

Exodus 3:1-16

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[0 : 00] Great, so we're in Exodus chapter 3 on page 55, just in case you just came in there.! I wonder what it would take for God to convince you to follow Him into some really tough situation, some real danger.

When the heat is on, what would it take to convince you to keep going, to keep following God, to keep being faithful to Him?

Perhaps for you the question is more like, what is the God of the Bible like as He asks me perhaps for the first time to follow Him?

What is He actually like? What is His character like, the God of the Bible? Well in verse 10 in this passage that we read together, God gives Moses a call to do something unthinkably difficult if you look there over the page.

Verse 10, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring them up out of the land. That is his challenge for Moses. We've been following the book of Exodus, haven't we?

[1 : 14] And at the end of chapter 2 last week we saw that God's people are still in slavery and now God meets Moses to give him this commission.

But you see these two chapters, chapter 3 and 4, are laced with Moses' insecurity and his weakness and his reluctance to follow this commission.

Persistent, who am I?

What is the sort of God who calls us to follow and obey Him in the first place? As you read through this chapter and if you maybe take it home, if you've got a Bible, do read on into chapter 4.

You'll see it's a section in this book about relationship. It's about relational separation and reunion. So just look at the tension as God appears to Moses for the first time in this burning bush vision.

[2 : 40] Maybe some of you know it. Moses. He calls out to him, doesn't he, from this burning bush in verse 4. He beckons him, Moses, Moses, he shouts. But immediately in the same breath in verse 5 he says, don't come near.

Stay where you are. He summons him and yet warns him, don't come closer. And of course that's a picture, isn't it, for what it is like to be a human being.

The relationship between God and the human race has broken down. There's a tension there.

That's what it's been like from the very beginning. Like an unfaithful spouse, humanity has lost its relationship to the God who made it.

Think back to Genesis 3. God sent out Adam and Eve, sent humanity out from his presence from the garden. And in Genesis 3, God drove the man out at the east end of the garden.

He placed a cherub in there with a flaming sword going backwards and forwards. There is no way back into that relationship at the end of Genesis 3.

[3 : 48] And it speaks in the Bible, doesn't it, of God's reaction to evil and wrongdoing. It's like our reaction to eating food that's gone off.

Leviticus 18, the land became unclean so I punished iniquity and the land vomited the people out. You know, I was at a wedding a few years ago and it was a lovely reception meal, one of the best I've ever eaten.

But the day after I woke up and I felt as weak as a daisy. I knew at that point something was not right. I had a phone call from the groom which was strange because he should have been on a plane to the Bahamas with his new wife.

He asked me was I okay. And it turned out 50 other guests had gone down with food poisoning. I will vomit you out, God says.

My inner compulsion to get rid of rancid chicken legs and volavons. It is an illustration, isn't it? It is an illustration of his inner compulsion to get rid of wrongdoing.

[4 : 58] And sin and evil, however trivial we think it is. Adam and Eve, they thought they could stay in the garden, didn't they? They hid away. They thought they could stay there but it wasn't the case.

God had to cast them out. He can't keep evil and wrongdoing in his stomach. He can't stomach it. And this is the problem with Moses, isn't it?

Moses, Moses, don't come any closer. It's a relational breakdown. You cannot see my face and live. He says to him in chapter 33 of Exodus.

So as we come to this passage, what should strike you? What is so peculiar and absurd, if sheer volume of phrases is anything to go by, is that the God who appears to Moses, the God of the Bible, the God who vomits sinners out, the God who says don't come any closer, is with him.

Chapter 3, verse 2. The Lord appeared to him. 3, verse 8. I have come down. 3, verse 12.

[6 : 08] I will be with you. 3, verse 18. The Lord of the God of the Hebrews has met with us. 4, verse 12. I will be with your mouth. 4, verse 24. The Lord met him.

4, verse 31. When they heard that the Lord had visited his people, they worshipped. What will it take for God to convince Moses to remain faithful?

It's the almost unbelievable reality that God is with him and his people. That Moses will serve a God who will dwell with them.

And that is both the means and the ends of the salvation of Exodus. It's what it's all for. That God will dwell with them.

He is a God who is so far from us, morally speaking, and yet he is so near in this passage. So in the time that we've got left, I want us to see if we can three ways in which God is with Moses and his people in this passage.

[7 : 17] Firstly, he is with them by way of promise. He is with them by way of promise or commitment or covenant. Now, when I read this earlier in the week, I could count at least three times where God describes himself as the God of the people.

So if you look at verse 6, he says, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. Verse 15, it's very similar, isn't it?

The God of your fathers and so on. Verse 16 again, he says the same thing. God defines himself in relation to his people.

He is in very nature a relational God. It is his nature to have a people. So let's think about this.

What does he actually mean when he says, I am the God of Abraham? What does that mean? Now the word of in the English language can mean a lot of things, can't it?

[8 : 26] So if I say to you, the music of Mozart, that could mean at least two things, couldn't it? It could mean the music that Mozart composed, that he produced.

It could mean the music that he likes in his CD collection that he has at home. There are at least two ways of understanding that. So is God just saying here that he is the God that Abraham served?

That he is the God who belongs to Abraham, the God of Abraham? I don't think it is that. I think there is more to this meaning. I think it is more like, I'm the God to whom Abraham belongs.

He belongs to me. I will do everything that God does for him. It's a bit like, isn't it, when a husband can say of his wife, I am the husband of my wife, Emma.

That's my role. I am the husband. Now one commentator, one preacher, gives the story of an elderly couple who'd been married for a long time.

