

27 February 2011 David Neate

Rescue – Saviour

What attracts our attention?

There's a story about a university interview where a bored tutor peered out from behind his newspaper, and asked the candidate to "surprise him". One candidate leant across the desk and set fire to the paper, winning a place for sheer audacity.

UK spends approx £20bn on advertising each year. Advertisers want to attract our attention.

At the Christian Resources Exhibition (CRE, Peterborough) this week, people tried to grab the attention of visitors walking past the stands. Singers have sung about it, Clifford T. Ward "I wish I had the wherewithal, to attract your attention" (1973).

At school, teachers used to throw chalk, to attract a pupil's attention (probably not these days). In sport, referees blow a whistle to get the attention of the players.

How does God attract our attention? For most of us, there is no burning bush, or Road to Damascus experience, but probably a 'still small voice of calm', maybe through creation, eg sunset.

God appeared to Moses in a burning bush, and revealed His identity to Moses. "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." He reminds Moses of who He (God) is. It's because of his ancestors, that Moses and the Israelites are in Egypt.

We heard last week in Genesis 12, 17 that God promised Abraham that He would make him the father of a multitude. Abraham and Sarah had a son – Isaac, who married Rebekah, and they had twin sons Esau and Jacob. Esau sold his birthright to Jacob. Jacob married Leah and Rachel and had 12 sons, one of whom was Joseph.

We also heard how God had renamed Abram (exalted father) as Abraham (father of many). After wrestling with God, God also renamed Jacob (he grasps the heel = he cheats) as Israel (he struggles with God).

Most parents say they don't have favourites, they love their children differently. Jacob loved Joseph more than his other sons; as Bruce Forsyth would say 'you're my favourite'; he gave Joseph robe of many colours. Most people probably know about Joseph because of 'Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat', the musical by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice.

Joseph's brother's were jealous of him and sold him into slavery to merchants going to Egypt.

God was with Joseph; he was a servant in an officer's (Potiphar) house, then wrongly imprisoned, and then with God's help he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, and became an official (vizier, high executive) of Pharaoh.

Because of Joseph's prudence (something Gordon Brown would approve of), there was food in Egypt, even during the years of famine. Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to get food, eventually they are reconciled.

Joseph recognised that God had been at work.

"And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors" (Gen 45v7)

Joseph reassures his brothers about God's purpose.

"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen 50v20)

Hindsight helps us to see how God has been with us.

Even in tough times, do we have faith in God? Will be faithful to God, as He is faithful to us?

There had been hardships on the way, but God saved His people. Despite their flaws, God looked after His people – encouraging for us.

Three to four hundred years have passed and the Israelites are slaves in Egypt. Joseph has been forgotten (Ex 1v8). The Israelites were numerous, and the new Pharaoh wanted to stop them growing even more, so he wanted all the baby boys to be killed (Ex 1v16), (Herod did a similar thing, Matt 2v16, after Jesus' birth). One baby Hebrew boy was found by Pharaoh's daughter in a basket in the reeds on the River Nile, this was Moses. Moses grew up in Pharaoh's house, but he was still a Hebrew. After killing an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew, Moses fled to Midian (South East Sinai), where he married Jethro's daughter, Zipporah, and became a shepherd.

On Mount Horeb (possibly Mount Sinai), God appears to Moses as a burning bush.

The LORD is the God of Israel's ancestors and was aware of His people's suffering (Ex 3v7), He was coming to fulfil His pledge of deliverance (Ex 3v8).

In the news this week, has been the uprising in Libya, the British Government sent planes to rescue people from the desert. We knew about the problems but it took a few days to get the planes to the desert.

In Christchurch, NZ, some people have been rescued after the earthquake, though unfortunately there have been many fatalities. Rescue teams from Japan, Britain, and around the world flew out to help in the rescue.

God is planning to use Moses as part of His rescue plan.

At the age of 80, Moses is called and commissioned by God. There is plenty of time for God to use us!

Moses is uncertain and feels inadequate, but God promises to be with him (Jesus promised to be with the disciples when He sent them out into the world, Matt 28v19-20).

It's not about Moses, it's about God.

“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak in the world to shame the strong” (1 Cor 1v27). The glory goes to God, not to us.

Moses has to take a step of faith, God's confirmation is that the people will worship God on Mount Horeb (Ex 3v12). We live in faith as well, we look forward to the New Creation.

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11v1).

Moses knows that God is the God of his ancestors (Ex 3v6), but wants to know more about who He is.

God reveals more about Himself. Yahweh – the name of the Living God – I AM who I AM (I cause to be what is). YHWH is the tetragrammaton, representing God's divine name, in English represented 'LORD' in capital letters.

Jesus refers to Himself in this way, eg 'before Abraham was, I AM' (John 8v58), which seemed blasphemous to the Jewish leaders, who tried to stone Him.

There are also seven 'I AM' sayings of Jesus in John's Gospel. Jesus was claiming to be God. Jesus is God's ultimate rescue plan, to save us from our sins.

God has revealed Himself to Moses and want Moses to reveal Him to the people.

Later in Exodus, we see that God will fulfil His promise of redemption.

The Israelites are in slavery in Egypt, God will use Moses to bring the people out of slavery.

We are slaves to sin (John 8v34), Jesus can set us free (John 8v36), He is our Saviour.

There is a book by Philip Yancey called 'Finding God in Unexpected Places'; in the introduction he quotes someone he met who said “God is already present, in the most unexpected places. We just need to make God visible.”

At a CRE seminar, Michelle Guinness talked about discovering God in daily life, finding God in the ordinary things.

“The Practice of the Presence of God” by Brother Lawrence, 17th century monk, talks about developing an awareness of God. Will we listen for what God is saying to us? How will we respond? Will we take a step of faith, like Moses?

“Earth is crammed with heaven,
and every common bush is on fire with God;
but only he who sees takes off his shoes;
the rest sit around it and pluck blackberries.”

– *Elizabeth Barrett Browning (Aurora Leigh, 1857)*

It's not the season for blackberries at the moment, but there are other distractions for us.

Will we see God and worship Him in obedience?

Moses encountered God in a burning bush, but we can encounter God through His living Word, the Bible.

Some of us are using the Essential 100 (E100) by Scripture Union – a journey through the Bible, seeing God's big picture.

Maybe Lent, which is less than two weeks away, will be an opportunity to take time to be with God and listen to Him. Will meet with God on His terms?

God sent Jesus to attract our attention, to be Immanuel – God with us, to rescue us, to forgive us.

This week, Prince William and Kate Middleton launched a new Lifeboat in Anglesey. Lifeboats go out, often in stormy weather, to rescue people. In the same way, the Church can play its role in God's rescue plan – bringing people to Jesus as their Saviour, knowing God as their shelter in life's storms.

Will we listen out for God in every day life, tell others about Jesus, though we might be nervous and uncertain, we all need saving, we can trust God, we can all play a part of God's rescue plan.

In the song 'Our God is a great big God', the second part of the verse is: “And He's known me and He's loved me since before the world began. How wonderful to be a part of God's amazing plan!”