



Stuck In Midian

by Rev. Jerry L. McGlone

Exodus 3:1-4

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and [Moses] looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt."

When the Lord saw that [Moses] had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "*Moses, Moses!*" And [Moses] said, "Here am I."

Back in August of 1976, Janet and I had gone through a few major life changes. Our daughter, Jennifer, was eight months old. Janet had just graduated from law school. I had decided to look for a job as a pastor.

In August of 1976, Janet and I decided we would take a vacation before the rest of our lives started. To prepare for the trip, we took our car in for a tune-up and oil change. Wanting to save money, we took that car to a garage that advertised a tune-up and oil change for \$35.00. What a deal!

My parents drove down to Richmond, Virginia to watch over our daughter, and Janet and I drove off to the Eastern Shore of Virginia, to the islands of Aceteague and Chicoteague for vacation.

It was a great place to go. We had a wonderful time. But the morning we were to drive back to Richmond, I awoke with a sun burn. What a sun burn I had. My body was on fire. My ankles and legs were so swollen that I could barely walk. There was no way I could drive the car. Janet had to drive.

On the trip back, we discovered that our \$35.00 tune-up deal wasn't such a deal. Whatever the mechanic did to our car really messed it up. It kept stalling out. We'd be driving down the interstate, going 70 mph, and the car

would stall. We discovered that if one person got out of the car, went to the back, raised the hood, and put a hand over the carburetor, the other person could start the car up again.

Just imagine the scene. Every twenty miles or so, the car would stall out. I'd have to roll my swollen and pain-wracked body out of the car, hobble my way to the back, put my hand over the top of a hot carburetor, while Janet started up the stalling engine.

Hours later we drove into the city of Richmond. I told Janet to take a short-cut to get to our apartment as soon as possible. The short-cut took us through one of the worst sections of Richmond. It was there that the car stalled out the last time. It was there, in the shadows of the wall surrounding the Richmond Penitentiary, that the car stalled out. No matter how much we tried, that car would not start.

There we were, stuck at the Penitentiary, as night fell. We were stuck at the Penitentiary in a bad section of town. We were stuck at the Penitentiary with no phones around.

It's no fun to be stuck somewhere you don't want to be. It doesn't have to be outside a penitentiary wall. It doesn't have to be a dangerous place. It just has to be some place you don't want to be.

Like here. I'm thankful we're here. I appreciate the Masons for letting us worship here. It's a great place to be, but I don't want to be here. I want to be in our own church on Shawnee Road. Until that happens, there's a part of me that feels stuck on Ruie Road.

Like home. We've sold our house. We've bought another house, but it's a matter of time - waiting for papers to be signed, waiting for money to change hands, waiting for lawyers to do their magic work, waiting for keys to be exchanged, waiting for the move. Until that happens, I'm stuck on Evans Street. It's a nice place to be, but I want to be in that other house in Williamsville.

Stuck beside the Penitentiary wall. Stuck on Ruie Road. Stuck on Evans Street. Have you ever felt stuck some place you don't want to be?

That's what was going on in Moses' life in today's scripture. He found himself stuck in Midian. Don't get me wrong. There was nothing wrong about being in Midian. It was an O.K. place to be. There was a time when Moses was delighted to be there. But, it wasn't where he wanted to be. When he was a young man, he never dreamed he'd end up a middle aged man stuck in Midian.

I know you remember how Moses ended up in Midian. In case you have forgotten, I'll fill you in real quickly. It all began the day he was born. His parents were Jewish slaves in Egypt. In order to save his life and give him a better chance at making it big, his mother set him adrift in the bulrushes along the banks of the Nile River.

Plucked out of the river by the Pharaoh's daughter, Moses was adopted into the Egyptian royal family. He grew up in the Pharaoh's palace. He grew up being used to wealth and influence. He grew up as if he were a prince, himself. When he was a young man, he was given the job of over-seeing the building of the Pharaoh's pyramid. While he was growing up, Moses had every reason to expect that when he got to middle age, he would have a position of power and trust.

