

## I AM Who I AM

Exodus 3:13-22

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*First Presbyterian Church  
November 26, 2000*

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Exodus, chapter 3. When last we were together, God had revealed Himself in this manifestation of the burning bush to Moses, and had announced to him His intentions to make him His spokesman to Pharaoh and His leader for Israel. Moses has already met the Lord with one question. Who am I to do this? What qualifications do I have to do this, Lord? Are you sure that you have the right person? And now we will begin in the rest of the story in Exodus, chapter 3, beginning in verse 13. This is God's holy word:

Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, "I AM Who I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" And God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons 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 this is My memorial-name to 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, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me saying 'I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt. So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.'" "And they will pay heed to what you say; and you with the elders of Israel will come to the king of Egypt, and you will say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So 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 permit you to go except under compulsion. So I will stretch out My hand, and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go. And I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be that when you go, you will not go empty-handed. But every woman shall ask of her neighbor and the woman who lives in her house, articles of silver and articles of

gold, and clothing; and you will put them on your sons and daughters. Thus you will plunder the Egyptians."

Amen and thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

O Lord, sanctify us by Your truth. Your word is truth. Reveal Yourself to us, cause our hearts to be lifted up with joy and to marvel at this glorious, biblical presentation of who you are for us. We pray that as we contemplate you and all your benefits that we would be humbled, encouraged, built up, rooted, strengthened, equipped to serve, moved to praise. We ask, oh God, that you would open our eyes to see Your truth and to see yourself. In Jesus' name, Amen.

In Exodus, chapter 3, verses 1 through 12, God had appointed Moses as the leader for His people, and as His spokesman to Pharaoh. And immediately Moses asked for a recount. And after God had continued in conversation with him, Moses had some further questions to ask as well. And that's exactly where we are picking up tonight, right in the middle of that conversation. But as we look at this passage, as tempting as it is and as you often hear this passage set forth, and I don't say that it's illegitimate, you often hear this passage as a passage about Moses, that it's a passage that tells you about this man of God that the Lord is choosing, how humble he was, how self effacing he was, etc, etc. But as you look at this passage closely, it's quite clear, that it's all about God. The passage is not about Moses, it's about God. It's not about Moses' struggles, it's about God, and what He is, and what He's about to do for His people. And so as we look at this passage tonight, I would like to focus your attention, drawing, of course, directly from the word of God the direction of focus. I'd like to focus your attention on God Himself.

.In verses 13 through 17, God, as He gives this name to Moses, makes it clear that He is going to be the person who defines Himself, not only to Israel, but to Egypt. Nobody else is going to define who He is and what He's like. He's going to define Himself. And it's already in that passage that we begin to see just how much God is the center of this story of redemption. Then secondly, in verses 16 through 18, we're going to see God reveal His compassion and His patience, and even His humility. And then in verses 19 and 20, thirdly we're going to see God's sovereignty revealed in His foreknowledge of future events, and in His foreordination of future events. And then finally in verses 21 and 22 we're going to see God's sovereignty in His fulfilling His covenant promises. Let's look at this passage and what it teaches us about our God

## **I. God defines Himself and is the center of the story .**

In verse 13 we're told that after Moses has received God's answer, and it was a good and a thorough answer, and we have every reason to believe that Moses has accepted the answer, because in the very question that he asks in verse 13 he assumes that he is going to obey that which God has commissioned him to do. In verse 13 Moses follows up that first question with another question: What is it that I am to say about you to the people of God when I go talk to them? Who do I say that You are? What do I tell them about You? Moses' commission obviously implies that he has had a special revelation from God. And since God always announced His name to the patriarchs of old when He came and visited them, and since He often revealed to them a new aspect or a new nuance of Himself by expanding on that name as He revealed Himself to the patriarchs, it is only natural that the people of God, when approached by Moses with the announcement that God has appointed him as their leader, and as his spokesman to Pharaoh, that they will say, 'Okay well tell us something about this God. Who is He? What name did He give you when He came to you in this great revelation?' They would inquire of Moses the name by which God had revealed Himself.

