

MOSES: The Servant of God

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE MARVELOUS COLLOQUY

“God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I” (Exodus 3:4).

MEMORABLE DAY

There are days in all lives which come unannounced, unheralded; no angel faces look out of Heaven; no angel voices put us on our guard: but as we look back on them in after years, we realize that they were the turning points of existence. Perhaps we look longingly back on the uneventful routine of the life that lies beyond them; but the angel, with drawn sword, forbids our return, and compels us forward. It was so with Moses.

Quite ordinary was that morning as it broke. The sun rose as usual in a dull haze over the expanse of sand, or above the gaunt forms of the mountains, seamed and scarred. As the young day opened, it began to shine in a cloudless sky, casting long shadows over the plains; and presently, climbing to the zenith, threw a searching, scorching, light into every aperture of the landscape beneath. The sheep browsed as usual on the scant herbage, or lay panting beneath the shadow of a great rock; but there was nothing in their behavior to excite the thought that God was nigh.

The giant forms of the mountains, the spreading heavens, the awful silence unbroken by song of bird or hum of insect life, the acacia bushes drooping in the shadeless glare these, things were as they had been for forty years, and as they threatened to be, after Moses had sunk into an obscure and forgotten grave. Then, all suddenly, a common bush began to shine with the emblem of Deity; and from its heart of fire the voice of God broke the silence of the ages in words that fell on the shepherd's ear like a double-knock: **“Moses, Moses.”**

And from that moment all his life was altered. The door which had been so long in repairing was suddenly put on its hinges again and opened. The peaceful quiet, the meditative leisure, the hiding from the strife of tongues, the simple piety of the homestead where the priest of Midian ministered, and Zipporah welcomed him with his boys, as he brought the flock home to its fold suddenly vanished, as a tract of land submerged beneath the ocean. And he went forth, not clearly knowing whither; knowing only that he dared not be disobedient to the heavenly vision, or refuse the voice of Him that spake.

That voice still speaks to those whose hearts are hushed to hear. By written letter or printed page, by the beauty of a holy life, the spell of some precious memory, or the voice of some living teacher, the God of past generations still makes known His will to the anointed ear. Nor will our lives ever be what they might until we realize that God has a plan for every hour in them; and that He waits to reveal that plan to the loving and obedient heart, making it known to us by one of the ten thousand ministries that lie around us.

Insensibly to ourselves we contract the habit of thinking of Him as the God of the dead, who spake to the fathers in oracle and prophet; whereas the I AM is God of the living - passing through our crowded thoroughfares, brooding over our desert spaces, and seeking hearts which are still enough from their own plannings and activities to listen. The main point for each of us is to be able to answer his summons with the response, "**Here am I.**"

It may seem long to wait, and the oft-expected day so slow in coming, that the heart sinks down, oppressed with the crowd of common days, and relinquishes hope; but your opportunity will come at last. Be always ready!

Never let the loins be ungirded, or the lamps expire; never throw yourself down at full length by the brook, to drink lazily of the limpid stream. In such an hour as you think not the Lord will come. What rapture to be able to answer his appeal with, "**Here am I.**"

If that summons were to come to-day, too many of us would have to ask for a moment's respite while we went to finish some neglected duty. Oh for the free, untrammelled, unengaged spirit, to be ready to go at any moment whithersoever the Lord may appoint.

A REMARKABLE ANNOUNCEMENT

Out of the bush came the voice of God, blending past, present, and future, in one marvellous sentence:

- the past, "**I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob**";
- the present, "**I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows, and I am come down to deliver them**";
- the future, "**Come now, therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh**" (Exodus 3:6-10).

Deep and searching thoughts arrest us, which should be laid most seriously to heart, especially by the Lord's busiest workers.

We are all too apt to run before we are sent, as Moses did in his first well-meant, but ill-timed, endeavors. We put our hands, at our own prompting, to a work that needs doing; we ask God to help us, and we go on very well with the momentum of our own energy for at least a day. But on the morrow, when chiding and rebuke and difficulty arise, as they did to Moses, we are disappointed, and throw it all up; betaking ourselves to flight, finding our refuge in the solitudes of the desert.

