

# Apostolic Commission

by Art Katz

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of being 'sent' by God, rather than being drawn to causes or responding to needs, in order to fulfill one's apostolic calling.*

**Duration:** 41:23

**Scripture:** Exodus 3:2-3, Exodus 3:5, Exodus 3:7, Exodus 3:10, Exodus 3:12, Acts 7:25, Acts 7:35

**Topics:** "Apostolic"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of not panicking or feeling overwhelmed when trying to understand the message of God. He encourages the audience to take what they can from the sermon and trust that if it is a word sent by God, it will become clear and meaningful in the future. The speaker then delves into the story of Moses and the burning bush, highlighting the encounter as a revelation of God in a form that Moses did not anticipate. The sermon emphasizes the need to communicate and make known the awe-inspiring nature of God, rather than creating a limited image of Him.

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## Transcript

Good morning, Saints. I appreciated that introduction. How did he know those things, that this was not going to be a sermon? It must be in communion with the Spirit of God.

Hallelujah. Lord, grant us grace, grace of utterance, grace of hearing. Whatever an oracular statement is, Lord, we invite it, knowing that it's costly and not given to many.

And just take your precious liberty, Lord, and invest something in us. Let your word be for us, my God, an event, an act, a happening, an occurrence. Let it continue to stick to our ribs and be brought up again and again to our recall, to our consideration.

May we turn it over, my God, in our hearts. May we ponder and dwell upon it. May it have all of the rich, life-giving possibilities that your word has as it is sent from the throne.

Grant us this privilege. Spoil us by such a hearing. Require of us because of such a speaking.

We thank you and give you the praise for such love that will not let us go, that is so jealous and brooding over us and calls us again and again, higher and higher, to the ultimate things of God that pertain to your glory, even in this city, in this hour. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Well, bless the Lord. What's on my heart this morning is the root of apostolicity, the genius of that word, the word apostolic. I may have said something about it last time in passing.

If you don't salivate, if you don't drool, something is amiss. This word needs to be restored to its original, pristine meaning or else we have had it, or else we condemn ourselves to being merely charismatic and God's jealousy over you is for much more than that. So the Greek word apostolos means sent.

And that's the word that the scriptures use for Moses in the Old Testament because the anatomy of this, the nub of it, the genius of it, is consistent and the same throughout all the dispensations of God. Moses was apostolic. The word is not used.

It's a Greek word. But everything that he was and the whole origin and his sending, his calling lays bare the heart of what it means to be sent, what it means to be apostolic, whether it's an individual or a fellowship. And that's what we want to examine in the limited time that we have this morning.

There's a wonderful reference to this in Acts 7 where Stephen, in the address that cost him his life, refers to this Moses who, in verse 25, he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them, but they understood not. So evidently one of the components of being apostolic is a certain dimension of rejection, even from those whom you're called to deliver. It's part of the paradox of the faith and one that we need to expect and to bear.

Am I too fancy already? Are you guys having trouble? Are you knitting your brows? Is my English too English? I want to put you at ease and to say don't panic that you're not expected to understand this message in its entirety in the first hearing. We have the great advantage of tapes because this is going to be loaded. It's going to be rich.

It's going to be compact and full. It deserves an entire seminar, not just a Sunday morning preaching, but you'll have it on tape for further examination and beside that, if it's a word of spirit and life, something will go into your spirit and then subsequently rise to the level of consciousness and of understanding. So don't panic.

Don't tighten up because when you tighten up, then you block the whole flow of the spirit. So take what you can get and have confidence that if it's a word sent by God, the future will reveal it. In fact, I'm often saying, put this message on the shelf and wait for a later time when it will become current and more meaningful.

So, the next day, he showed himself unto them as they strove and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, you are brethren. Why do you wrong one to another? But he that did his neighbor wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? And just to leap to verse 30, And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he wandered at the sight.

And as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled and durst not behold. Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place where thou standest is holy ground.

