

## “Ordinary, Average Guy”

Exodus 3: 1-15

August 31, 2008

If we were asked to create a list of the most famous characters in the Bible, I can't help but think that Moses would be one of the first names mentioned. Christians, Jews, Muslims—even people of no faith at all—are familiar with this man who played such a pivotal role in the ancient history of God's people.

As famous as Moses is, I'm sure that you have certain images and stories that come to your mind when you hear his name. So tell me, what do you think of when you hear the name Moses? Well, among all of those images and stories, one of the most familiar and beloved has to be our scripture reading this morning, the story of Moses and the burning bush. And if you're anything like me, whenever you hear that story mentioned, the first image that comes to your mind looks something like this.

For millions of people who grew up watching television and movies, Charlton Heston, God rest his soul, was Moses. He was tortured on the planet of the apes and chased by radiation infected zombies as the Omega man. He stood before the National Rifle Association and dared the liberal media elite to pry his gun from his cold, dead fingers, but despite all that, whenever I see or hear Charlton Heston, I see Moses.

One of the things that I've always loved about Heston's portrayal is the way that he overplays and dominates every scene that he is in. Joshua, Miriam, Dathan, Pharaoh—whoever might be sitting around talking about whatever in *“The Ten Commandments”*—they sound pretty much like you and me. But then Moses enters the scene with his deep, booming voice and sweeping, dramatic gestures, and it almost looks like he's acting in a different movie altogether. One of my favorite examples is when he is in the mudpits slogging away and when he's given a drink of water, instead of saying *“Thanks, that really hit the spot,”* like a normal person might, Heston as Moses replied *“Woman, you bring a warm smile with your cool water.”* Who talks like that? With his face glowing like he spent too much time in a tanning booth, and speaking the King's English like some sort of Shakespearian actor, it's like he's from another planet or something.

However, despite the beloved nature of Charlton Heston's portrayal, chances are that the testosterone-injected swagger of his Cecil B. DeMille Moses bears little resemblance to the real Moses who walked the plains of Midian so many thousands of years ago. Let me explain what I mean. Imagine, if you will, that God was accepting applications for someone to lead his children out of bondage in Egypt. Our experience might lead us to picture something like Charlton Heston storming into the room booming out "*A deliverer of the Jews do you seek? I tell you that I am he!*" It sounds pretty inspiring, but it's not very realistic.

In real life, what Moses would have had to offer God in such a situation would have been a résumé that read something like "*former slave, ex-prince, brick maker, murderer, and shepherd.*" Despite our attraction to the Charlton Heston bravado, the truth is that when God met with Moses on top of Mount Hermon that afternoon, there really wasn't a whole lot on his résumé that would suggest to anyone that Moses was the man who would lead the Jews out of captivity in Egypt.

Even in his own estimation Moses was in most ways little more than just an ordinary, average guy. When God called him from that burning bush, Moses replied, "*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?*" [Exodus 3:11] And remember how brave Charlton Heston was when he cast that wooden rod on the ground before Pharaoh and it turned into a serpent? When God first introduced the idea to him in chapter 4, the scriptures tell us that "*he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it.*" [Exodus 4:3]

And as for that dramatic elocution that we have become so accustomed to from repeated viewings of "*The Ten Commandments,*" in chapter 4 of the book of Exodus, Moses told God "*I am slow of speech and of tongue.*" [4:10] Far from waxing eloquent like Charlton Heston, many scholars interpret this statement to indicate that Moses was in fact a stutterer. In the final assessment, it was a murderous, herpetophobic, stuttering shepherd and former slave that God called to lead his people in a chapter of their story that would shape the identity and history of his people forever.

Now, why do I tell you this? I tell you this because so often when we think of people who make a difference for God in the world, we tend to think of the Charlton Heston type. In our mind's eye, when we try to imagine some individual who might be considered for membership in our Biblical Hall of

Fame, we figure that it would have to be some big, strong, tall, eloquent, brave, handsome, charismatic guy or gal with thick hair and high cheekbones. When in fact, just like our friend Moses, God uses ordinary, average guys and gals—people just like you and me—to achieve His will in the world every day. It's pretty amazing when you think about it.

But even more amazing than that is the fact that not only does God use ordinary people like you, me, and Moses to change the world, God actually NEEDS us. In his classic book, *The Meaning of Prayer*, Harry Emerson Fosdick puts it this way, “*Meister Eckhart, the mystic, puts the truth with extreme boldness; ‘God can as little do without us, as we without him.’ God cannot do some things unless men work. Will a man say that when God wants bridges and tunnels, wants the lightnings harnessed and cathedrals built, he will do the work himself? This is an absurd and idle fatalism. God stores the hills with marble, but he never built a Parthenon; he fills the mountains with ore, but he never made a needle or a locomotive. Only when men work can some things be done. Recall the words of Stradivarius, maker of violins, as George Eliot interprets him: ‘When any master holds ’twixt chin and hand a violin of mine, he will be glad that Stradivari lived, made violins, and made them of the best ... for while God gives them skill I give them instruments to play upon, God choosing me to help him ... If my hand slacked I should rob God—since he is fullest good—leaving a blank instead of violins ... he could not make Antonio Stradivari’s violins without Antonio.’”*

It is a miraculous partnership forged between an ordinary, average guy and an extraordinary God: God and Moses in the desert, God and Stradavari in Italy, God and you, here and now. Every day of your life from the very day that you were born, all along the road of your life, God has placed a series of burning bushes, each one calling you to follow God in the working out of His design for the creation. All through your life God has been guiding and leading you through a series of events, all of which have been preparing you to be the person that God has created you to be, and to do the good for the world that only God's power and your willingness can make possible.

So think about it this morning ... what is it that God wants done, but cannot accomplish without your help? What blanks will be left in the world if you don't respond to the bushes that burn around you inviting you to do for God and your neighbor the things that only you can do? Now think about plain old ordinary Moses and the way that his life has changed the world forever,

keeping in mind that God continues to change the world with love and grace every single day by ordinary, average guys and gals just like you.  
Amen.