

## **God Remembers: I AM Who I AM (Part I)**

**Exodus 3:1-22**

**By [David Strain](#)**

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Now if you would please take your copies of God's holy Word in your hands and turn with me to Exodus chapter 3. Exodus chapter 3, which you will find on page 46 if you're reading in one of our church Bibles. Once you have the Scriptures open before you, would you join with me as we turn to God and ask for His help as we seek to understand and believe it? Let's pray together.

*O Lord, we come to You and bow down and pray for grace now as Your Word is before us. Give us ears to hear what Your Spirit would say to the church by it, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

Exodus chapter 3, reading from verse 1. This is the Word of Almighty God:

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. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "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.

Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.

Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, 'I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.'" And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, "The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God." But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians."

Amen. We thank God that He has spoken in His holy Word.

### **Turning Points**

In a 2012 *New York Times* article, columnist Niall Ferguson put his finger on something important when he said that "we yearn for turning points." Just as economists have predicted nine out of the last five recessions, so journalists have surely reported nine out of the last five revolutions. They are reporting more recessions and revolutions than there are. "Every election," he says, "is hailed as epoch making. Every president is expected to have a new foreign policy doctrine. A minor redesign of a cellular phone is hailed by the devotees of the Apple cult as a paradigm shift. The point about paradigm shifts," says Ferguson, "as Thomas Kuhn pointed out in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, is that they

don't happen every other year; they just don't happen that often." I think that's insightful. We yearn for turning points, paradigm shifts. We want change - personally, culturally, politically even. We are suckers for the next big thing, aren't we? So everyone's going paleo. CrossFit will change your life. There's even my favorite - it's the tiny little flat robotic vacuum cleaner that you can switch on and it does the housework while you're not home. We're looking for something - some gadget, some revolutionary something that will change our lives, fix them up, revolutionize our day, change our world even. But you know, real change, as Ferguson points out, real revolutionary, epoch making change doesn't happen that often.

As we turn our attention to Exodus chapter 3, however, we are in fact reading the record of a real epoch making turning point. It will prove to be a turning point certainly for the people of Israel, languishing at this moment under the brutal oppression of their Egyptian taskmasters. It will be the beginning of a process by which God will deliver them from bondage, constitute them a body politic, and give them a land of their own just as He had promised. The world would never be the same again because one morning on the backside of the desert, Moses turned aside to see a great sight on the slopes of Mount Horeb. Of course this is also a turning point for Moses himself, isn't it? You remember that he began his life a slave, a Hebrew slave in the land of Goshen in Egypt, born with the edict of Pharaoh to kill the male children of the Hebrews hanging over his head. The Hebrew slave-child, saved from disaster by Pharaoh's daughter, the princess of Egypt, and eventually adopted into her household, raised now to be a prince of Egypt. But then as he intervened in a dispute between an Egyptian slave-driver and a Hebrew slave killing the Egyptian, Moses flees into the desert and lives the next forty years of his life neither as a Hebrew nor as an Egyptian prince but as a Midianite shepherd. Moses' life has been one of turmoil, of real revolution after revolution; really a downward spiral if you think of it.

But this time in Exodus chapter 3 it's quite different. Up till now Moses has been, if you like, a piece of flotsam cast adrift on the waves of the providence of God, blown and tossed this way and that. But now in Exodus 3, God Himself directly intervenes and his life take a new turn, not because of what is happening to him so much as because of who meets him. It is an encounter that changes Moses forever. When people meet God in glory and in grace they cannot, do not ever remain unchanged. Real change, the great paradigm shift, the revolution that we really need, comes in relation to the God of infinite glory and majesty and grace. So let's look at the passage together.