But it all changed in the blink of an eye. One day, Moses saw an Egyptian soldier beating a Jewish slave. Moses didn't like what he saw. He struck out at the Egyptian soldier. He didn't intend for it to happen, but Moses killed that soldier. Moses was in trouble.

When he turned to his fellow Jews for help, they turned their backs on him. They didn't see him as a Jew. They saw him as one of their Egyptian masters.

When he turned to his pals from the palace for help, they turned their backs on him. They didn't see him as a brother Egyptian. They saw him as an uppity Jew, a slave who was out of his natural element.

Even his adopted grandfather, the Pharaoh, wasn't any help. When the Pharaoh looked at Moses, he didn't see a grandson. All he saw was his daughter's mistake. The Pharaoh didn't think he had any choice. He issued an arrest warrant for Moses. The charge was murder.

To save his own skin, Moses ran away. He made a quick escape from Egypt. He ended up in a distant wilderness country by the name of Midian. When he got there, Moses was happy to be in Midian. He settled down. He married the daughter of a wealthy man. At first, life in Midian looked pretty good to Moses.

But by the time we find him in today's scripture, Moses was a middle aged man. He wasn't happy in Midian any more. It wasn't where he had planned to end up. The life he was living wasn't the life he had mapped out in his younger years.

I imagine Moses was pretty depressed. He was a defeated man. He felt guilty for murdering that soldier. He felt like a failure because he had to

depend on his father-in-law to make a living. He felt like a loser because he had grown up expecting so much more out of life.

When we come upon Moses in today's scripture, he was a man without a country, a man with a bounty on his head, a man without a home of his own, a man without hope for a better tomorrow. Moses was stuck in Midian.

The day we find Moses in the scripture, he had set out to find his father-in-law's missing sheep. Moses was a man who had grown up like a prince. For a while as a young man, he had been the Pharaoh's right-hand-man; but as a middle aged man, he had ended up a charity case - the fellow who got sent out, told to go look for sheep on the back side of a mountain! When he left the house that morning, he didn't have a hint of what was coming.

He didn't know he was going to run into a burning bush. He didn't know he was going to have a talk with God Almighty. He didn't know he was going to be chosen to lead the Jews up from slavery and out of Egypt. He didn't know he was going to become God's right-hand-man.

When he got up out of bed that morning, Moses was a disappointed man stuck in Midian. He was a failure in middle age. Maybe he was somewhere around fifty-five years old. But in an instant, in a flame of fire, Moses was given one glorious chance to start all over again.

If you ever feel stuck where you are, you might wonder how Moses did it. How did he get that glorious second chance? How did he turn his life around? How did that loser, that failure, that murderer become the most important man of his time?

It all began when he said three little words.

Climbing up that back side of that mountain he must have seen the smoke from far off. When he got to the place where that bush was burning, he wondered, "Why does it just keep burning? Why didn't it burn out? Why didn't it start a forest fire?" He couldn't figure it out. He went over to take a closer look. When he came closer, he heard a voice call out his name: "Moses, Moses."

And he answered with three little words: "Here am I." And with those three words, his life started over.

A young girl was asked a question in her Sunday School class. "Rebecca," the teacher asked, "can you tell us how God created man?"

“God created man,” Rebecca answered, “then he stepped back and looked at what he had done; and God said, ‘You know, I think I can do better than that!’ That’s when God made woman.”

Starting over begins when you step back and say, “You know, I think I can do better than that. I think I can be better than that. I think I have more to offer than I’ve given so far.”

There’s going to be some time in your life when you feel like Moses, when you feel stuck some place. When you’re stuck, you want that glorious chance to start all over again.

You want to do better than you’ve done so far. You want to do better work. You want to be a better husband or wife. You want to be a better parent or child. You want to be a better Christian. But, you’re stuck where you are. You don’t know how to start over.

When you feel stuck, don’t you want a chance to start over again? You get it when you say those same three words: “Here am I.” Then follow up those words by asking God: “use me, teach me, lead me, show me...”

