

Exodus 3:1-12

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 June 2015

Preacher: Adam Wilson

[0:00] The story of the book of Exodus is one that we perhaps know all too well, don't we? Whether it's through, sitting through many Exodus sermon series, or whether it's just because your kids repetitively make you watch The Prince of Egypt.

It begins, doesn't it, with the birth of Moses. A boy who providentially is rescued by God from Pharaoh's plan to kill all the sons of Israel.

By rescuing him, being placed in a boat, placed into the river Nile, only to be discovered by Pharaoh's daughter and raised up in the presence of the man who sought to kill him.

And by the time we get to Exodus 3, Moses is now grown up to a man, and he's killed a fellow Egyptian, an Egyptian slave master.

He's fled to the land of Midian, which is in the back end of nowhere, and he's become a simple shepherd who tends the flocks of his father-in-law. And in verse 1 of our passage today, Moses, while wandering the wilderness of Horeb, is confronted by the living God.

[1:10] In such a remarkable way. And he's given a colossal message of salvation. It plays itself out throughout the rest of the book of Exodus, but throughout the rest of history.

And in our time today, that's what we're going to be thinking about. We're going to be thinking about this colossal message, this salvation of God. Next time, we're going to be continuing looking through Exodus 3, thinking about the God of salvation.

But as we walk through our passage today, through our narrative, I want us to just marvel at the salvation of God. Because it genuinely blows away our small, individualistic, me and my personal relationship with Jesus attitude towards salvation.

And it gives us a picture of salvation that genuinely should cause us to gasp. It should genuinely cause you to be comforted. And realign maybe why you think God saved you in the first place.

Why is it that God saves people like you and me? So let's just dive straight into our passage. Under our first heading, first of three, thinking about salvation. And our first heading is, Salvation is Shocking.

[2:27] Salvation is Shocking. Verses 1 to 5 of chapter 3. Now these verses are very familiar. Moses, he's now tending flocks in the wilderness. And out of the corner of his eye, he sees something unusual.

And he does a double take. I'm not from London, so I've done a lot of double takes while I've been on the tube, seeing unusual things. But what's unusual about this, is not that there's a bush burning in a dry, barren, hot desert.

What he does a double take for, is as he looks closer, he saw that although this bush was on fire, it wasn't being consumed. He does a double take because what he's seeing is miraculous.

That he heads closer and moves in. And we know that from verse 2, don't we, that it's God who has appeared to him in the fire, in the midst of this bush. But Moses is unaware of this.

He just sees this remarkable sign until God speaks. God speaks from the bush, calls to Moses, and tells him, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.

[3:41] And that he must take his sandals off, because this is holy ground. And before he has a chance to kind of kick off his flip-flops, he's on the ground, covering his face, trembling with fear.

Trembling with fear before a holy God. Before we carry on, just a quick side point. What is it that makes things holy?

What is it that makes things holy? Is it the function they perform? Is it because this object does holy things? Is it the actions that someone does?

They do holy things. Or is it just arbitrary? This is holy, this isn't, and it's just kind of, there's two lists. What makes you holy? John, the burning bush makes it really clear, isn't it?

That the presence of the living, holy God is what makes things holy. Holy, this is just massive implications.

[4 : 50] The reason that you are holy is because the presence of the living God has made his home in you by his Spirit. He has transformed you from the very ordinary to the very unordinary.

He has taken his residence in you, and we manifest his holiness in our living and actions. That's what's going on with this bush. If we could spend hours talking about this, but God, by being here, has made us holy.

And God, by being there in that story, has made this ordinary bush holy. So he kicks off his sandals and falls to the ground. And there's something right about that, isn't there?

Being confronted by the God of the universe, it is right that he trembles. But why is it that he hides and trembles with fear? What is it?

Because I think this is what makes salvation really shocking. And this is what makes it so shocking. The God, who is above creation, has come down to his creation.

[6 : 02] And therefore his creatures tremble. Because God is so big. We talked about this, didn't we, kids, in the Sunday school. God is so big, and we are so small.

Think about it. It's like a great bear meeting a baby. You know, it's so extreme. It's scary for finite beings like you and me to meet the infinite creator.

But there's something else going on. Although we know intrinsically there's something right about that trembling before a holy God who is so great.

He hides. He hides. Where immediately does your mind go? It's back to Genesis 3, isn't it?

Confronted with God, Adam and Eve, having sinned, hide. And are afraid. They're afraid because they knew they deserve punishment before this holy God.

[7 : 06] They knew that in the same way that Moses knows, confronted with the same God, that it's not just the greatness of God that causes them to tremble, but the pure perfection of God too.

So we tremble before this God, in and of ourselves. Not just because the distance between the creator and the creature is so great, but because he is so perfect, and we are so sinful.

Or as you put it with the kids, he is big and perfect, and we are small and sinful. Our sin and its consequences make it impossible, impossible for us to get to know God on our own.

Now, do you really believe that? Do you tremble at the prospect of coming face to face with this God? Because he is so great, and we are so not.

The only way is that he must come down with a message of how this holy God can save people for himself. If God is going to be known personally, if he's going to be known savingly, he must take the initiative.

