

Sermon

October 5, 2014

Title: Burning Bush

Text: Revelation 1

## **Where Are We Going?**

### **An Invitation:**

I want to invite you to join me in an exploration of what is in many ways the most fascinating book of the Bible: The Book of Revelation. The Book of Revelation takes us on a very special journey: an Exodus Journey. The original Exodus story is the story of a journey that brought God's People out of slavery in Egypt to a new home, a land "flowing with milk and honey." The Revelation Exodus Journey takes us out of slavery to Sin and Death and into God's New Heavens and New Earth.

We're going to begin our exploration of Revelation this morning. Then, beginning on October 19<sup>th</sup>, I will bring you six messages from Revelation, with a follow-up study offered on Wednesday evenings here at the church. During that time you will be able to ask questions you might have, and we will dig more deeply into the portion of the book that we are studying at that time. We will also break out into small groups for sharing and prayer, so that we make sure to apply to our daily lives what God is showing us in this amazing book.

I would also like to invite small group leaders to a training and orientation time this Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. here at the church. I'll share with you how you can pitch in and make the small group time as effective as possible for those who attend.

### **The Exodus Journey and the Three Questions:**

The Exodus Journey answers three of the most basic questions that all human beings must try to answer:

- Who (or what) is God?
- Who are we?
- Where are we going?

Read the Book of Exodus, and you will soon discover that the Hebrew people had only the vaguest idea of Who God actually was. They didn't even know His Name. They were condemned to a false identity – that of being slaves to Pharaoh. And they had no future. Their future was determined by whatever Pharaoh wanted to do with them.

God's Exodus Journey upset the apple cart in all three of these aspects of their world.

- God broke in to reveal Himself as Creator and Redeemer and Judge, the One who would liberate them from slavery and make them His people.
- God redefined them as a nation chosen to be the vanguard of His work to restore His Creation.
- God called them to take the long journey to the Promised Land.

### **Our Exodus Journey:**

The Book of Revelation is one of the most timely and practical books in the entire Bible. It takes us on that same Exodus Journey, but now on a world-wide and cosmic scale. The Promised Land is now all of God's Creation. The chosen people are now from the entire human race.

The Book of Revelation is focused on making sure that we know *right now* Who God is, who we are as God's People, and where it is that we are going on our Exodus Journey. It allows us to see ourselves and our world from God's perspective.

Richard Bauckham sums it up this way:

*John (and thereby his readers with him) is taken up into heaven in order to see the world from the heavenly perspective. He is given a glimpse behind the scenes of history so that he can see what is really going on in the events of his time and place. He is also transported in vision into the final future of the world, so that he can see the present from the perspective of what its final outcome must be, in God's ultimate purpose for human history.*

*Richard Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation*

That means that the story of Revelation is *our* story. We will find ourselves all through it, if we take the time to look. And when we do, we will come to know Who God is, who we are, and where we're going.

## **The Exodus God**

### **A Letter from the One True God:**

The very first thing that John does in the Book of Revelation is to introduce us to the One True God:

*Revelation 1:4-5 NIV*

<sup>4</sup>*John,*

*To the seven churches in the province of Asia:*

*Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.*

The great overriding question posed by Revelation is the question of who is really Lord of this world? Is it the Emperor in Rome or some other human ruler? Is it a system of knowledge and technology, finance and culture? Or is it the God who created all things?

John introduces the Creator God by calling Him the One “who is, and who was, and who is to come.” This is an explanation of the Divine Name by which God identified Himself to Moses: I AM THAT I AM. It is a name that sums up all of reality. It is a name which says that there can be no rival, no other gods.

This One True God manifests Himself as Spirit: “the seven spirits before his throne.” The number 7, which figures so prominently throughout Revelation, is the number of completeness. John is not saying, therefore, that there are 7 Holy Spirits! Instead, he is saying that God’s Spirit fills God’s world.

Finally, we come to know the One True God through Jesus Messiah. He is the One through Whom God conquered Sin and Death. He is the One who rules as the world’s true Lord.

Time and time again we will see in Revelation the false rivals, the counterfeits, of Father, Spirit and Son. We will come face to face with the Dragon and His Monsters – the unholy trinity. To follow them is to go the way of death. But to know God as Father, Spirit and Son is to know ourselves and to find the way to eternal life.