I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people, which is in Egypt or New York City or Asia or the world over. And I have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will

send thee into Egypt.

Then Moses, whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? The same did God send. You underline every time you see the word send. The same did God send to be a ruler and deliverer by the hand of the angel, which appeared to him in the bush, and he brought them out.

Let's look in Exodus at the first statement of this remarkable sending, the heart of which is the encounter with the God of the burning bush. A revelation of God in a form other than the way Moses knew, understood, or anticipated him will not be sent except we can communicate in going something of the sense of God as he in fact is. Not what we think him to be.

Not the little patsy that we have made him in our image to do our bidding, but God as he awesomely is and demands to be made known. There'll be no bringing out of Egypt. There'll be no deliverance out of bondage except those who can come to men out of the presence of God and communicate that God as he has chosen to reveal himself, the God of the consuming fire in the bush that burns, but is not consumed.

Now we need to note where that bush is located because it's in the same place still. It's on the mount of God on the back side of the desert. And I want to say that you're disqualified from this encounter with God and the sending that comes from the meeting of him there if you're not to be found in that place.

And you guys are right now at a perilous crossroad because of your success. That you'll receive invitations and they are already coming to draw you to the front side, to the side where prestige and esteem and honor of men and acknowledgement by men, even religious men, is to be found. It's very seductive.

It's very powerful. And unless you're alerted, and I think that's part of the purpose that God is speaking today, you'll find yourself invariably drawn to the wrong side where the mount of God is not to be found. That's not to say that those who labor there and have their ministries there are somehow opposed to God.

It's just that they're operating from another place and another level. But I am jealous and God is jealous for the place to which he has called you. Because except you're sent from that place, there will be no deliverance for those who are presently in Egypt and who are building treasure cities out of brick, made without straw, and are every day under the bondage of a taskmaster who cracks his whip, but of such a kind that they do not even know that they are enslaved.

I'm talking about the countless millions who labor, who sweat, who strive, who are on the subways going to schools, seeking careers, wanting to make it, don't even know that they're working for a pitiless pharaoh who has no redemptive intention for them, but to chew them up and to spit them out as merchandise. Someone needs to come to them who is free from the power of that and has no striving in himself even spiritually. And is sent of God out of the presence of God to deliver the captives, not only to bring them out, but to bring them into a land flowing with milk and honey.

And we can't offer freedom or deliverance beyond what we ourselves experience and know. And if a 40 year stint in the wilderness was the preliminary requirement for a Moses, what shall it be for us? Forty is a symbolic number. Israel was 40 years in the wilderness.

Jesus was 40 days in the wilderness. Probably there are other reiterations of the number 40 all suggesting trial, dealing, sifting, preparation. Forty is an all-consuming number and we mustn't be too literal about this.

I don't say you're going to have to wait 40 years in Queens before you are sent to be deliverers. I think the Lord will have come long before that. But whatever 40 signifies in terms of preparation, of the ruthless dealing of God with your own flesh, with your own ambition for God, in the kind that Moses himself had.

Because let's look where Moses boo-boomed. In chapter 2 of Exodus, when it came to pass in verse 11 that when Moses was grown that he went out unto his brethren and looked on their burdens and he spied an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together and he said to them that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? Intendest thou to kill me as thou killest the Egyptian? And Moses feared and said, Surely this thing is known. Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses but Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian and sat down by a well. The story of Moses is the story of failure.

And I want to say that I believe with all my heart that failure is a necessary ingredient to apostolic success, a necessary preliminary. And it's not the failure that comes out of blundering stupidity or lack of consideration for the things of God but out of a desire for the things of God. Moses meant well.

He was well intending. But what he didn't understand is that though he had superb Jewish credentials, being a Levite and a favored child and gifted, and though he was raised as a prince of Egypt and had the best of both worlds, both Judaic and Egyptian, which was the preeminent civilization of his time, neither of these things were apostolic qualifications. In fact, they inhibit apostolic sending and we need to be emptied both of our human and racial, ethnic, and worldly qualification.