[8 : 23] But salvation is shocking, because it comes to people who don't deserve it like us. Like Moses, the great Moses, who did not deserve to hear this message of salvation.

That's important to remember, isn't it? Is God about to save his people because they're better? No. Is he about to save his people because they're less sinful than the Egyptians who have enslaved them?

No. Absolutely not. God saves people. Saves people like you and me, because we belong to him. He saves because we belong to him.

We are his children, his bride, his treasured possession. Yet these are descriptions of you, if you are trusting Christ this morning. Here this morning, we are so small and sinful, and yet God has revealed himself as the God who saves people, because he is great.

Not because we are. And this message of salvation, which is so shocking, is unpacked for us in verses 7 to 9. The message of salvation is outlined, and it is astounding.

[9 : 40] Verse 8, his plan to act in history is to save his people from slavery to Pharaoh, and bring them, verse 8, into a land flowing with milk and honey.

Not slaves, not slaves, but free in a perfect land, unparalleled in their known world. And we all know, don't we, how great salvation is.

But look at what provokes it in verses 7 to 9. It sandwiches this promise of salvation in verse 8. Verse 7, surely I have seen the affliction of my people.

I have heard their cry. And verse 9, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppressed them.

Think. If salvation arises because God cares about his people, the small sinful people that we just talked about, salvation arises because of their cry to him.

[10 : 45] It seems so simple, doesn't it? That the holy God of the entire universe, the infinitely high and great one, in need of nothing, stoops down and even cares for people like you and me.

Doesn't it just make you want to sing with that psalm? What is man that you are mindful of him? Or the son of man that you care for him? God sees, hears, knows the plight of his people, and it moves into action.

God sees your plight, your struggle, and as we cry out to him on our knees, as we corporately confess and need for his help.

God sees. God knows. God cares. And it moves him to action. Joy, it is a universal truth, isn't it?

That no one runs faster than a mum running after their toddler who has just tripped and fallen.

Yeah. And what moves that mum as she sprints across the playground to try and catch them before they graze their knee?

[11 : 49] Well, it's the distress and plight of their children. And God's love for his people, those who belong to him, well, it moves him to action when he sees them struggling.

But, we've got to be really clear here. We've got to be really clear. Because there's something that feels almost a little bit odd, isn't there?

Because we could end up thinking, you know, God, he's busy over here, and then he suddenly sees that his people are in distress over here, and he thinks, I've got to come up with a plan to go and rescue them.

God's plan seems to be failing. You know, the plan A? The plan A with Abraham to go and make for himself a people, a great nation where they'll be blessed?

It seems to be failing, so quick, God have come up with a plan B to go and get these people out of slavery. But look at verses 24 and 25 of Exodus chapter 2.

[12 : 53] Because the same idea of God responding to the pleas and cries of his people come up again. Read with me. They cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God, and he heard their groaning.

But then look what God does. He remembers. And God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them.

What does the Bible mean when it says God remembers? Because it sure is clear that it doesn't mean that he's forgotten. So what does it mean when God remembers?

Well, this is a much richer idea than forgetting and recalling some information. It's the idea that God acts on the promises he's formerly made.

God acts in a way that he is formally promised. God recalls who he is and what he said he'll do, and he acts.

[14 : 00] And that's what we have here with the salvation of his people from Egypt. The salvation of God revealed to Moses is rooted in what he's already promised long, long, long ago.

Israel's exodus from Egypt is God's fulfillment of his promises to Abraham. This is not, we've got to be really clear on this, this is not God initiating plan B.

A new plan never heard of before. Instead, he's simply fulfilling what he's already promised to the great, great, great grandparents of the faith, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

You know, when God hears his people's groans, he remembers his covenant with Abraham and acts to keep his promises. Taking Israel out of, taking Israel out of Egypt was part of this perfect plan all along.

From the beginning, and part of the blessings, promised in that relationship, he's established already with Abraham in Genesis 15. You don't have to turn to it, but I'm going to read it to you.

[15 : 04] Do you remember that great promise with Abraham that God makes? Well, this is part of it. Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourned in a land that is not theirs, and they will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for 400 years.

But, I will bring judgment on the nation they serve. No plan B. This has always been plan A. You know well, don't you?

It didn't have to happen yesterday, but any time a church organises a church picnic, they always need a wet weather plan, don't they? You know, we long to be sat in the sunshine eating tiny sausage rolls and playing frisbee, but every organiser of a church picnic knows we need somewhere to dash quickly.

But the thing is, God has no wet weather plan. God has no plan B. It's just not that way. It's not as though there was plan A with Adam, plan B with Moses, but then his people got put in slavery, so

plan C was getting out of Egypt, and then, you know, what we are on plan J with Jesus. It's not the way it happens. salvation, and in which God's people are free from slavery, not from Pharaoh, but from sin and death, in which he gives not the land of the Canaanites, but a new creation.

[16 : 42] You know, this, this has always been God's plan A, and we see the shadow here. Jesus coming is for us, is part of plan A, and the way that we know that is because we see it here pictured.