### **An Exodus Introduction:**

The next thing John does is summarize our Exodus Journey from Sin and Death to Life in God’s New Creation. He reminds us that Jesus is the One:

*Revelation 1:5b-6 NIV*

*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, <sup>6</sup> and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.*

Just as God rescued Israel from slavery and death through the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb, Jesus became our Passover Lamb. He Himself entered our world, entered our brokenness. He allowed Himself to suffer all of the injustice and cruelty, hatred and shame, that humans are capable of. He carried a Roman cross to that ghastly hilltop called The Skull. He became our sacrifice, entering into the darkness and death of this old creation so that He could conquer Death on our behalf and make us a new people – “a kingdom and priests.”

And He is the One Who will return to rule all of God's Creation as the world's True Lord:

<sup>7</sup> *"Look, he is coming with the clouds,"<sup>[b]</sup>  
and "every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him";  
and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him."<sup>[c]</sup>  
So shall it be! Amen.*

<sup>8</sup> *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."*

## **Burning Bush**

### **Finding Ourselves in the Exodus Story:**

John has shown us Who God is. He has shown us a glimpse of who we are. So what about the third question: Where are we going? John's next words show us exactly where we are in our Exodus Journey, and thus, where we're going. He writes:

*Revelation 1:9 NIV*

<sup>9</sup> *I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*

In a word, John was in *exile*. He wasn't in the Promised Land. Nor was he at home in Egypt. He was in between. He was exiled on the island of Patmos "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." He had refused to acknowledge the emperor and his system as Lord of all. Like other believers, he was their companion in suffering and patient endurance. And they had not yet seen Jesus return to rule the world.

Isn't that where you and I find ourselves in God's Story? Like John, we have been set free by Jesus' death and resurrection. We, too, have a new identity as "a kingdom and priests." But we live in a broken world that is hostile to God. As we will see, Revelation is written to us and for us precisely because of where we find ourselves in the Exodus Story.

### **Burning Bush:**

John tells us that an amazing thing happened to him right in the middle of his exile on Patmos:

*Revelation 1:10-16 NIV*

<sup>10</sup> On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet,  
<sup>11</sup> which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

<sup>12</sup> I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup> and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man,<sup>[d]</sup> dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. <sup>14</sup> The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. <sup>15</sup> His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. <sup>16</sup> In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

Every Exodus Journey begins with a Burning Bush. Moses met God in exile, in the desert, and received his marching orders. God had to be *real* to Moses before Moses, or Israel, would dare to set out on Exodus.

John's vision of Jesus is much like that of Ezekiel, a prophet who like John was in exile. In describing his "burning bush" experience, Ezekiel writes:

*Ezekiel 1:26-28*

<sup>26</sup> Above the vault over their heads was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. <sup>27</sup> I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. <sup>28</sup> Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him.

*This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.*

### **Knowing where we're going:**

John's response to seeing Jesus is much the same:

*Revelation 1:17-20 NIV*

<sup>17</sup> When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. <sup>18</sup> I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

<sup>19</sup> "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. <sup>20</sup> The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Jesus knows where we're going. He has the keys that unlock even Death's stronghold. He is both the Beginning and the End of the Journey. And He promises to show us the way forward.

Best of all, He is standing right in the middle of His people. In the symbolic language of the vision, the seven lampstands are the seven churches. The seven churches stand for us all – the complete church in all ages. And Jesus assures us that He is right here with us. In His hands are the messengers to the churches. We will never be without His direction.

Remember what I shared with you a few moments ago about how the Book of Revelation shows us our world from God's perspective? The world we live in may seem hostile or uncaring. It may seem to be a place where might makes right, where truth is "negotiable," where money does all the talking. John reminds us that it is not that way in the reality of God's perspective. Jesus is already the world's true Lord. And He stands with those who trust in Him. He speaks to them and cares for them. He is our Leader on our Exodus Journey.

Like John's first readers, every day we will have to answer the question of Who is going to be God in our lives. Every day we will have to answer the question of who we truly are. And every day we will have to decide whether our next words or actions will take us on our Exodus Journey with Jesus, or whether they will take us back to Egypt. I invite you to join me as we let John chart the path and answer these three questions. I invite you to join him on his Revelation Exodus Journey.