You can think back to the story of Jacob, for instance, when God speaks to him as the God of Jacob, the God at Bethel. And He reveals something about himself to Jacob that certainly Jacob had not understood to that point. And so the people of God are waiting. This person has announced himself as a prophet, as a spokesman of God. Surely, then, God will have given him a special name. You need to understand Moses is not saying, "This is a God that I've never heard of before, I need to know your name." This isn't Moses saying, "Well, you know, I've never worshiped this God before. I need to know something about you." This is Moses knowing that the people of God will expect a prophet of the Lord, one who has received an encounter, a vision from God, to be able to tell the people of God something that God said to him about Himself; especially His name which carried such great significance.

Knowing a person's name in the ancient world gave you a certain influence with them, as it does in the modern world. When I receive personalized letters in the mail that say, "Dear J. Legion," I immediately know where they go. The trash can. So also when the people of God call upon His name, because they are part of the family of God, they have a peculiar access to Him. And so God's name is significant. And so it's not unusual that the people of God would ask that question, and it's not unusual that Moses would say to the Lord what do you want me to tell them? And God's answer is, "I AM who I AM." This is the name, "I AM who I AM." Or Maybe I will be who I will be, or maybe I will be who I am. God gives us this mysterious name which is usually set forth in the Old Testament by four little letters, L-O-R-D in all caps. LORD. Now it's important for you to remember, we'll emphasize this in a moment, that it's a name, it's not a title. Yes, the Bible does use the title, *Lord*, *Adonai*, but the name LORD is a proper noun. It's sometimes pronounced *Jehovah*. We really don't know how this name is pronounced, because from the time of the second temple in Judaism, the name

was so revered that the people didn't speak it. Some people speculate that the name was pronounced something like *Yahweh*. But we just don't know. Jehovah is created through the combination of the consonants of this word, *Yahweh*, and the vowels of *Adonai*, put together in order to speak the word reverentially without pronouncing as it perhaps was originally pronounced.

At any rate, this name, LORD, this name, Jehovah, is the name that God gives to Moses as His name to speak to the people. What does it represent? It's mysterious, certainly, and commentators struggle with how to explain the fullness of the meaning of this name. But certainly it indicates at least this: It indicates God's self-existence. He was not created, He was not brought into being by anyone else. "I AM who I AM." It indicates His independence. He is not dependent upon anything in His creation, and everything in His creation is dependent upon Him. "I AM who I AM." It indicates perhaps His faithfulness. Great is Thy faithfulness, O God, my Father. Because He will be who He will be to His people. He will not change. He will not change on them. His character will be constant. His purposes will be constant. They can count on Him. And it indicates His absolute prerogative of self-revelation. The name itself, because of its mystery, will actually allow the people of to see God define Himself in His redeeming actions towards them. In other words, I am the Lord, now watch Me define Myself to you My people, as I redeem you. You are going to learn a lot about Me, and what I am going to do in the Exodus.

God gives Moses this name, and then he gives him three missions. First, he is to go to the people of God, Israel, the sons of Israel. Then, he is to go to the elders. And then he is to go Pharaoh.

In verse 15 we see this first mission. The first of three missions. He goes to the people, and he is to tell them three things. First of all, he is to tell them that the Lord sent me. It is Jehovah God. It's the Lord. It's this new name which God has given to Moses that he is to announce. The Lord sent me, and he is going to teach you a whole lot about Himself in the Exodus, is the implication. But that's not all. He's to tell them that the God of your fathers sent me. In other words, this is not some new God. This is not some god other than the God whom you have always worshiped. This is the God of your fathers, the same one who spoke to your fathers. The same God whom you worship. Thirdly, he's not only to say the Lord has sent me and that the God of Your Father sent me, he is to say that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob sent me. That is, the God of the covenant and the God of patriarchs. He sent me, just to make sure that they understand. This is not some other God, this is the God of their fathers revealing Himself to them in a way that far surpasses everything else He's ever told them about Himself.

