

Study 5: Moses' Honest Questions #1 Who Am I?

Exodus 3:1 – 4:17

The confrontation between God and Moses at the burning bush in Midian is often described as an issue of obedience. God makes clear commands and a reluctant Moses refuses to obey. Moses questions are seen as an attempt to evade the responsibility that God has placed upon him. At the end God gets angry and Moses is finally forced to surrender and do what he is told to do. This is one possible interpretation of these events found in Exodus 3 and 4.

But what if Moses' questions are honest doubts he has been struggling to understand for years? He is confused. 40 years have gone by since he fled from Egypt. Now he is 80-years old and God comes to him and says, "Come now ... I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people ... out of Egypt" (3:10).

In response, Moses raises five questions with God:

1. **Who am I?** (3:10)
2. God, Who are You? (3:13)
3. What if they do not believe me? (4:1)
4. Lord, I cannot speak? (4:10)
5. Lord, can You send someone else? (4:13)

Let us look at the first question that Moses raises with God. Who am I?

"Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?'"

Was Moses an Egyptian?

If so he knew that in Egypt he was a failure, a political refugee and a traitor wanted for murder. He knew he now had no influence in the palace, with the royal family or in any position of power. How could God use him to lead Israel out of Egypt? It made no sense to him.

Was Moses an Israelite?

If so the Hebrews had already rejected him as a Hebrew family member 40 years before when he tried to win their support. Why would they follow him after all of these years? To Pharaoh he would simply be another slave and one who was wanted for murder. Slaves had no power to challenge the might of Egypt.

Was Moses a Midianite?

If so after these 40 years, he would only be a foreign shepherd whom the Egyptians culturally despised as an abomination. Midianites were of no importance to the Israelites and carried no political leverage with the Egyptians. It would make no sense for God to send him back to Egypt as a Midianite.

Lord, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?” Moses is genuinely confused about who he really is. His question is real, “Who am I?”

Moses at age 80 is a man of three different cultural heritages and he was not able to integrate them into a whole and stable identity.

Royalty ← → Slave ← → Outsider

The problem with cultural pressure is that they force people into either or choices. For Moses, he could be either an Egyptian or a Hebrew or a Midianite. His desire was to be a Hebrew. But he could not see himself being who he really wanted to be while living in Midian. And more importantly, he could not visualize who he really had become: A man who was a mixture of three ethnically different cultures that could not be split apart into distinct identities.

These same pressures confront us in the multiethnic world the United States has become. There is the “White” population that has assimilated for the most part into one ethnic culture and they feel they are the ‘Real Americans.’ The “White” community for the most part chose to cut most of their ties to their immigrant past and have only vague memories of what once identified them as English, French, German, Swedish etc.

Then there are “Whites” who still have some ties to their ethnic cultures overseas like the Italians, Irish, Polish or Jews. Somehow those ties make other “Whites” uncomfortable. They are Americans but ...

The “Black African American” is seen as different from the “White” community. This difference still creates tensions in our society. But if a “Black” identifies too strongly with the “White” world, he or she is called an ‘Oreo’ by the “Black Community that has experienced years of rejection by the dominant society. ‘Oreo’ means one who is ‘Black’ on the outside but really is ‘White’ on the inside.

If “Asian Americans” are seen as buying into the ways of the “White” culture, their ethnic community will call them ‘Bananas,’ ‘Yellow’ on the outside and ‘White’ on the inside. For South Asians, those who are too “White” are called “Coconuts,” ‘Brown’ on the outside and ‘White’ on the inside. The fear is that they will give up and reject the ethnic heritage of their parents and ancestors.

The same is true of “Latinos” as they move into the dominant cultural work world of our nation. They are pressured on the one side to give up their language and become ‘Real Americans.’ Their Spanish heritage calls them to remember their culture and language of their parents and not to give it up or throw it away. Those in the Latino community who are seen as becoming too “white” are described as “agrindiado” – a Spanish word derived from the root word gringo, meaning you have become literally “white-ified.”

The “White” society looks with fear at this growing ethnic diversity in our country. It says to new immigrants in all their different shades of color and language, “If you want to be an ‘American,’ give up your foreign attachments like language. Leave your home country behind. Assimilate,

assimilate!!!! Learn English and be 'Real Americans.'" But is it really true that to be an 'American' you have to reject and deny your English, Polish, Dutch, Latino, or Japanese heritage? To retain your Italian, Jewish or Chinese identity must you refuse to be a true 'Americans?' What if you really are both cultures or like Moses a product of three or more?

Did God make a mistake with Moses or today with many of us who are part of several different ethnic groups or cultures within those groups? Can there be freedom to be who God created you to be or must people choose one part of themselves and reject the rest of their background?

As you look at your neighborhood or place of work, what are the ethnic and cultural identities that you see? How do you respond to them? How does God want you to respond?