That's a painful emptying and it can only be performed on the backside of the desert. What a grubby place. What a mean and inhospitable place.

What a thing that offers nothing voluptuous to our eyes to see or to enjoy. It is barren. But Moses was faithful in that place to tend the flock of God on the backside of the desert.

And I somehow think however unappetizing to the eye and however lustrous the front side is and beguiling and inviting that the nutriment that comes from those barren patches where the shepherd of God will lead his flock has more to do with preparing God's people for the last day's eventualities than the glib, facile, cheap and glitzy stuff that is to be found on the front side of the religious dimension. You see the way I have to talk? It's all symbolic. It's all charged.

It's all loaded. Because if I would take any one of these statements and expand them it would occupy the balance of the hour. You have to intuit a prophetic statement.

You have to apprehend by your spirit what God is saying. You have to know that nothing has changed. That the elements are timeless and eternal.

That face Moses and face us. And we have a choice. We do not... We're not required.

It's not obligatory that we find ourselves on the backside of the desert. It's a choice and a preference. And it's not one that young men would eagerly make.

You need to pray for your pastor. You need to pray for your leaders. For every force and every power wants to seduce and wants to draw them to the place of acknowledgement and the honor of men and being one of the boys for the success of this remarkable movement that has developed in New York.

It's going to take heroic constraint and restraint to keep yourself from that seduction and to keep on the backside of the desert obscure, unknown, unseen, unheralded, and unpromoted if you're going to find and be found by the God who called Moses and seeks to call you. For except there be a calling, there's not a sending. And except that we be sent, what are we and what have we and what power and what authority? It's interesting that when the sending comes on the holy ground of consecration, take off your shoes for the ground upon which you stand is holy, not because it's at Sinai, but because it's the place of the revelation of God as he is and as the God who sends, who himself is the high priest and the apostle of our confession.

And because the consecration and the dedication that is being made there is to the uttermost. For when Moses heard his name being called Moses, Moses, he answered in a truly apostolic way. He said, Hineni, Hebrew for here am I. How many of us have said that to God? Lock, stock, and barrel.

No strings attached. No questions. Well, what is this going to mean if I go, what is it going to mean if I go to Minnesota? What's the weather there like? And what assurance do I have and what security? And the only thing you know is you're being called by name by the God who sends and no other detail is required and if you're truly apostolic needs to be asked.

You don't need to know in advance because the God who calls you says I will be with you. I didn't make that up. It's in the text.

Verses 11 and 12 are enormously significant. The whole text is enormously significant. How come you're compressing me to finish on time? Verse 10, Come now therefore and I will send thee unto Pharaoh.

Notice where Moses is being sent. Not to a peripheral Egyptian of the kind that he picked off before and left laying in the sand. He's going now to where the action really is.

Dum-da-dum-dum. I will send you to the Pharaoh. I'll send you right to the headquarters of Satan himself.

I'll send you right into the pit and the grit of the powers of very darkness that have held men enslaved in bondage since time immemorial. No more playing around at the periphery. No more touching the secondary issues.

I'm sending you to the heart of the matter. It's time saints for the powers of darkness to say Jesus I know and Paul I know. And the new, what are you? The new life fellowship.

Who? See we can be drawn off not only to acceptance by men because of the wonderful thing that we exhibit. We can also be drawn off to causes. We can also be drawn off to do good things.

And there's a multitude of good things that need to be done and needs that need to be touched and ethnic groups that need to be met. But ascending is to the heart of the matter and not to the secondary causes. In fact God does not allow Moses to move on the basis of the distress of the people Israel.

I have heard their cries. I have seen their affliction. Not you.

You don't go on the basis of your schmaltzy sentiment. You don't go because of your identification with your people as a Jew. You go for one reason only because I have sent you.

I spent two years at a seminary and I saw all the bleeding hearts, all the upper middle class students whose hearts were so grieved for the conditions in Latin America and poverty and they were just shredded by this cause and that cause. They were just coming apart at the seams in blubber and profuse tears until they were worth nothing. Listen dear saints.

