

God Remembers: I AM Who I AM (Part 2)

Exodus 3

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Do please turn with me in your copies of the Holy Scriptures to the book of Exodus, chapter 3, page 46 if you're using one of our church Bibles. Exodus chapter 3. When you have your Scriptures open before you, would you bow your heads with me as we pray? Let's pray together.

Lord, You came and confronted Moses on the mountain long ago and showed him Yourself. We believe that there is now a fuller revelation of Yourself in Your Son, the Lord Jesus, and in the power of the Holy Spirit He now comes to us to meet with us. We pray that we would be enabled to see and behold the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shining upon us in Him from this portion of Your Word that we may hate sin, believe the Gospel, and live for Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

Exodus chapter 3 from the first verse. This is God's own holy Word:

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, and we give thanks to God that He has spoken in His holy Word.

Equipped for Ministry: God's Revealing of Himself to Moses

Last Lord's Day you will remember we began to consider the message of Exodus chapter 3. God has called Moses to go back to Egypt after forty years of exile in the wilderness where he has been living as a Midianite shepherd, tending the flocks of Jethro his father-in-law. God has remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and now Moses is to be His instrument in keeping His promises and effecting Israel's deliverance. As we saw all of that last

time, we called it a great commission. Moses is given both a mission and a message. He's given a task - he will be their deliverer; and a message - he is to proclaim truths about God both to Israel and to the Egyptians. But alongside the great commission given to Moses there's also a great provision by which Moses is equipped to perform the task laid upon him. A great commission without a great provision would be an unfunded mandate, right? To borrow a phrase. I have learned since living here, among the many arcane details of American governments, that there are such things as unfunded mandate when the government requires the states to perform a task of national significance but does not provide the resources for them to perform the task it's an unfunded mandate. A commission without a provision would be an unfunded mandate. God never, never gives unfunded mandates to His children. As Augustine's famous prayer so helpfully puts it, "O Lord, give what You command and command what You will." The Lord gives what He commands and then commands what He wills. There are no unfunded mandates in the kingdom of God. When the Lord calls you to serve He will give you the grace so that you may serve.

And so this morning we come back to Exodus chapter 3, having noticed the great commission given to Moses, to think now about that great provision. And what I want us to see particularly, probably the single most important and urgently needed truth in the church today actually - I don't think that's an overstatement at all - what I want us to see is that the great provision of God for the needs of His people is God Himself. Let me say that again. God's great provision for His people is God Himself. It is God Himself. In Exodus 3 when God met Moses and called him, verses 7 through 10, as we saw last week to go back and rescue Egypt, Moses was unsurprisingly worried. After all, wouldn't you be? He'd been rejected by the Hebrews on his first attempt to be their deliverer, on the course of which he slew one of the Egyptian taskmasters and became a wanted man in Egypt. So rejected by the Hebrews, hunted by the Egyptians, a dropout, burned out shepherd in the backside of the desert looking after his father-in-law's sheep. An exile of forty years - what a failure. And now he's supposed to go back and play the hero. Verse 11, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

But do look at God's answer. This is how God responds to Moses' sense of personal inadequacy at the great commission given to him. Verse 12 - it's the same answer given to God's people across the ages. "I will be with you. I will be with you." It was the word God gave to Isaac, one of the fathers of Israel to whom God had promised His covenant. When faced with great famine, Genesis 26:3, God said, "I will be with you." It was the promise God would make in the generation that entered the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership, Moses' successor. In Joshua 1 and verse 5 as they began the conquest of the Promised Land, "I will be with you." When Israel had settled the land and the wars with the Philistines continued to rage, God promised Gideon in Judges 6:16, "I will be with you." To a troubled people of Israel facing deportation and enslavement in Babylon, the prophet Isaiah brought the Word of the Lord to the people of Israel,

“Fear not,” God said, “I am with you. Do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you by my righteous right hand.” And then when the risen Christ went to the disciples and sent them into all the world to make disciples with the great commission, calling us to go and be His witnesses to the ends of the earth, He stills our fears and strengthens us for the task with the same promise, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” God’s great provision for our great need is to give us Himself. He will be with us. God’s great provision is God.