### **The Great Commission of Moses**

Having been rejected by the Hebrews and hunted by the Egyptians, Moses is now reduced to a shepherd tending his father-in-law's flocks in the wilderness. He's made his way, verse 1, to the west side of the desert. I like the King James Version of this - he's in the "backside of the desert." That's where he is. It's a

pretty ignominious location for a former prince of Egypt - the backside of the desert. He is absolutely nowhere. And we can make an educated guess at the kind of humiliation this season of life must have entailed for Moses. Back in Genesis 36:34 Joseph said that "every shepherd is an abomination to an Egyptian." That's who Moses has become now - an abomination according to the mores of the Egyptian culture in which he was raised and a failure according to the Hebrew culture into which he was born and which he chose for himself latterly. While he is tending his father-in-law's flocks, as both an Egyptian abomination and a Hebrew failure, he comes close to Mount Horeb and there he sees a strange phenomenon - a bush fire that doesn't stop burning. The bush is unconsumed by the flames. And so he turns aside as any of us would, I'm sure, to take a closer look - verse 2. And as he gets close, just then his world turns upside-down. The angel of the Lord, identified throughout our passage as God Himself, speaks to Moses from the heart of the flames.

And what follows is a conversation, if we can call it that, between Moses and God, that if we were to simplify it, it has two major components to it. First there is a great commission given to Moses. Moses is to be sent back to Egypt to become the agent of God in the deliverance of His people from Egyptian slavery - a great commission. But if Moses is to accomplish the task he must depend not simply on his natural and native gifts. He needs more; he needs the presence and he needs the knowledge of the God who sends him. And so not only is he given a great commission but he's also given a great provision. This week we're going to think about the great commission given to Moses and then next week, God willing, we'll come back and think about the burning bush and the revelation of the divine name at the heart of this passage which is God's great provision for Moses. So today we're thinking about the great commission and that commission falls into two parts. First, in verses 7 to 10, Moses is given a mission to fulfill. A mission to fulfill. And then in 15 to 22, a message to proclaim. A mission to fulfill and a message to proclaim.

## **I. A Mission to Fulfill**

First of all, Moses is given a mission. The Lord has a job for Moses to do. Verses 7 to 9 please. God has already identified Himself to Moses in verse 6 as "the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And now He tells him that in full compliance with His covenant promises to the fathers He is now going to bring the children of Israel out of bondage at last and into the land of Canaan. It's a land of plenty, verse 8, and it's a land occupied, verse 9, and yet it is a land He swears to give them nevertheless. This was the promise to the patriarchs; it is the promise He now renews with Moses. This is the good news. In a very real sense it is the Gospel - the announcement to Moses that God is going to save and rescue and deliver His languishing, enslaved people, keep His covenants, and bring them into the land of promise. Here's the good news of God's promised salvation reaffirmed.

## **Moved with Compassion**

But I do hope you noticed as we read the passage together what motivates the heart of God to keep His covenant promises and save His people. This is wonderful, although I dare say too easily forgotten even by mature believers. Why, according to our text, does God resolve to save Israel and deliver them? Why? Or why, for that matter, does God ever resolve to save such wretched sinners like me and like you? Look at the text again. Isn't it simply that He saves because His heart is moved with compassion and pity for His chosen people who are suffering in slavery and bondage and pain? Verses 7 and 8 - "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings and I have come down to deliver them." That word, "I know," means more than that He simply has an acquaintance with the fact. It means rather that He comprehends the depths of the reality. He is touched with the feeling of their infirmities. He knows in the fullest sense of the term the sufferings of His people. His heart melts in love for them. Verse 9 - "The cry of the people of Israel has come to me. I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them." God cares for His people. He's moved with compassion for them.

I wonder if you've lost sight of that. Israel may well have after all these years of slavery and bondage. Moses may well have, forty years of exile later, but God has not forgotten His promises neither is He indifferent to His people's cries. He acts for us, we're being told, because He loves us. He delivers because He cares. God's salvation is not an abstract thing done arbitrarily, unfeelingly by an aloof deity who saves sinners for esoteric reasons all His own. No, the God of sovereign power who has mercy upon whom He will have mercy saved you because He loves you. He hears your cries and He is moved with compassion for you. It was love for Israel, His own people, that moved the heart of God to deliver them and it is love for you that moves His heart still. God loves you! You are beloved.