The ultimate trap of the last days is to draw us off to act in response to need. What's wrong with that, Art? What's wrong with that is that the good thing keeps you from the perfect. And there are needs everywhere and to which of them shall you attend? That's the difference between went and sent.

You see, shouldn't we be doing something? All those needs out there crying out for attention, shouldn't we be doing something because we're guilt ridden or our consciences bother us and we should be doing something is one of the most powerful temptations that will distract you from the perfect will of God except that that itch to do and to be seen doing and to be recognized for doing has been burned out and has died out in forty years in the wilderness place. There wasn't much left of Moses by the time that God appeared to him in the burning bush. You say, how do you know that, Art? Because when God calls Moses, Moses says, who am I that you should send me? You want to know what the qualification is for apostolic sending? That.

Who am I that you should send me? Well, what happened to all of your Jewish credentials? What happened to your pedigree? A Levite and a Hebrew of the Hebrews and a Jew of the Jews, one saved out of the river. What happened to your Egyptian training and all of the art and science and philosophy and the accomplishment of Egypt? Zilch. It counts for nothing.

Who am I? And you know what? God doesn't argue with him and say, now don't take that negative attitude. You've got wonderful qualifications. He agrees with him.

Because I want to say this, saints, however impressive our human and religious qualifications is, none of them are equal to the task to which we are being sent. Who is sufficient for these things? New York City? The Babylon? The heart of anti-Christ spirit that makes merchandise of men? And you're going to deliver the captives and bring them out and into a land and get flown with milk and honey? Who is sufficient for these things except the God who will be with you? That's what makes apostolic apostolic. Beware of false apostles who say all kinds of clever and right things and can court Paul and have a wonderful facility for problem solving and putting together franchises and all the other kinds of things.

But look for the man who has come out of God's presence, who has been burned out, not in his carnality, not in his sinfulness, I mean, that's long taken care of, but even in his well-meaning intentions for God. That's the last thing that must go. And that is the most formidable thing that keeps us from the true apprehension of God and his sending, what we are going to do for him.

Who am I that you should send me? The one virtue that Moses had, and this is what we need to recognize, is that when he saw the burning bush, he turned aside to see and to ask, why this bush burns but is not consumed? And when God saw that he turned aside to see, he spoke to him out of the midst of the bush and said, Moses, Moses. And Moses said, Here am I. This was the critical point, and I ask you to ponder that. Why did God wait to see if Moses would turn aside to see the bush? And I want to say that that turning aside is not just a little act of curiosity.

It's a deep apostolic jealousy for truth, for ultimate meaning, no matter what its cost or what the pain is required to obtain it. Our generation is a bunch of superficial flakies that have not examined the burning bush of its own time. We have not even examined why we have hurricanes and devastating riots in Los Angeles or Oakland, California going up like a torch and various other calamities and geophysical and social disturbances as if somehow they are accidents.

Where's God? What is the causal connection between the increasing calamities that are afflicting mankind from droughts to floods to fires to social unrest and his will and purpose in being the God of those disturbances? Who sees in that way? Who sees a causal connection? Who understands that they are preliminary judgments to turn the attention of mankind to a God whom people will not seek, will not turn aside to see, will go on with their humdrum certainties, even religiously, while the world is increasingly burning? How many of us have examined the Holocaust of half a century ago? Six million art cats systematically annihilated and sent up through smokestacks and gas ovens? Not by a savage and brutal and uncivilized people, but by the most eminently civilized people on the face of the earth, the Germans. The land of Goethe, Schiller, Fichte, Hegel, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Brahms, Beethoven and Wagner was the land that systematically annihilated the people of the covenant. Of course, they've paid reparations since, or Israel would never have gotten off the ground, but does that take care of it in God's sight? How many have leaped into the grave with the bones and wrestled with them and have asked the question, why? I want to say I'm saved today because of that question.

