

## Exodus 3 - Moses at the Burning Bush

**3** Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup>There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. <sup>3</sup>Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." <sup>4</sup>When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." <sup>5</sup>Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." <sup>6</sup>He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

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**Q & A with Jesus**

**Exodus 3:1-6; Luke 20: 27-40**

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*One day, when he was teaching the people in the temple and telling the good news...*

This is how Luke begins chapter 20 – feel free to turn to it and follow along if you'd like, but I'll guide you through it if you just want to listen, and we'll get to the reading for the day when it comes to that point in the text.

*One day, when Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and telling the good news...*

Imagine, Jesus is the keynote presenter, the preacher, the teacher, the one who has the microphone for the moment. He's doing what both my husband and I do professionally to make a living – talking... teaching... trying to make an impact with his words... – and if he were in front of an audience today, he might just have his power point slides cued up and ready to go.

The danger is that he's teaching on "other peoples' turf." He's doing this in the temple – where there are other teachers, other preachers, ones who are already pre-qualified to run the show, maybe who feel themselves more qualified to present what he's presenting. He's the new kid, the hot ticket so to speak. People are gathering around him rather than around the old guys they've heard drone on a thousand times before. He's garnering attention, too much attention, so the old guard has to figure out how to stump him, or reign him back in, or shut him up. Lucky for them, Jesus is about to open up his Q and A to the broader temple audience. If they can just get a few zinger questions in, maybe, just maybe they'll take a bit of the wind out of his sails.

My hunch is that you've seen how this goes in some context in your own life – a business conference, a teacher in-service, at Presbytery, or at a PTA or Home Owners Association meeting. You have sat in an uncomfortable chair at some gathering where there is supposed to be learning, or voting, or the adoption of a new mission statement, and someone takes the mic that you KNOW has their own agenda they want to get across. You dread hearing “that person” open his or her mouth. You can sense it taking time off your life. You can feel your stomach growl because you know this is going to delay lunch by at least 20 minutes. You maybe even feel a little twinge of guilt that you should have protected the keynote speaker from the tirade of questions you know has the potential to wreck everything good he just said.

But this is Jesus. Apparently, he knows he's going to have critics and hecklers. He's one of those speakers that's just as good off the cuff as he is during his prepared address. Maybe he's even better at those exchanges given that Luke decides he better write some of that stuff down. The text this morning enters that exchange in the middle, but it's interesting to look at the variety of questions that appear in this chapter.

The first question is more demand than question: *Tell us, by what authority are you doing these things? Who is it who gave you this authority?* They want to know Jesus' curriculum vitae. (vee – tie) What's on his resume? It wasn't in the hand out. Has he been ordained? Does anyone know who taught him this stuff? Even then, preachers and teachers were judged on their level of education and which school they were from. They want to read and pick apart his bio. They want to see if he's been appropriately trained enough to be teaching in the temple. If you ask any of our seminary students about this process today, they can certainly tell you about what hoops they have to jump through to be legit in having the designated authority to teach in the church. Jesus

skirts the question by saying basically, “You’re just trying to trick me so I don’t have to answer that one. Next.”

Well, next, Jesus tells a parable against those who asked the question, insinuating that they have killed all the prophets of God, and they will kill him as the beloved Son too. You have to remember that some keynote speakers are sent to be trouble-makers. Jesus is one of those. Ever heard any of your teacher friends complain about the speaker brought in for the in-service to “tell them how to do their jobs.” Jesus is being *that* consultant here. They sense that his metaphor of the tenants responding with violence to the messengers from the owner of the vineyard is all about them. They don’t like it. When that happens to us, we don’t like it either. Pastors get pretty riled up at church conferences too. We go to hear about new things and new ideas, but then we don’t want to change anything for new life to take root. We want to know the easy fixes and proven gimmicks that will bring in new people and their wallets. We certainly don’t want to hear how we have shut out God’s presence with the traditions that make US comfortable. The same is true of those who were disturbed by Jesus’ teaching. He was meddling. He had already overturned the money changers tables one of the last times he came to teach in the temple. Wasn’t that enough? Luke tells us they were ready to kill him. So, what does Jesus do? He asks for another question.

This time the question is about paying taxes. Wanna get someone in trouble? Get them talking about politics AND religion in the same breath. The spies “pretending to be honest” get to ask this question according to Luke: *Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?* That’s the “show me whose face is on the coin” answer. So, knowing that there’s more to unpack there than we will get to, we’ll skip over that one for now and take the next question, bringing us to today’s

reading, which is a question about resurrection coming from those who “say there is no resurrection.” Imagine for a moment how that might turn out before I go on.