Think, my friends, how fleeting were the revelations of God to the patriarchs that we have already in the book of Genesis. The book of Genesis is a long book, but if you stacked up the passages in which God spoke to the patriarchs, they wouldn't be very long. I doubt you'd fill up but a few chapters. Even though the

book of Genesis is about God, even though Moses as the narrator tells us much about God, there are not many passages in which God speaks to the patriarchs and reveals Himself to them copiously.

But now in the book of Exodus, and in the book of Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy, God is going to reveal Himself to His people in a way that far surpasses everything else which is come before in the history of revelation. And so Moses asks this second question who do I say sent me? Who do I say commissioned me? And he gets this answer. You tell them that the Lord is the one who commissioned you and sent you. God is showing that He will define Himself, and he is showing that he will be at the center of the story. Remember again LORD is not a title. It's not like Lord McCay or Lord Fauntleroy. It's a name. The LORD. He is our LORD. He is not simply a lord, the LORD is a proper name. It became that name. That name became to the Old Testament saint, a name as precious to us as the name of Jesus; because when the name the LORD was appended to the great title and description God, the people of God were reminded of God's efforts for them in behalf of grace for their redemption. When they thought of the LORD it was the covenant God of Israel who was coming for their rescue. And so it was a precious name the children of Israel, and so you will see it deployed, not only in the Psalms, but throughout the Old Testament. But in announcing this name to Moses, God is letting Moses know that He will define Himself in this process of Revelation. The people of God must simply watch and learn about Him as He fights for them in the Exodus. He is the main character in the story, but He will not be defined by the ideas and the expectations of man. He's going to break all those bearers as He reveals Himself in the Exodus.

A dear friend of mine, Mark Dever, who has this ability to get by with things that would get me killed was once giving a seminar at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. And there was a young man in his seminar, I think named Bob. They were studying the attributes of God, and Mark was giving a classic, historical, reformed orthodox presentation of the attributes of God. This fellow named Bob was very upset at what Mark was saying. He clearly disagreed with him. So he raised his hand and he said, "Mark, you know I like to think of God as omniscient, but not meddling. Just, but not nit picky. Sovereign, but not overbearing." And so it went on. After he finished this little spiel, Mark said, "Thank you, Bob, but we're not here to talk about what you think, and we're not here to talk about you. We're here to talk about God. And so we're going to go back to the Bible now." But my friends, you know, you have lots of conversations with people week after week that begin like this, "I like to think about God like..." or "I think God is..." And that's precisely what God is waiting for here. And He says, "I don't want to hear that. I'm going to define what I'm like. I'm going to show you. Don't you come with your preconceptions of what I'm like. I'll blow all your categories. I AM who I AM. And I'm about to reveal just how awesome I am to you. But you're going to have to watch and learn. Stand still and see the revelation of the Lord. That's the first thing we see here in verses 13 through 17.

## **II. God is compassionate and patient beyond belief.**

Then in verses 16 through 18 Moses is going to carry through or is given the assignments to carry through on two more missions, to speak to the elders and to speak to Pharaoh. And God tells Moses that He is to tell the elders of God's concern for Israel, and what He is going to do, and he's to make a request of Pharaoh. And here in this passage we see a glimpse of God as the God of compassion, the God of patience, and I want to say this carefully and reverently, but even a God of humility. That's not a term that we often link with God, but I'll try and explain that to you in just a few moments. In verse 16, Moses is commanded to gather the elders of Israel. By the way, this is the first time that the elders of Israel are mentioned. And he is to explain God's revelation to him, and he is to explain God's concern for them. In fact, in this passage, God tells Moses to tell the elders four things. First of all he is to reveal the name. And as he reveals the name, God tells him to tell the elders the same thing that he told the people. I am the Lord, I am the God of your fathers, and I'm the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In other words, he's tying up all of those three things together in the closest possible way, so there is no way they can mistake who Moses is speaking about. So he's to tell them the name, then he is to tell the elders that he has had a revelation from this one true God.