The thing that holds you back is the fear of the unknown. It’s always easier to stay where you’re stuck than it is to blaze a new trail.

Take Moses, for example. Sure, he was stuck in Midian, but at least he was comfortable there. Sure, he was stuck in Midian, but if he stuck it out another ten or fifteen years, his father-in-law would eventually die and Moses would inherit the land. Sure, he was stuck in Midian, but his wife and children liked it there. Sure, he was stuck in Midian, but life was safe and secure.

It would have been easier to stay stuck than to go off somewhere else.

Take the rich young ruler, for example. [Luke 18:18-23, Matthew 19:16-22, Mark 10:17-22] He was stuck being a good man. He wanted to be better. “What shall I do,” he asked Jesus, “to inherit eternal life?” [Luke 18:18] Jesus told him to sell everything he had, give to the poor, and become a disciple of Christ. But that rich young ruler was too comfortable stuck with all his wealth. He was afraid to try another way of living.

Maybe you’re stuck where you are right now; but if you sniff the air, you might catch the aroma of a bush burning. If you listen carefully, you might hear the Lord God Almighty calling your name. If you look, you might see Jesus reaching out to you.

When you’re stuck, you probably won’t change over-night. It usually takes a while.

Just like our starting over by building our new church. We want it to happen right away, but it's taking a while.

Just like Moses starting over. Sure, he answered the voice that spoke to him from that burning bush. Moses answered right away, "Here am I." But, it still took him a while to get started.

He didn't agree with God right away. Moses tried to talk his way out of changing his life. He kept finding reasons why he couldn't meet the challenge. You can read all about it in the third and fourth chapters of Exodus.

"Who am I to do all this," Moses asked. "What if they ask me who I think I am to be talking to them? What can I tell them when they ask me who sent me? What happens if they don't believe? I don't know how to speak in public! Can't you find some body better qualified than me?"

Moses was stuck with a defeatist attitude. He didn't think he could do it. He came up with a whole list of reason why he would fail.

Even though he was stuck in Midian, even though he was unhappy and unfulfilled in Midian, even though he was a failure in Midian; Moses was afraid to leave Midian.

But God had an answer for every one of his fears.

Maybe you're like Moses. Maybe you're stuck where you are and afraid you can't do any better.

"Here am I," Moses said, and finally he stopped making excuses. He put aside his personal doubts and fears. He broke free from his past, and, as Exodus tells us, "Moses took his wife and sons and went back to the land of Egypt." [Exodus 4:20]

Maybe you're like Moses. You hear God's call. You say yes to His invitation. You get ready to start all over again. But, before too long, you get stuck again.

Do you know why that happens? Because like most of us, you make the same mistakes all over again.

A family went to the airport to meet Grandma who was flying in for a visit. Excitement built as the plane arrived and the passengers walked out into the baggage claim area. They family watched and waited, but Grandma never showed up! Where was Grandma? A few minutes later, the father got a phone call on his cell phone.

It was Grandma. She was still at home in Florida. “I got a late start this morning,” Grandma said. “I missed my plane. But don’t worry, I’ll start off the same time tomorrow.”

As the disappointed family left the airport, Dad told the family exactly what Grandma had said. “Dad,” his little son grabbed his arm in alarm, “if she starts off the same time tomorrow, she’ll miss the plane again!”

When you want to get un-stuck, don’t make the same mistakes all over again. When Moses finally started over, he started out in a new and different way.

The very best good Gospel news from Jesus Christ is that every new day can be a new beginning. New life can grow in previously barren places. You don’t have to stay stuck where you are, because you can begin again.

It doesn’t matter if you’re in your prime, middle aged, or enjoying your senior years - a grand new beginning is still waiting for you. There is still something wonderful for you to do. There is still important work for you to finish. There are still untouched resources and talents you haven’t even explored. Your tomorrow can be a brighter, happier, more fulfilled day.

Whenever you get stuck in your own custom-made Midian, Jesus Christ invites you to start all over again.