

Amazing Truths of the Pentateuch (10)
The Burning Bush: He Who Meets My Need
Exodus 3:1-15

Introduction:-

What does it take to get our attention in life? As a small child I remember being fascinated with a Christmas window in a large department store in Sydney, similar to the Myer Christmas window in Melbourne. The window featured some elves, who were sawing through a piece of wood. And what continued to capture my childish imagination and fascination, was the fact that the elves never did saw that piece of wood in half, no matter how long they kept sawing away!! Moses, even as an adult, must have had a similar experience at the Burning Bush. Only with this situation, the bush continued to burn, without being totally consumed! For this reason, the Burning Bush was certainly worth a closer look! And as we draw near to this passage, the Burning Bush experience brings before us some important spiritual truths today. I can think of at least three points, which we need to reflect upon.

1. First of all, the Burning Bush reminds us that God is the God of Perfect Timing and Purpose.

Two different sets of texts make the incident of the Burning Bush possible. First, back at Genesis 15:13-14 God reminded Abraham that Abraham's descendants would eventually become strangers in a country not their own, namely Egypt, and they would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years. But after that time, God would punish the nation they served as slaves, and afterward they would come out with great possessions. Here one may ask the question, as to how often was this text ever reflected upon, and remembered in Israel's history in Egypt? The second text relates to Exodus 2:23-25, just before our passage today. During the long period of Moses' exile in the land of Midian, the Pharaoh who sought to kill Moses was now dead. However, this also proved to be a time of great suffering and oppression for the Israelites in Egypt. But why does God respond to their suffering and cry at this point? The answer is provided by verse 24: Because he remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This covenant was first made with Abraham at Genesis 12:1-3, and was then renewed with Isaac and Jacob as time went by. God would make of Abraham's descendants a great nation, and would give them a land, and through them, God would also bless the nations of the earth. But now, the prophetic reality of Genesis 15:13-14 was about to come to pass. God had every intention to prove faithful to his covenant promises with the Patriarchs, and so nothing less than God's character was involved with what was now about to take place. God "saw" the Israelites plight, and was "concerned" about them. And in order to set the stage, and make the next move, Moses mysteriously takes his sheep to the backside of the desert and came to Mount Horeb, the mountain of God. Why do this with his sheep? Was there no suitable pasture near his home? It appears that Moses at this point was driven by a higher power and purpose. Moses would soon be called from tending the flock in order to become Shepherd of God's people, like David later on (2 Samuel 7:8). And so, in the vicinity of Horeb, the mountain of God, God provided a Burning Bush, which reminds us that God has a time-table, and promise, which He was intent on bringing to fulfilment. Should this not encourage our hearts today? Even though we often do not realize this amazing truth, God "is" working His purposes out from year to year. God has a time-table for our lives as well, and his interventions are always on time. Perhaps we can pause at this point, and think of the times when we had to say within our own experiences, that God's timing was truly perfect!! And so

the Burning Bush is a wonderful reminder to us today, as it was to Moses, that God has a time-table, and a promise to fulfil in our lives, as we journey with Him.

2. Secondly, the Burning Bush reminds us that God does not choose to remain a Hidden God

At Israel's most critical stage in history, the Burning Bush reminds us that God did not choose to remain hidden and silent, but drew near to His people, and to Moses, through the Burning Bush. What this is saying is that God is intent on communicating with His people, in a personal and individual way. Notice what happened at this Bush. Suddenly it burst into flames. That in and of itself may not be so unusual. But the obvious drawcard for Moses was that this Bush continued to burn without giving appearance of being consumed. Now that was worth taking a closer look at!! What did this really mean? (1) Firstly, when God reveals himself to us, He takes the initiative, and makes the first move. Furthermore, the call of God is always personal and individual, and our response to Him must be the same. We read that God called to Moses: "Moses, Moses", and Moses said, "Here I am" (verse 4 ; cf. Samuel at 1 Samuel 3:10). Dale Carnegie in his book "How to Win Friends and Influence People" speaks about the great power and affect that is connected with the ability to remember a person's name - "A person's name is to him or her the most sweetest and important sound in any language." (2) Secondly, any old Bush will do. God can speak to us in a multitude of ways. As C.S. Lewis reminds us, he can speak to us in our pain, disappointment and failure, as well as in our joy. I prefer to call these the way-side meetings of life. (3) Thirdly, every Bush is burning. This means that every bush of God's choosing is burning with God's revelation, purpose, and direction for us. With this in mind, God does and can speak through the most inconspicuous things of life. This is what brother Lawrence probably meant by the God of Pots and Pans in his book, "Practising the Presence of God." But there was also another side to this Bush. Notice verse 4. When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the Bush, "Moses, Moses." And he said, "Here I am." It is only as Moses approached the Bush, that God then addressed him from it. Had he not done that, the Bush would have kept on burning without revelation and reference to Moses. What then is the principle for both Moses and for us? I believe that this is clearly stated at James 4:8: "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you." In other words, practising the presence of God involves both intention and drawing apart to seek God's presence. Also, Moses had to learn that in spite of his privileged past, he himself was only a common bush. Any greatness in him would be the result of the divine indwelling, and divine outworking.