But what a contrast to all this ineffectual effort and dismal disappointment is presented in those who have learnt to wait for God!

When the time is full, they hear Him say, I am come down, and I will send thee; and from that moment they are no longer promoters, but instruments, agents, and tools, through whom He executes his plans. What, then, are difficulties to them? They anticipate them without anxiety; they pass through them without fear. God must have foreseen all before He put his hand to the work. He must be able to see a pathway threading the apparently trackless waste. He must know a door through what appears to be an impregnable barrier of rock. At any rate, the chosen soul has simply to walk with Him; to be ready to do the errands He requires, whether they consist in accosting monarchs, lifting up a rod, or uttering his words. That is all; and then to stand still to watch the ease with which He cleaves a pathway through the sea, and provides a commissariat in the desert.

DIVINE LONG-SUFFERING UNDER PROVOCATION

In the first blush of youthful enthusiasm Moses had been impetuous enough to attempt the emancipation of his people by the blows of his right hand. But now that God proposes to send him to lead an Exodus, he starts back in dismay almost petrified at the proposal. But how true this is to nature!

The student, as a precocious schoolboy, thinks that he knows all that can be acquired of a certain branch of science; but twenty years after he feels as if he had not mastered its elements, though he has never ceased to study. The believer who began by speaking of himself as “**the least of saints**” ends by calling himself “**the chief of sinners.**” And Moses, who had run before God in feverish impatience, now lags faint-hearted behind Him.

*At first he expostulated: “**Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh?**”*

There was something more than humility here; there was a tone of self-depreciation which was inconsistent with a true faith in God’s selection and appointment. Surely it is God’s business to choose his special instruments; and when we are persuaded that we are in the line of his purpose, we have no right to question the wisdom of his appointment. To do so is to depreciate his wisdom, or to doubt his power and willingness to become the complement of our need.

“And God said, Certainly, I will be with thee.”

“I whose glory shines here, who am as unimpaired by the flight of the ages as this fire is by burning; who am independent of sustenance or fuel from man; who made the fathers what they were; whose nature is incapable of change I will be with thee.”

What an assurance was here! And yet something of this kind is said to each of us when we are called to undertake any new charge. We have been called into the fellowship of the Son of God. **“He died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.”** He is with us all the days, even unto the end of the age. He will never leave us, neither forsake us.

“**Fear not,**” He seems to say; “I am with thee: I who change not, and without whom no sparrow falls to the ground. All power is given unto Me in Heaven and in earth. Not an hour without my companionship; not a difficulty without my co-operation; not a Red Sea without my right arm; not a mile of wilderness journeying without the Angel of my Presence.”

Days break very differently on us. Sometimes we open the door to a flood of sunshine, sometimes to a sky laden with black, dull clouds; now a funeral, and then a marriage; hours in which it is luxury to live, and others which pass with leaden-footed pace; but nothing can part us from our Divine Companion - nothing but needless worry or permitted sin.

*In his next excuse Moses professed his inability to answer if he were asked the name of God (13); and this was met by the proclamation of the spirit-stirring name, **I AM THAT I AM.** There we have the unity of God to the exclusion of the many gods of Egypt; the unchangeableness of God, who lives in an eternal present; the self-sufficiency of God, who alone is his own equivalent. No other term can describe Him; when you have said your utmost you must fall back on this that God is God.*

The term JEHOVAH was not wholly unknown to Moses, for it entered into his mother’s name, Jochebed, *the Lord my glory*; but now for the first time it was adopted as the unique title by which God was to be known in Israel.

Slowly it made its way into the faith of the people; and whenever employed, it speaks of the self-existent and redeeming qualities of the nature of God, and is forever enshrined in the precious name of our Saviour, Jesus. The whole subsequent life of Moses and of Israel was inspired by this name. All through their history the thought of what He was, and what He would be to them, rang out like a chime of bells.

And for us it is full of meaning. “**This,**” said He, “**is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations**” (15). And as its full meaning opens to our vision, it is as if God put into our hands a blank check, leaving us to fill it in as we will.