Having told the elders, the name and about his revelation, he is to tell them of God's concern for them. Think of how the people of God might have thought God where are you in all this? You know we've been in an oppression for generations now. It's been 400 years now, Lord. Where are you in all this? And God says, "Moses, you tell them that I am concerned for them. I know what's been going on, I know what's been done to them, and I care." And finally, Moses is to tell them something very precious. The fulfillment of the covenant. Look at what he says in verse 17. "So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Jebusite to a land flowing with milk and honey." God tells Moses to tell the elders what He plans to do. Moses had not been instructed, by the way, to tell that to the children of Israel in this kind of detail. He is to tell the elders especially exactly what He plans to do to bring them out of Egypt and into the land of Canaan, and that is in direct fulfillment of Genesis 15, verse 16 and verses 18 through 21.

In other words, God is telling the elders, who among all the people of God, would have remembered God's covenant promises that he is just about to fulfill a promise that he had made over 400 years ago to Abraham. Remember the promise? Turn back to Genesis 15. In the very context in which God entered into that covenant ceremony with Abram, He said to him this. Genesis 15, 16: "In the fourth generation, they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." Verse 18: "On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram saying, "To your descendants I have given this land from the river of Egypt as far as the

great river, the river Euphrates, the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite.” And in the repetition of those words here in Exodus, chapter 3, it is being emphasized that God is going to fulfill His covenant promises.

Now God does something else for Moses here, if you'll look at verse 18. I think this is a very special thing. God assures Moses that the elders are going to listen to him. Now it's interesting to me that in this passage, God tells Moses how Pharaoh is going to react. He tells Moses how the elders are going to react. He doesn't say how the people of God are going to react. I wonder, I just wonder if God knew that Moses just couldn't take the reaction of the people of God. But He encourages him by telling him. Moses let me tell you when you tell the elders of God's people this, they're going to listen to you. They're going to embrace what you said.

And then in verse 18 God goes on to tell Moses to perform one more mission. You and the elders go and speak to Pharaoh. And it's absolutely amazing. God's compassion is revealed here in His care for His people. God's patience, however, is revealed in the way in which Moses is told to approach Pharaoh. Dare we say it? God's humility is revealed in the way that He tells Moses to speak to Pharaoh. A simple request is made of Pharaoh. God could have sent Moses in and said Pharaoh, I am the spokesman for the God of the universe. You better let us go now or else. That's not the first message from Moses to Pharaoh. The first message is a simple request. We know it is a reasonable request because we have documents from this time, the Mauri tablets and others that indicate that it was not uncommon for slaves to go to their masters and ask permission to go out in the wilderness to worship specific shrines and then to return. It happened all the time. And the request is simply this: Israel needs to go into the wilderness a distance of three days to offer sacrifice to worship. Three days was a long distance to travel. It would have taken Israel well beyond the bounds of Egypt, thus not to offend the Egyptians and their cultic sacrifices. It was a simple request. And God had Moses give that simple request because he knew what was going to happen in response to it. And we're going to find that out in verses 19 and 20.

### **III. God is sovereign in His foreknowledge and foreordination.**

God has validated Moses in the eyes of the elder, but He gently petitions this earthly king. This earthly king ought to be groveling before God, and yet God puts a simple request to him. Allow my people to go three days into the wilderness to offer sacrifice, to worship Me, and immediately we are told what the response is. In verses 19 and 20 we see God's sovereignty displayed in His foreknowledge and in His foreordination. Moses is told ahead of time how Pharaoh will react and what God will do. Before Moses ever went on his errand,

before he ever went to speak to the elders, before he ever went to speak to Pharaoh, God told him what the outcome will be because He knows the end from the beginning just as we heard this morning. God knows everything. Why does God know everything? Because He's got the best crystal ball in the universe? No. Because He's ordained everything. He knows because He has ordained, and He tells ahead of time, Moses, what the outcome will be. He says, "The King of Egypt will not permit you to go. Go ask him, but the King of Egypt will not permit you to go."