3. Finally, the Burning Bush speaks of the God who Calls and Meets our Needs

When God communicates with us at our Burning Bush, he calls us as he did with Moses in verse 10, to make a difference within our world. In fact, Moses would have been very comfortable to leave things with verse 9. If God has noticed the misery of His people in Egypt, and has come down to rescue them, then let Him act!! One could hear Moses say to himself, "It is about time that God stepped into the picture to do something about this overdue situation!!" But verse 10 comes as a clanger!! To fellowship with God and to encounter the Burning Bush was to also "Go to Pharaoh, that you might bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, from Egypt." Israel were a people in despair, a people for whom the light of life had gone out, as we have already noticed from Exodus 2:23-25. Even Moses himself had tried his hand in the past and had failed. And now as a failure in the desert, he is called by God to lead God's people out of Egypt, but he cannot see the way - In fact, at the point when God

meets Moses at the Burning Bush, he appears to have lost any sense of direction and purpose for his life - And then he encountered God at the Burning Bush. Here God is burning with indignation at the bondage of His people. But at the same time, God is burning with the memory of His covenant love and promises made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and with his desire to fulfil those promises and lead his people out of Egypt. This probably gives meaning to Moses' encounter with God as "fire", for Moses first encounters God as holy in verse 5, which then becomes foundational for the statement in verse 6: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" - In other words, "I am the faithful and holy God, who spans the generations, and does not change, and therefore, continues to walk and be with you." And when Moses later questions his own ability to lead God's people out of Egypt (verse 11), followed by the problem of the name of the God of your fathers (verse 13), the reply in verse 14 then becomes crucial: "I am who I am" - This reply can best be understood as preparatory for God's final reply in verse 15. In other words, what I am about to declare to you as the "I am" tells you all that you need to know about my unchanging name and character. Therefore, 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." In other words, this is who I am. I am a God with a purpose, plan, and end in view, that spans the generations. And so the Burning Bush finally reveals the God of the generations, who like the Burning Bush itself, whose fire does not go out, does not change, nor is capricious with regard to His holy character, faithfulness, and covenant love, but continues to burn with His desire to bless, call, and provide for the needs of His people throughout the generations.

Conclusion:-

To encounter the God of the Burning Bush is to gain a new perspective on how we may know and experience God in everyday life. James 4:8 tells us that if we draw near to God, he will draw near to us. Further, any Bush will do, and every Bush of God's choosing, no matter how seemingly insignificant in life, is burning with God's revelation and love to us. Here I think of Jesus' revelation of himself to Peter in his own fishing boat at Luke 5:1-11. After the miraculous catch of fishes, Peter fell at Jesus' feet within the boat, and said, "Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." This was then followed by Jesus' commission to the disciples to go forth and catch men for the kingdom of God. One could say, Moses' Burning Bush all over again, but this time, in a fishing boat!! Later Peter would recall a further Burning Bush moment on the Mountain of Transfiguration, when he heard the voice of God upon the mountain, with the words, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (2 Peter 1:16-18). And finally, as with Moses, the God of the Burning Bush says "I will be with you" wherever I send you, and will make you sufficient for every challenge that you meet. May we too continue to experience the God of the Burning Bush, as we follow in the steps of Jesus, and seek to make a difference to our lost and hurting world. God has much to share with us. Will we draw near to listen to Him? Maybe what we hear will change our personal world, and world of those around us, for both time and eternity. May God bless this meditation to us today. Amen.