Because I was a Jewish kid growing up in Brooklyn when the statistics began to become known of the systematic annihilation of my people and like most modern Jews, I admired German civilization. In fact, we Jews admired it so much, we made it a substitute for the Messiah himself. And the prototype of what we thought the messianic age would be, if all the world could be as eminently civilized and as ethical and as moral and as philosophical and as cultured as Germany.

Then the Lord lowered the boom. Or was it the Lord? Or was it just a madman by the name of Hitler? Or was it an aberration, a historic moment that, of the things that just went kaflui? Or is there a deeper meaning, a significance, something to be understood that we have overlooked because we have no stomach to look into burning things. I don't understand the saints, but I know it is an apostolic distinctive that God waits for people who will turn aside to see.

And it's only a lowly bush that burns and you're liable to pass it by because it's so ordinary. But you know what I want to tell you this morning? That in the ordinary bush circumstances of your very own life, in your failed marriages, in the kids that have gone wrong, in the broken conditions of our life, in the things that we don't want to consider and just go on and pass them by, there's a God waiting there to be met. And if you guys have any distinctive that justifies my being here and our having a relationship, it's your love for truth and not wanting to gild something over or whitewash it with a brush.

But in all of the mix that is represented in this fellowship, in all of the racial, ethnic thing that everywhere else in the world is falling on each other's necks with violence unto bloodshed and death, there's an opportunity here to dig in, to examine, to see, to understand the root, the grit, the meaning of things that somehow when God sees those that will turn aside. You know what the rabbis say about this and I don't often quote them? Once in a while, they say something good. I like this.

They said, the thing that God saw that allowed him to call Moses to an apostolic commission was that when a man turns aside to see something of an unusual kind that has fearful implications once you begin

to examine it, there's no assurance you'll ever turn back again to where you were before. All of your charismatic understanding might go up like a puff. All that you thought God was and what you understood about the church and how we ought to proceed will never again be seen that way.

There's something in that radical wrench of turning out of the orbit of the conventional and even correct ways that we have seen things that waits to be seen afresh in the fire of God that will forever change you. Are you willing for that? The world is dying, saints. Can you understand it? Dying because of its superficiality.

Dying because of its unexamined life. Dying because it doesn't ask ultimate questions about life and its meaning. It's content to plot along and to go on from day to day to feed the gut and to have their sex experience and to make the payments on the car and perish.

The world is living in a lie. No one is bothering to inform mankind that there's an issue of eternity waiting to be decided in this life. The life itself, the mere perpetuation, the feeding, the getting by is the justification in itself.

It's a lie and it's death. Someone said the unexamined life is not worth living. And I want to ask you whether even as Christians whether you're living an examined life.

Are you examining the issues of the faith? Are you looking into the circumstances of your life? And if there has been failure, do you just pass it by or are you willing to turn into that burning thing and allow God to show the subtle issues of vanity, of self, of pride, of rebellion, of self-will, of jealousy, of fear, of insecurity that need to be seen there because he's a God of truth and because the church is the ground and pillar of the truth or it's not the church. I wonder how many burning bushes are represented in this room. Homely little bushes that we would just as soon walk by and ignore.

But there's a God waiting to be found there and a revelation of himself and even a calling to us from that place alone that will not be obtained anywhere else. God is the fire in the midst of that bush and we are escapist and we don't want to consider painful and difficult things. But it's in those things and in the ordinary issues of our own life that God is and desires to be found.

That's the holy ground and we need to take off our shoes in that place and make contact with it. You know that the priests never wore shoes? For all of their elaborate garments and dress they were barefooted. For a priest who will not make contact with terra firma, with the ground of reality, with things as they are, somehow is divorced and cut off from the things that are heavenly, eternal, lofty, pure.

We've got to be willing to tread in those places. We've got to go back to the Holocaust. We've got to go back and examine the issues of our life and of our society and of our time and of our own personal situations and see them through and let God show us in those things what he will and face them.