Commissioned *and* Equipped

Moses presses for more information, doesn’t he? “You’ll be with me. That is great, but what am I supposed to tell the people of Israel? When I go to them with this story they’ll think I’ve been out in the sun too long, out in the desert one day too many!” Verse 13, “If I come to the people of Israel and I say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what am I going to tell them?” Moses is not asking for the correct form of address when he speaks about God, you understand. He’s asking to know the character of God, to understand something of His nature. The name of God is shorthand for the attributes and essence of God. If the God of his fathers was sending him back to his suffering people, well Moses wants to know this God better and he wants to be able to lead them into a deeper knowledge of this God. If they’re to trust Moses and trust the God on whose errand Moses has been sent to them, Moses needs more than simply, “the God of your fathers.” He wants to be able to show them who God is. And so in His answer, God does more than help Moses compose his speech to the suffering Hebrews; He reveals Himself to Moses. He discloses Himself as He gives him His name.

What is it that God says? Look at verses 14 and 15 please. “God said to Moses, ‘I AM who I AM. Say this to the people of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.’ God said to Moses, ‘Say this to the people of Israel, The LORD, 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.’” If the most pressing and urgent need of the church today is a recovery of the God-ness of God, the glory and greatness and otherness of God, then it seems to me hardly wasted time, perhaps the best use of our time, to pause in our journey through the book of Exodus to press the pause button here in Exodus 3 and rewind and replay the tape a few times and meditate some on the being and the attributes and the glory of God revealed to Moses here on the mountain, to behold our God for awhile that, like Moses, we might be equipped by God’s great provision of Himself to go on the great commission He’s given us. Do notice two things in particular about God that is revealed in His name as He gives it to Moses. First, the divine name reveals God’s total independence. The divine name reveals God’s total independence. And then secondly, the divine name reveals God’s perfect faithfulness. The divine name reveals God’s total independence and His perfect faithfulness.

I. The Divine Name reveals God's Total Independence

First of all, the divine name reveals God's total independence. God is not like creatures. He is a being unto Himself. The divine name, I AM, Yahweh, "LORD" in all-caps in English Bibles, is at once a proper name - that's verse 15's point, isn't it? "This is my name forever, thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations." It is a proper name and it's also a description of God's otherness, His independence, His self-sufficiency and self-existence. We translate the name, I AM, because it comes from the Hebrew verb, "to be." I AM who I AM might even be translated, "I am who I will be" or "I will be who I am." The name underscores, really, the most basic fact of all about God and that is that He is not like us. God is not like us. He isn't a creature; He is the Creator. His name is designed to highlight His independence. We're all dependent creatures, aren't we? We need food and water. We are vulnerable, fragile. We grow old, we decay, we get sick, we die. Just think about the Ebola virus ravaging Africa right now. It's hard not to be reminded of those facts of our creatureliness everyday. We exist because of God; God does not exist because of us or because of anything other than God. He is self-existent. He is the great I AM. The Septuagint, the old Greek version of the Old Testament Scriptures translates Exodus 3:14 with the Greek words, "ὁ ὢν" - the Being One. That's God's name. The God who is. The self-existent One. It's a title picked up in the New Testament. Revelation 1 verse 4 and again in verse 8. "The God who is and who was and who is to be." God is self-existent and independent of His creatures and an implication of that is that He is not prone, as creatures are, to flux and mutation and ebb and flow and change. He is the same - immutable and unchanging; "ὁ ὢν", the great I AM, the Being One, the One who is and was and is to come. The very first words of Scripture make the same point with some force, don't they? What are the first words of the Bible? "In the beginning God" - God already was in the beginning. "In the beginning God." And because of His divine fiat, all other things, all other creatures came to be. He always was. All other beings are derivative because God gave them existence therefore they exist. God is underived. He exists from Himself forever.