## **The Compassion of God personified in Christ**

Nowhere is that more clearly demonstrated of course than in the life of Jesus Christ. It was love, after all, in the heart of God that sent Him. "God has demonstrated His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" - Romans 5 and verse 8. And it was love in the heart of Christ that animated all that He did - Mark 1:41. When a leper came to Jesus calling out, "If you will, you can make me clean." Mark takes us inside, as it were. He shows us what happens in the heart of Jesus Christ when confronted with this man in a wretched state. Mark says, "Moved with pity he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, 'I will. Be clean.' And immediately the leprosy left him." The compassionate heart of God that met Moses here in Exodus 3 is most fully displayed, meets us in Jesus Christ, who hears when you cry and responds,

is moved with pity for His people. "He is," Hebrews 4:15, "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." He sees and He hears and He knows and He has come down to deliver you. When people cry out to Jesus Christ He hears them and He saves them. When people cry out to Jesus Christ He hears them and He saves them.

Of course that's a principle that's often been misused by well-meaning Christians. I read the story this past week of a well-meaning and zealous evangelist who used as his evangelistic technique his short-sightedness. He couldn't see well and so he would give a tract out and asked the person to whom he gave the tract to read the tract aloud to him, which of course the person did all the way down to the copyright. The tract included a so-called "Sinner's Prayer," and when his poor victim said his, "Amen," reading the tract, the overzealous evangelist immediately and exultantly declared him to have been converted! He'd made him say the words. Well prayers are not prescriptions that work medicinally as though the simple repetition of them had intrinsic potency. They're not magical incantations which if you'll say them enough will leverage from the hands of a reluctant God the blessing you are seeking. No. But if from the heart you will cry out for mercy to Jesus Christ, He will always, always hear you. No one ever went to Jesus seeking mercy and left empty-handed. He is touched with the feeling of your infirmities. He knows. He has come to deliver you. God loves you. Isn't that good news? Have you forgotten? Drink it in again. You are beloved of God. He has proven it in the gift of His Son. He hears you and He will answer when you cry to Him.

### **The Call of God and an Inadequate Man**

That's the good news. I'm sure Moses found it wonderfully comforting; we should certainly too. Although I can't help but imagine Moses at that moment being somewhat bemused, touched, helped even, but finding himself wondering, "Well what does this got to do with me exactly? I'm delighted that you are the God who hears the cries of my people but you know, I'm a failure, a dropout. I'm here in the backside of the desert. The Hebrews don't want me and the Egyptians are trying to kill me." And then God drops the bombshell. Verse 10 - "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." Often that's the very people that God will use, those who have been humbled and broken, who feel keenly their inadequacies. And Moses begins now at this point to splutter and offer excuse after excuse at the summons of God. The knowledge of God's love is wonderful, but the call of God, well that's another story. But God often delights to use us in our weaknesses and brokenness. "Remember your calling, my brothers. Not many of you were wise; not many of noble birth. But God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the strong and the ignorant to shame the wise and the things that are not to bring to nothing the things that are so that if anyone boasts they boast in the Lord. He has done it and all the glory might be his."

And so He calls a man like Moses. Perhaps He calls someone like you in your

weaknesses and vulnerabilities into His service. And so God confronts Moses and calls Moses. And Moses, for his part, seems altogether unprepared for this call. Saving Israel was a dream he once harbored but when he acted and intervened it went horribly wrong and now he's found himself forty years later still in exile in the wilderness. He'd given up on that dream long ago but God has not given up on His purposes for Moses. He has other plans and He calls Moses to service. It is wonderful to be reminded of the love of God as Moses was here - His compassion, His pity, His understanding, His readiness to hear us when we call. We are comforted by it and that is right and proper. We should be. But when we realize that the love of God and the compassion of God has a goal beyond ourselves that the God of love and compassion is interested in more than our comforts but is actually determined to use us in His service, well that can be a real challenge, can't it? Everything was great with God's message until He called Moses to be His instrument and the not so much. Moses begins to offer his excuses. He begins to demur.