## Luke 20:27 - 40 - The Question about the Resurrection

<sup>27</sup> Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him <sup>28</sup> and asked him a question, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man<sup>(a)</sup> shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. <sup>29</sup> Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; <sup>30</sup> then the second <sup>31</sup> and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. <sup>32</sup> Finally the woman also died. <sup>33</sup> In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.”

<sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; <sup>35</sup> but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. <sup>36</sup> Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. <sup>37</sup> And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. <sup>38</sup> Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.” <sup>39</sup> Then some of the scribes answered, “Teacher, you have spoken well.” <sup>40</sup> For they no longer dared to ask him another question.

Initially this question made me feel like we have “Richard Dawkins” in the audience – some puffed up atheist who wants nothing more than to see the religious person squirm. It’s not exactly that, but for some questions, you have to know who’s asking the question to know how to respond – especially as a religious leader or particularly when a disagreement about the tenets of one’s faith is being questioned. Luke is right on at least one account, there IS a conflict of theological interpretation happening here. The Sadducees don’t believe in resurrection. And obviously from the question, Jesus has been sharing a lot in proclaiming this “good news” about resurrection, both as a renewal of life on earth, AND a promise for those who trust in him that

there will be life after death. The Sadducees were logical thinkers. They followed religious law. But, we do not *need* to presume that they were out to get Jesus – even if it feels that way given the tone Luke writes into this text about some of those other questions. Remember that ALL the people listening at the temple had been raised on the law of Moses, Sadducees included.

Therefore, they all knew, whether they were practicing it or not, that Moses had laid out for them in the Deuteronomic code a process for the succession of heirs, something important in a culture where children were needed to sustain family lines into the future. But a problem with this idea of resurrection presented itself when, in this practice, a woman might marry multiple brothers trying to conceive heirs for her first husband, and for whatever reason, 7 of the brothers in this line marry her and die childless. Then there's a question, to whom would she be married in the afterlife? To us it may sound like a strange question, but it really isn't. Luke genuinely interprets some hostility throughout this Q & A, but I do wonder if there was honest curiosity coming up as well. What I love is that Jesus' answer to the question remains a compassionate one – I think – and here's why.

I can tell you, the most curious questions come to pastors about the afterlife, and just like with Jesus, our answers could easily sound like avoidance, or like some woo-woo stuff we are making up. Will I get to see my dog in heaven? Will there be cheeseburgers in Paradise? If I've been divorced or widowed, and married again, with whom do I spend eternity? To this day, curious religious seekers still ask about partners and relatives and what those relationships will be like in our heavenly bodies. We can't imagine an afterlife without the people, and pets, and foods, and scenery that we've always loved in this life. If there are no mountains or trees, I'll feel lost – but what about the people who love their desert landscapes? They may not adore my idea of not just almost heaven, but an actual view from heaven to be a sunset over a West Virginia mountain

range. These are serious questions, and those who ask them want me, as a purveyor of religious truth, to answer them honestly.

Try as I might, my answers aren't so much like Jesus' answer. Jesus was blunt in telling them there is no marrying or giving in marriage in heaven. I refrain from telling people that life as children of the resurrection may have less need of such things than we might think. I genuinely want to believe that the relationships we make in this life are honest and true, and worthy of redemption into the next. But do I know that my answer is not necessarily the most honest one. My experience of heaven is, well, about the same as yours I'd guess. It's all speculation. This is the Jesus of Luke's gospel, not John's so we can't presume that Luke has the same idea as John that Jesus would ACTUALLY know as someone present with God from the beginning of creation. Would Jesus, could Jesus tell us the whole truth? Again, I don't know.

What I do know is that he listened very, very carefully to the question. It began, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us..." Moses. Moses gave us this instruction and what you have said Jesus, even as a teacher of our own book, may make me have to re-think what Moses taught. The Sadducees are saying, help us out here. So, Jesus replies to them with Moses' understanding of who God is, so they might have an even deeper understanding of the God who was and is and ever shall be the Creator of Heaven and Earth. From the burning bush, this well-known sign of God's presence, God introduces himself to Moses as the God of his ancestors: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Issac, the God of Jacob. Jesus tells the Sadducees that God brings those ancestors to life in that moment of recognition. They are not dead and gone. God is the God of the living, not of the dead. Therefore, if they, Abraham, Issac, and Jacob are in relationship with Moses, then they must be in relationship with the Israelite people forever and throughout all eternity. I don't think this answered their question in the way they asked it. I understand exactly what he's doing

though. I still hedge a little when people want me to give certain answers about the unknown aspects of what resurrection holds to be true. It's OK that there's a little mystery going on there. It gives our own imaginations some freedom, and allows us to put our faith even more fully in the God of our ancestors who loves us enough to be one with us in this human life, and invites us into trusting in a life that is to come. And I absolutely love what happens next. The Sadducees say to him, "Teacher, you have spoken well." And Luke says, no one dared to ask him another question. Amen.