Burning Fire: The Presence and Power of Almighty God

That's part of the point of the stunning image of the burning bush in the opening six verses of the chapter. More than just a visual aid to hook Moses' attention, it is itself a revelation of the character and nature of God designed to help Moses understand God's name. Look at it please, the burning bush. Moses sees the flames of fire igniting this desert bush, and yet the fire does not consume the bush. The flames are not like other flames, are they? They don't depend on the bush for fuel. They are not burning the bush. They are uncreated flames. Fire, as you probably know, would go on to become one of the great emblems of the presence of God in perfect holiness. Our God, as we read at the beginning of our

service in Hebrews 12:29, "Our God is a consuming fire." It would be the pillar of fire by which God would lead His people through the darkness of the night in their wilderness journeys towards the Promised Land. It was the emblem of His presence among them. In Isaiah 6 when the prophet sees the Lord high and lifted up, the seraphim, these angelic beings whose name means "burning ones" must veil their faces because they cannot gaze into the white-hot brilliance of the holiness of God. Holiness, the otherness of God, is depicted and portrayed in the fire of His presence and here Moses sees the angel of the Lord, the Lord God Himself, burning in fire in the bush but it is independent of the bush. It doesn't consume the bush; it doesn't need the bush for fuel. It is self-sustained. Its heat and light derive only from itself. That is God - the uncreated Lord. He made all things, on Him all things depend, but He Himself needs nothing, depends on no one. He is ase. He is from Himself.

And now grasping that is critically important because it helps us get our thinking straight, our minds and our understandings, especially of ourselves as creatures, oriented in the correct direction in relation to Him. We are creatures; we need Him. He is the Creator; He needs nothing and no one. God wasn't lonely and so He had to make you. He was not deficient knowing some lack that caused Him to create all things or to love you or to save you. He was not compelled to do it by a deficiency intrinsic to Him. He loved you because He chose you. He loved you because He chose to love you. He saved you not because He must but because He willed. He is the independent God of glory and grace. The uncreated fire - that is God. He burns in the bush but He does not consume it.

A Doctrine of God for the Living of These Days

You know in these days of terrifying global epidemics, isn't this a doctrine of God that we need to cling to? This is the God we need, not a God who's a bigger version of ourselves - always eager to please, emotionally vulnerable, surprised when we struggle, saddened by our pain, and impotent to help. Who needs a God like that? A God like that is at best only a victim, Himself prone to being acted upon by a world that takes Him by surprise. When chaos and darkness and sin and sadness and death and disease puncture our lives, a God like that will never be enough. What you need is the God who met Moses in Exodus 3 who stands above it all, greater than it, unlike it, over it, governing it, superintending it but independent of it, unaffected by it, not a victim but a deliverer. That is the God we need. No other can possibly satisfy and no other will do. "God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in times of trouble, in straights a present aid. Therefore although the earth be moved we will not be afraid." God is our refuge and our strength; He is our solid Rock; He is our mighty fortress. Only a God like this is enough for hearts that are breaking and broken in a world like ours.

That is what God was showing Moses as He prepared to send him back to face the challenges of delivering Israel from hostile Egypt. This is who pledges

Himself to be with Moses. Not a cosmic life coach full of, you know, punchy one-liners and pep-talks to encourage you on your way but utterly powerless to bring change. No! He is the mighty sovereign Jehovah, the uncreated fire, independent and holy, upon whom Moses depends, but who is utterly dependent of Moses. God didn't need Moses to go to Egypt, but if Moses was going to go to Egypt, he would need this God. God doesn't need you to be His witnesses, but since you are called to be His witnesses you badly need Him. God is independent of us; we are dependent on Him. Nothing could be more comforting than that, actually. "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD, Yahweh, I AM, is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not grow weary or faint. His understanding is unsearchable. Therefore," Isaiah 40:28 and 29, "He gives power to the faint and to him who has no might, He increases strength." God is the only secure anchor for your life; the only solid Rock amidst the ebb and flow and the sinking sand of this dark world. A God like this, the great I AM, sovereign, transcendent, holy - you can rest your hopes upon Him.

II. The Divine Name reveals God's Perfect Faithfulness

He is the faithful God. That's the second thing this great name reveals - not simply His independence of the creature but His faithfulness towards us as His people. When God reveals His name in verses 14 and 15 He does it, did you notice, three times over, in slightly different ways - "I AM who I AM; I AM has sent me to you; the LORD, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you." Each time is slightly fuller in its explanation and teasing out the implications of the divine name. Like the sun rising - you know at first you only see a silhouette and then you see, in the rising light of the sun, a little more detail, and when the sun has fully risen you see the whole picture. So God begins - He gives the name of God. Then He says to Moses, "Because this is who I am, I'm going to send you. You can trust Me." And then He says, "Even more than that, because of who I am you can trust Me to keep My covenant promises with your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I AM, and therefore I am faithful. Because of My character as the unchanging Lord, My every word is secure and safe and true and you can depend upon My promises." And so God brings the revelation of His name into the closest possible connection with His covenant promises. It's not just that He's the great I AM, it's not just that the great I AM is sending Moses back; it is that the great I AM has not forgotten His promise and therefore He's sending Moses back. God's good name, He says, is at stake in His keeping His promises.