- Are we dark? let us add to his **I AM** the words, the true Light;
- Are we hungry? the words, **the Bread of Life**;
- Are we defenseless? the words, **the Good Shepherd**;
- Are we weary? the words, **Shiloh**, the Rest-giver.

“**For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power**” (Colossians 2:9-10).

Moses’ third excuse was that the people would not believe him, nor hearken to his voice (Exodus 4:1).

But God graciously met this also by showing him miracles which he might perform in Egypt, and which would read deep lessons to himself.

“What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod.” It was probably only a shepherd’s crook. What a history, however, awaited it! It was to be stretched out over the Red Sea, pointing a pathway through its depths; to smite the flinty rock; to win victory over the hosts of Amalek; to be known as the Rod of God. When God wants an implement for his service He does not choose the golden sceptre, but a shepherd’s crook; the weakest and meanest thing He can find a ram’s horn, a cake of barley meal, an ox-goad, an earthen pitcher, a shepherd’s sling. He employs a worm to thresh the mountains and make the hills as chaff. A rod with God behind it is mightier than the vastest army.

At God’s command the rod was cast on the ground, and it became a serpent. In Egyptian worship the serpent played a very conspicuous part. And as it wriggled on the sand, and sought to do him harm, so that he fled from it, it was an emblem of the might of Egypt before which he had become a fugitive. But, when God gave the word, how easily it became once more a rod in his hand, as he fearlessly grasped the venomous animal by the tail. So God would instruct his faith. If only he would dare to do as he was bidden, Pharaoh and all his priests, and the whole force of the Egyptian empire would be equally submissive.

The second sign was even more significant. His hand thrust into his bosom became leprous; and then again pure and white. It was as if God met his consciousness of moral pollution, and taught him that it could be put away as easily as his flesh was cleansed through His forgiving grace.

And the third sign, in which it was promised that the water of the Nile should become blood on the dry land, was full of terrible omen to the gods of that mighty country, the people of which depended so entirely on its river, and worshipped it as a god.

We may well ponder these significant signs. Are we only as rods, and rods which were once serpents? Yet God can do great things by us, if only we are willing to be wielded by his hand. Are we polluted with the leprosy of sin? Yet we may be as his hand, thrust into his bosom and made clean and pure. Are our foes many? They are his foes too, absolutely in his power to cover them with confusion.

The last excuse that Moses alleged was his lack of eloquence.

“O Lord, I am not eloquent; I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue” (ver. 10).

Probably, like our Cromwell, he had no ready supply of words. But God was willing to meet this also with his patient grace; and if only Moses had been willing to trust Him, it is probable that he would have added the gifts of a persuasive and splendid oratory to the other talents with which he was so copiously endowed. **“And the Lord said, Who hath made man’s mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say”** (verses 11, 12).

But Moses would not believe it; so at length the Divine anger burnt against him, and the Lord ended the conference by saying that He would send Aaron with him, to be his colleague and spokesman.

Ah! better a thousand times had it been for him to trust God for speech, than be thus deposed from his premiership! Aaron shaped the golden calf, and wrought folly in Israel, and became a thorn in the side of the saint of God. And probably in the eyes of their contemporaries, Aaron engrossed the greater attention, and had most of the honor and credit of the great deliverance.

THE FINAL ASSENT

It was a very grudging one.

“And he said, O my Lord, send, I pray Thee, by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send.”

It was as much as to say, “Since Thou art determined to send me, and I must undertake the mission, then let it be so; but I would that it might have been another, and I go because I am compelled.”

So often do we shrink back from the sacrifice or obligation to which God calls us, that we think we are going to our doom. We seek every reason for evading the Divine will, little realizing that He is forcing us out from our quiet homes into a career which includes, among other things, the song of victory on the banks of the Red Sea; the two lonely sojourns for forty days in converse with God; the shining face; the vision of glory; the burial by the hand of Michael; and the supreme honour of standing beside the Lord on the Transfiguration Mount.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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