And then at the end of verse 19 He says, "Except by a strong hand." Now there are many ancient Egyptian texts that speak about Pharaoh's strong arm against his enemies. So in a tongue and cheek way, the God of Israel, by His strong arm, is going to strong arm Pharaoh who thinks he has a strong arm into releasing the children of Israel. He will not let you go except under compulsion. Under God's strong arm, the people of God will be compelled into deliverance.

And then, at the end of verse 20, we are told that God will strike Egypt, will do wonders in her midst, and will compel Pharaoh to let them go. Only after he has done those wonders, only after Pharaoh has refused, God is showing His plan and His knowledge of that plan ahead of time to Moses. Again, He is the center of the story. Moses may be His great human spokesman. He may be the spokesman to Pharaoh. He may be the leader of His people, but God is at the center of the story, and we are learning about Him as He speaks to Moses in this passage.

#### **IV. God is sovereign in His fulfillment of the covenant promises and in His provision for His needy people.**

And then finally, in verses 21 and 22 Moses is told ahead of time how God will provide for this now poverty-stricken people as they leave the land in freedom. Again, we see that God is sovereign in His fulfillment of the covenant promises, and His provision for His needy people. The people of God have been enslaved for 400 years. They were in abject poverty, but God has provided for that. Again, in fulfillment of His covenant, God says that He will provide for His people. Turn back to Genesis 15 again. Note how twice in this passage God speaks of fulfillments of promises that He had made to Abraham 400 years ago. Genesis 15 and look at verse 14. He has just spoken in verse 13 about the fact that they will be enslaved and oppressed for 400 years. And then He says in verse 14, "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. God had promised the children of Israel that though they would be enslaved and oppressed, they would leave the land of their oppression with many possessions. God had thought of everything, and He is working to provide for His people in every way possible, and God's people in turn are both to remember the way were treated in Egypt, and they are to remember how God treated them even as they deal with those who work for them. And so in



Deuteronomy, chapter 15, verses 13 through 15 and elsewhere, the people of God as they set free household slaves are never to send those slaves away empty-handed. They are to remember how they were treated, they are to remember how God treated them, and they are to show an according mercy to those who are freed in their own households.

But the important thing again to see here is this: God fulfilling His covenant promises. His people perhaps have forgotten His promises. Perhaps they have lost faith in these promises, but God before their eyes is fulfilling promises that though they had forgotten, He had not forgotten. And He has provided for them even in small ways. You might say, well, He's giving them freedom. Yes, He's given them freedom, but He's giving them so many other benefits along with it. And we're reminded of that great passage in Romans 8:32 that said, "He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

We are so tempted to think that God in His redeeming deliverance of us through Jesus Christ is somehow going to leave something out of the mix that we need. Though God has sent His Son to redeem us, that He's going to leave us short of that which we need in this life. And so Paul reminds us as we come to the Lord in prayer, that the Lord has already given us the greater, He's already given us the greatest, He's given us His Son. And if He's given us His Son, how is there anything that He could possibly fail to provide that we need. And so the God of Israel provides even these basic needs even in the context of providing for the redemption of Israel. God is sovereign. He keeps His promises. He provides for His people. He foreknows. He foreordains. He's compassionate, He's patient, even with the unbelieving, He's patient beyond belief. He defines Himself. He's the center of the story. "I AM who I AM." Let's pray.

Our Lord God, help us to worship You as You are and as You have revealed Yourself and not according to our own imaginations. As You reveal Yourself to us in Your word, correct our misidentifications, our misdefinitions, correct our prejudices, show us the wideness of Your grace, the perfection of Your justice, the glory of Your righteousness, the majesty of Your holiness, and refresh us with Yourself, and as You show us Your grace, oh God, in Jesus Christ. Help us to worship You as we ought, having seen You as You are, in the one who was God in the flesh. We ask these things in His name, Amen.

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