Later in Exodus 34 verses 5 to 7 God will reveal His name again to Moses, proclaims His name to Moses, and it's this aspect of God's faithfulness that comes out particularly clearly. Exodus 34:5-7, "The LORD, the LORD" - there's the divine name twice repeated. And then comes the explanation of all that is entailed in that name - "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for

thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty." God keeps His promises. He is faithful and true. The God who, when He makes a covenant, keeps it. And so centuries later when the Lord Jesus Christ repeatedly declared of Himself, "ἐγώ εἰμι" I AM, it was to that principle He was bearing witness - the faithfulness of God to His promises. "I am the light of the world. I am the way and the truth and the life. I am the good shepherd. I am the bread of life." Most clearly John 8:58 - "Before Abraham was, I am." "I am the God who met Moses on the mountain," Jesus is saying, "and I am here to keep My promises because I am faithful and true and I will save sinners for Myself."

Deliverance in Christ: a Greater Exodus to come

In Exodus 3 you know, just for a time, the uncreated God came down and was united, bound together with a creature. In the burning bush, the uncreated fire rested upon, dwelled within, the bush. The bush blazed with the presence of God but the presence of God did not burn the bush. What Moses could not have known was that many, many years later God would come down again to join forever in indissoluble bonds uncreated deity with the creature in the union of God with man in the person of Jesus Christ. When God told Moses from the bush His name, I AM, when He reminded him of His utter commitment to keeping His promises and saving His people, Moses could never have known just how far Yahweh was going to go to keep those promises. He was going to take flesh and bleed and die to save His people, to bring them from every tribe and language and nation from the deeper slavery of sin into the glorious freedom of the children of God. And so while God's revelation of His name here must have spoken great comfort to Moses' heart, the true exposition of the name and nature of God would wait for the appearing of our great God and Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God but the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known. Jesus Christ displays the name of God to us. He is the great I AM and in God there is no unChristlikeness at all.

A Picture of God's Covenant Faithfulness

Which means that as we come now to the Lord's Table that we come to a higher mountain than Mount Horeb. It is to a fuller and clearer, more intimate, more complete disclosure of the heart of God and the essence and being of God that we draw near. We are coming to Christ as we come to the table, to our faithful God who bore our sin in His body on the tree. He kept His promises and sealed them with His blood. Here in the bread and the wine Christ comes to us anew in the power of the Holy Spirit to declare His name, His nature, to remind you, believer, of His faithfulness, His utter reliability, of His steadfast love for you. Here at the table, the Savior is reaching to you saying, "I am yours and you are Mine forever and I give you Myself to be the great provision for the sustenance and nourishment of your soul. I will never leave you. I am with you and I am enough for you." Our hearts, aren't they, they are "prone to wander, Lord we feel

it, prone to leave the God we love.” That’s us. But God’s heart never wanders. He never leaves the people He loves. And the cross of Jesus Christ, of which the bread and wine are the great emblems, is the perfect demonstration of that fact. He loves you. Samuel Rutherford called communion, “the love kisses of the Son of Man.” He is showing and showering again upon you, beloved, His love for His people, binding Himself to you in renewal of His covenant promise. “I will be with you. I’m yours; you’re Mine. I will keep you and sustain you and feed you forever.” Will you pray with me please?

O Lord, we praise You for the Gospel, for Jesus, who is the great display and exposition of Your heart and character. As we come to the Lord’s Table we pray that we may see Him as we’ve heard Him speak in His Word, read and preached. May we see Him in the Word visible in the bread and wine and may we be enabled by Your Spirit to feast on Him to the nourishment of our hearts and the strengthening of our faith that we too may fulfill the great commission He’s given because of the supply of His great provision. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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