[9 : 40] They were in their later years. And eventually, as time goes on, the wife suffers from mental illness. It's very, very sad. And it gets to the stage where actually her mental state becomes more like the mental age of a nine or ten year old.

So the husband, religiously, regularly, gets up in the morning early and prepares her meals for the day, prepares her treatments for the day.

He makes her lunch. And in the afternoon, he would play games with her. All afternoon. Silly, childish games. Now when a friend came round and noticed this, she said, you know, you don't have to do this, you know.

You can get help for this. You don't need to be here all day doing this. You don't have to do all of this work. And he says, yes, I know. But I'm the husband.

I'm the husband of my wife. She belongs to me. I'm the husband. And this is what husbands do. I am the God of Abraham.

[10:48] Do you get the sense of it? My people belong to me. And nothing will stop me from being God to them, to my people. Now I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but it's a curious thing, isn't it?

That God talks about people who are actually dead being his people. So Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, they all die, don't they?

In Genesis, before we get here. And yet God says he is their God. Now this is a point that Jesus makes in Mark's Gospel.

You can turn there, you don't need to, but it's in Mark 12, 26 if you want to turn there. And he is having a discussion with the Sadducees about whether the resurrection is real.

And he says to them, as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him saying, I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.

[11:53] He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong. It's great. Mark chapter 12. You see, God's people may end up as lumps of dust and clay when they die.

But God says, you belong to me. I am the husband. And not even death will stop me from being God to you. Because I am your God and I will do all the things that God does for you, there is a resurrection.

It's an unbreakable bond. He is with Moses and his people by way of unbreakable promise. Of commitment. Of covenant. So there is the with the people with promise.

But then secondly, he is with his people in practice. Promise and then practice. Just look at verse 7. Again in Exodus 3. The Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters.

I know their sufferings and I have come down to deliver them. Now again, it helps to know a little bit about the way the Hebrew words work here.

[13:13] Because actually when God says here he knows the sufferings of his people. Sometimes we think, don't we, that's a sort of a data kind of knowledge.

It's like a surveillance sort of knowledge. So he sees the people in Egypt from afar. A distant kind of knowledge. But actually the word used here in verse 7 is the word used for a shared experience.

It is to enter into the very experience of somebody else. It is to say, I know what you're going through and I can mean that.

I really can. He is the God who is with his people in pain. He enters into their sufferings.

Now there are hints of that in this chapter if you look at verse 20 he stretches out his hands to save them. It takes a big effort for God to do that.

[14:19] He isn't distant. He enters into their sufferings. And you know as you look through the Bible it becomes more and more clear that this is the God of the Bible.

The Lord is the one in Isaiah who comes as a suffering servant. Isaiah 50 verse 5 I gave my back to those who strike in my cheeks to those who pull out the beard I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.

Isaiah 53 Surely he's borne our griefs carried our sorrows he was oppressed He was oppressed despised and rejected by men. A man of sorrows acquainted with grief I know your sufferings God says to Moses with his people in practice in suffering I know what you're going through and I can say that with confidence.

So he is with them by promise I am your husband He is with them in practice I know your sufferings but thirdly and lastly God is with his people by name now I couldn't think of a word beginning with P maybe you can come up to me at the end with that He is with his people by name.

Now have a quick look at verse 13 again This is a really key part of the section verse 13 Moses says If the people of Israel ask me what is his name what shall I say to them God says to Moses in verse 14 I am who I am I am who I am Now if you're slightly baffled by that let me assure you that you're not the only one there have been many many pages written on what that actually means I am who I am Now if you look closely at your Bibles I think there is a number 1 isn't there next to verse 14 yeah just at the end of verse 14 there's a tiny number 1 and that is a footnote if you look to the bottom of the page it says I am what I am or I will be what I will be clearly this is not an easy phrase to translate into English is it so I'm not going to give you a categorical answer to that today but

[16:42] I do want to say that I'm pretty convinced at the moment at least that the footnote is more helpful at this point I will be what I will be now let me try and explain why I think that if I can so the

word used for I am in verse 14 is actually the same word he uses in verse 12 just look at that God says but I will be with you now that's the same word I will be so when he says it again in verse 14 I think verse 12 is telling us how we should read it it's in the context of Moses being given this difficult task when the people are in dire straits it's just the sense that I think it makes sense

God would say I will be with you so I think the thrust of verse 14 is look God says to Moses when you get to the Israelites and they want to know my name my name is I will be with you I will be with you I will be what you need me to be in this situation that you're in and then you see what God does is to give Moses a shortened version of that name in verse 15 look there God also says to Moses say this to the people the Lord and at the end this is my name forever now I don't want to be too technical here but the word Lord there that's an English word that represents Yahweh God's name in the Bible and that comes from the same word again in verse 14 and I think they all mean a similar thing or the same thing I will be with you

I will be present with you I will be what I need to be for you in that situation so it isn't I will comfort you or I will help you or I will love you it is I will be there present with you the Lord is a kind of nickname that encapsulates all of that that God will be with his people it's a kind of shortened version now we do that all the time don't we or I do sometimes we give each other nicknames don't we nicknames encapsulate the characteristics of someone that we know in a word or two lanky Tony smiling Susan the Lord the God who is with his people there are lots of Bible passages aren't there you could remember to get you through the day lots of

Bible passages that you could remember to think why can God convince me to do this hard thing lots of things that you could remember when you go to that doctor's appointment or that interview or that difficult conversation that you're putting off but there is one word that God gives us the Lord and that one word will get you through life the Lord what will convince you to remain faithful to trust in him he is the God who is so far from us morally speaking and yet he is so near with his people by promise I am your husband with his people by practice I know how you feel I know your sufferings and by his own name I will be with you the Lord let's pray together