages have helped you when you've felt down and out and forgotten?
2. What message was the Son of God communicating by choosing to be in the burning bush?
3. When have you felt powerless pity?
4. How can you increase your sympathy for others?
5. Why is Jesus's powerful pity such a comfort to us?
6. What does Christ coming before Christmas tell you about Christ's coming at Christmas?

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