Or else we go on to superficiality and play-acting and religionizing that disqualifies us from being apostolic. Moses was compelled by flight having failed in his well-meaning intention to help his Jewish brethren to find himself in the wilderness place. But you guys have a much tougher choice this morning.

Not because you're compelled to be on the backside of the desert. In fact, there's all kinds of invitations increasingly coming that you should be found on the front side as the wonderful example of what you might call it, cells and the success that everybody wants to celebrate. Will you choose to be found on the backside? Will you choose obscurity? Will you choose to remain unknown, unheralded and unsung? Will

you give God his full 40-year opportunity to divest you of the subtlety of your own religious ambition and well-meaning intention to do for him? That there's nothing left but a man who will say whatever I am, and I'm not much, here am I. Who am I that you should send me? Well, I've got to conclude.

Don't think that it's a disgrace to fail. I sort of have an affinity for failure. And I'm not talking about dumb, dumb failure.

That's the consequence of stupidity or selfishness. I'm talking about the failure that comes from choosing to do good for God. That must inevitably lead to disappointment and to failure.

But it's out of that that comes a brokenness. That comes a willingness to tend the flock of God in the obscure place that will bring you to the burning bush in the appointed moment of God by which the commissioning and the sending takes place. A lot of us have not failed because we have not ventured.

Our lives are predictable and safe. We're pew occupiers, and we love the anonymity and the obscurity of being lost in the great congregation. Necessarily, we must venture for God.

And we were talking last night about our ten-year initial experience in community. Were there mistakes? My God, the whole thing was a... a catalogue of mistake from beginning to end. But how should it have been otherwise? They are inherited.

It was inevitable that we would stumble and stagger and fall and in our best meaning intentions cause pain and suffering, the inevitability of it. But how else is God to fashion and to form his men and his people? What do we think that church is? A succession of good services? Or a place of suffering before it's a glory? We need to be rid of our romantic idealizations of what the church is or what God's men are who are of faith and power. That's an illusion.

It's not a reality. It's not your feet on the ground. How can you deliver captives when you yourself are captivated by notions that are idealizations of romantic notions that are not true? You've got to fail.

And failure is the consequence of venturing for God even at your best and well-meaning intention. But out of that is ignited the circumstances by which the wilderness experience, the Lord in the burning bush, the call and descending. I believe it's a pattern.

This is not just an historic episode. It's that perfectly. But it's more.

It's a picture of the anatomy of the sending of God in every generation and especially at the last. That the man who was content to just slay an Egyptian is now sent to the Pharaoh where the real and the ultimate issue is to be met in the power of God who sends because I will be with you. Will you remember that when you're standing before Pharaoh? And you're feeling as frail and as weak as you in fact are? That the God who sends you is also in you? And it's in his authority that you stand before Pharaoh and not some drummed up charismatic thing of your own? You were emptied of your own that you might be filled with the life of him who sends, the high priest and the apostle himself of our confession.

There's fire coming, saints, and it's coming on the earth already. The preliminary judgments of God to begin to turn the attention of men to a God whom they have not turned aside to see and for which every sin and consequence of a broken mankind and a dying earth is the result. There needs to be someone coming to them out of the presence of God to explain and to give an understanding of what the fire means before it becomes not preliminary but final.

The final judgment in which the earth itself will melt with a fervent heat. Knowing the terror of God, Paul says, I persuade men. But he persuades them not out of his religious ability or his Jewish credentials but out of the life, the power, and the authority of the God who sends those men who know that they know that they know who am I, that you should send me.

So I want to pray for you. You're at a crossroad, dangerously close to being drawn into a place of public religious celebration for the success of what you represent. And I'm sure that Christianity Today and other journals want to write articles about you and interview your pastor and different ones who are cell group leaders.

And you'll find yourself not on the back side but the front side. And that's okay. But it's not the place from which the true sending must occur.

God is jealous for you this morning, saints, for the thing that is ultimate. Confront the Pharaoh in the authority and the power of the God.

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