If you're anything like me, do you ever feel like God's plan is failing? Do you ever look at your situation and your circumstances, and you go, it doesn't really seem like God's kingdom's advancing. when loved ones die, and things are difficult, and there's real struggle, and that person isn't responding to the gospel, and you go, IBC should have built their new building by now, and we should have filled it.

Do you ever feel like God's plan is failing? Take great comfort in knowing there is no plan B, but every step of the way, God is fulfilling his purpose, exactly as he planned from all eternity.

I just think that's amazing, isn't it? Just always remember, God is 100% on plan, on track with plan A. Jesus has come, conquered sin and death, and is freeing people like you and me who were formerly slaves, and is gathering his church slowly and surely, and he will come back to deliver all that plan A has promised.

And we know that because we see it pictured here in Exodus. Take comfort. Take comfort. There is no plan B.

[18 : 16] Well, that was our second point. And our final point is something, again, that we might know, but we very, very quickly forget. And that is the goal of this salvation.

Look down at verse 12. Verse 12. 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. It's just before we get to that amazing, the huge revelation of God's personal name, I am.

In verse 14, which is what we're going to be spending a lot of next week looking at, we're given this insight into Moses' reservations about taking this message of salvation, both to the Israelites but also to Pharaoh.

And he kind of says, Who am I? Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and take this message of salvation? Or more precisely, who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring out the children of Egypt?

[19 : 24] Who am I to do this great thing? Now, is this Moses being humble? We always have that, don't we? We're given callings by the Lord and we go, Who am I to do this great thing?

Is it really humble? Is it just kind of being the British self-deprecating nature? I don't think it is. I think what we're reading is the response of a man who has wrongly fixed his eyes on himself and his own circumstances rather than looking to the one who's going to be doing the saving.

The one who is going to be accomplishing his plan A. But what's even more amazing is that God's answer is sign.

It's not just I'll do it. But the sign is when everyone is worshipping at the end you will know that he has done it. In other words, he's saying, Moses, look, here's the sign that it's me that's going to be doing it and not you, Moses.

But I'm going to bring the people out and not you. Because they're going to come to this mountain, the mountain that you're stood on, Mount Samui, and they're going to start worshipping.

[20 : 40] And they're not going to be worshipping you, Moses. They're going to be worshipping me. And this is the goal of my salvation. The purpose for which I am saving people.

The goal is that you will be saved. If you're a non-Christian neighbor, as you bump into them on the way home from church today, or they pop over there at the head of the fence this sunny afternoon, or maybe, kids, when you go to school and your friends say, I know you go to church, why is it that God saves people?

What's the purpose in God saving people? What would your answer be? I'm sure we've come up with lots of good answers. So we don't have to go to hell. Maybe so we get to go to heaven.

Maybe so we don't feel guilty anymore. Maybe so we don't have to fear death. Maybe so we can go to a school hall each Sunday morning and hear from God's word.

So all of these are really good answers, but they all serve a much bigger goal. And that is that we might become worshippers. Exodus, chapter 3 and verse 12 makes this point beyond doubt.

[21 : 55] Israel are led out so that they can become worshippers of God. But it's a pattern that keeps going. If you want to flick with me, Exodus 3.18 And they will listen to my voice and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say, Lord, the God of the Hebrews has met with us and now please let us go three days journey into the wilderness.

Why? So that we may sacrifice to the Lord. Or 4.23 Look down again with me. 4.23 And I say to you, let my son go that he might serve me.

Or 5. Chapter 5 verse 1 Thus says the Lord God of Israel, let my people go that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness. Or 5.

Verse 3 5. Verse 3. Thanks. Sorry. And then he said, God of Hebrews has met with us.

Please let us go three days journey in order that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. These are just, it just keeps going and going and going and builds and the message of scripture keeps unfolding and we keep going until we reach the climax in Revelation when God has gathered people from every tribe, tongue and nation and they are all around the throne crying holy, holy, holy.

[23 : 24] The reason that God saves people is that he might have a people that worship and know him. All of history, all of planet A, God coming down to give this salvation that is shocking, is that we might gather on a mountain and declare his glory.

I just want to close with this. Salvation is really incredible because we don't deserve it. God is infinitely great and we are infinitely small.

He is pure and perfect and we are sinful and rebellious. But from the beginning he has always had a plan to save a people, not because they are great but because he is.

And the goal of this, Exodus tells us, verse 12, that they would come to Mount Sinai to worship. And think of the joy in that day, no longer in slavery for 400 years.

Their first day off in 400 years and they gather on the mountain and worship the Lord. The thing is, we're not covered, are we, at Mount Sinai.

[24 : 37] that we're gathered somewhere far greater. Now hear how Hebrews puts it. Hebrews 12, for you have not come for what can be touched.

Here this morning, you have not come to what can be touched. But you, sat here this morning, because of the salvation that God has given, God's plan A, we have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to innumerable angels in festal gatherings, and to the assembly of the firstborn, who are enrolled in heaven, and to the God, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.

That has been God's plan A, from the very beginning. Moved to action by the struggles of his people, and all that we might glory in what he is, and what he has done.

Let's pray.