### **Mercy Revealed and Mission-Sent**

But this is always the way it is with God when He reveals Himself in mercy - He also calls us to go in mission. It's the pattern of Exodus chapter 3; it's also the pattern of Matthew 28. When, like Moses on Mount Horeb, Jesus' disciples gather on another mountain and there they too saw the glory of God shining not this time from the midst of a bush set ablaze with the presence of the uncreated Jehovah, but shining now from the face of Jesus Christ. Here He stood among them, and like Moses, confronted with the glory of God, they are confronted with the glory of the risen Christ and they also are over-awed and they worship. Here too, in Matthew 28 on another mountain, stands the uncreated Jehovah, the angel of the Lord. But He comes to him now not in a burning bush but in perfect union with human flesh, still bearing the imprints of His self-giving love at Calvary. A large part of the glory that moved them and humbled them and made them worship was the knowledge that the one who stands before them resplendent in authority and majesty is the one into whose flesh the nails were driven, for them and for their deliverance, that this one has acted to save and to rescue them. And there on this mountain, just like on Horeb, there is a fresh revelation of the name of God - not now I AM that I AM, but Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God's name is displayed in its fullness in Christ. His glory revealed, His purposes in salvation displayed. Here is God the Redeemer standing before them and just like with Moses, having seen all of this and heard all of this, Jesus sends His disciples in mission. "Go therefore and make disciples."

Too often we want the mercy but not the mission, don't we? "The mercy I like, but the mission not so much!" We want the blessing but not the burden; we want to be saved. We're not too bothered about being sent. But Moses needed to learn, as we must too, that salvation never terminates on us. Grace never finishes its work in our hearts alone. It must overflow from us to the hearts of others. The saved are always sent. Those upon whom mercy is given, to whom mercy is

given, are those whom God sends in mission. If God has made you His child He does so to make you His instrument. So Moses is sent. He's given a mission and so are we.

## **II. A Message to Proclaim**

And then secondly, 15 to 22, he's also given a mission - a message rather; I beg your pardon. A mission and now a message, 15 to 22. If you compare the words of 15 to 17, what Moses is to say to Israel, with the words that God initially said to Moses Himself on the mountain in 7 to 9, you will see that the Gospel that confronted and comforted Moses is the same message with which he is to confront and comfort Israel. It's the same good news. What God says to Moses, Moses says to Israel. When it comes to Pharaoh, however, in 18 to 22, the message is a little different. God will deal, apparently, with Pharaoh in stages so that at first the request is simply to be allowed a three day field trip into the desert to worship God. Pharaoh, verse 19, will resist, which will afford an opportunity for God to display His majesty and power, His mighty arm, in bringing Israel out of bondage. And when at last they do leave Egypt they will do so now no longer the object of Egyptian derision; they will do so with favor, we are told; indeed with riches, not poverty, so that, verse 22, "you shall plunder the Egyptians."

### **Two-for-One: A Message of Deliverance and a Warning of Judgment**

It is, in other words, a marvelous message of deliverance for Israel but a chilling warning of judgment for Egypt. And the Gospel message, the message of God for the world, entrusted to the church as we are sent on mission, always bears that double-edged character. It is at once a message of mercy to all and any who will believe in Jesus Christ. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. He is a perfect Savior to all who will call on Him. And yet there's also a warning. Reject the claims of Jesus Christ crucified and you will stand before His tribunal to face the wrath of Jesus Christ enthroned. If you will not be saved with Israel from Egypt, you will be judged with Egypt by the God of glory. If you will not be rescued by Christ from the cross, you will be judged by Christ from His throne. Do you see the urgency of the Gospel message? If today you are not a Christian, do you see the urgency? These are your destinies - one or the other. You will either be plucked from the wrath of God by the grace of Christ or you will be left to face His judgments, having rejected Christ. Which will be your destiny? Jesus comes to you in the Gospel today as He came to Moses in the burning bush and holds out mercy and grace and the promise of pardon. Any who flee to Him He hears and saves and delivers. And if today you are a Christian, do you sense the urgency that presses upon you to be a faithful witness? These are the destinies facing all people everywhere and as God sends you on mission with this marvelous message, He wants you to know that you have friends and family and neighbors and colleagues facing a lost eternity for want of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Will you open your mouth to speak for the Savior? Will you take the

message entrusted to you and go make disciples?

There is a mission entrusted to us and a marvelous message that we have been given to proclaim. May God help us fulfill the mission and joyfully proclaim the message. Let us pray.

*Our Father, we bless You that in Jesus we have a perfect Savior. We thank You too that You have entrusted to us this extraordinary Gospel message. Would You make us enthusiasts for the fame of King Jesus, bold to speak His name with joy and urgency to all? And we pray for any among us who do not know Christ. O Lord, save them from the wrath to come through faith in Your Son. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.*

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