

Exodus 3:13

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[0 : 0 0] We're on page 56, Exodus 3. Last week we spent our time thinking about the salvation of God.

! The narrative up to verse 12 was thinking about the salvation delivered to Moses by God.! That he himself received, was then to go and proclaim to his people, and then ultimately he was going to go and proclaim it to the self-appointed God of the world, Pharaoh.

A message of deliverance in direct opposition to this Pharaoh. And we thought about how salvation, this message of salvation, it's shocking, because it comes to people who really, really don't deserve it.

People like you and me. We thought about how it's always plan A, it's never plan B. It's never plan B. From the beginning of eternity, God chose a people, and he's been unfolding that plan throughout history.

Even in the darkest moments of history, God has always been on track, 100% with plan A. And that the goal of worship, it wasn't simply that we'd have our sins paid for, that our feeling of guilt would be alleviated, that we'd get to go to heaven.

[1 : 1 3] The goal of salvation is that we might bow the knee and become worshippers of this living God. But this morning, we're taking a turn from just thinking about the salvation of God to thinking about the God of salvation in the remainder of chapter 3.

The reason we're doing that is because that's the turn the narrative takes in verse 13. And Moses asks in verse 13 the logical question about hearing such a plan.

A question that if you were put in Moses' shoes, after hearing this great plan of salvation, you would ask too. Although it may be in different words. Salvation is proclaimed.

And Moses says, Sorry, who are you? Who are you? Or verse 13, to put it in Moses' words, What is your name? Now, what Moses isn't doing is he's not asking for a personal introduction over coffee at the end of church.

He's not going, Oh, hi, I'm Adam. What's your name? Oh, God. Great. Great. Nice to meet you. Now, what he's doing is asking for God's personal credentials.

[2 : 2 1] He's heard of this epic, colossal salvation. And he says, Who are you? What qualifies you to be able to defeat Moses, to defeat Pharaoh?

And deliver your people? And the thing is, if you've never asked that question this morning, then I don't think I did a very good job last week, describing what salvation is like.

Or maybe it's just that you struggle to see the insurmountable task of saving people like you and me. Saving people like us. Because the salvation that God's promised, it is huge.

Saving a bunch of enslaved sufferers, who have been trapped for 400 years, never knowing what a day off felt like. And they're moving them to a free people, in a beautiful, vast land, under the care and protection, of a good, gracious, loving God.

And we described last week, didn't we, that that is just a picture of what comes to us in Christ. Going from people who are enslaved to sin and Satan, trapped by our own deceptive hearts, corrupt, living with the consequences of a broken world.

[3 : 3 5] We move from that to people who are raised, from death to life, to know and worship an eternal God, in perfect perfection, a world remade.

Who could do all of this? Who could deliver on that kind of salvation? The thing is, we ask that question in a much smaller way, every morning when we wake up, don't we?

Is God able to get me through today? Am I actually going to make it? By the end of today, am I still going to be a Christian? You know, the difficulties, day after day, alone, are enough to not just ask, can God deliver eternal salvation, but can he deliver me today?

Today, the task is great, and Moses know the people, people like you and me, are going to want to know, who are you?

Who are you that you can deliver? And God responds with two things, two things that you really need to know, two things you need to know about God, two realities about him, that you need to set and fix your hearts upon, in order to have confidence, that God can deliver on this salvation.

[4 : 50] And that's how we're going to split our time up, today, we're going to look at these two things, and the first thing that you need to know, is his name. Halfway through verse 13, read with me.

And when they asked me, what is his name? What shall I say to them? And 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. He gives a mysterious name, doesn't he? Translated in the Old Testament, with the letters L-O-R-D, in block capitals, it's there in verse 15 as well.

It's the same I am, but now just translated. But it's important, this isn't a title. You know, we see Lord scattered throughout the Bible as a title, an ascription, but it's not the same as saying, you know, he's a shepherd, or a king, or a father.

It's not just a title, this is his name, this is who he is, in and of himself. And names are really important, aren't they? There's nothing like being greeted at the end of the service, by your personal name.

[6 : 05] You know, I've only been here a few weeks, and yet people come up to me, and say, how's it going Adam? That personal, intimate connection, and here, the God of the universe, is revealing his name to his people, close communion with them.

And there's so many things we could say about this name, but firstly, I am is, it's a mysterious name, isn't it? I am, is a mystery. And we can't really grasp the depths of what's going on.

When someone says, you know, my name's Adam, we've got a context for it, and it seems normal.

But just to say, if you asked me, what's your name, and I said, I am, you'd be, sorry, you are what?

But Herman Babink, a hearer of mine, he has this great line, talking about this, and he says, God is that which he calls himself, and he calls himself that which he is.

So, so when the people of Moses, people of Moses, they come and say, who is this God? When you say, yeah, who is God? Well, he just replies, God is.

[7 : 17] Any, any more questions? It just brings silence, doesn't it? Who is God? There is no adjective great enough to ascribe to him, just God is.

We lisp with vocabulary to try and grasp the greatness of God. Even the greatest descriptions you've ever read by your greatest authors of God are pale shadows of who he really is.

Even though we know true things concerning God, he's so far above us, so far beyond us, so far beyond our understanding that he's mysterious to us.

And when confronted by the mystery, the awesomeness of this God, we can fall into some traps. Because I've spoken to a few of you, a few of you are like me, and you're prone to becoming a rationalist.

Confronted with the great mystery of God, you try and explain away God's greatness. You think you can put him in a box, using your terms and your vocabularies and your own categories, and you try and explain him away, bringing him down.

[8 : 28] But then, as a few of you have met, I wouldn't say who, but you've tendencies to become a bit mystic, maybe a bit Welsh mystic.

And you think God is so big, and so unknowable, and so grand that, well, this isn't Paul's temptation at all, but we start to think of what, well, we can think what we want of God.

We can start thinking, yeah, no one can really know, because it's just so big. So we drag God down, and we just let him loose. But that's not the right response.

The third response, and the right response, and the response we see of Moses, is that he becomes a worshipper. John, whether you're prone to rationalism, or mysticism, repent, and humbly come, and sit under what God has revealed of himself, and worship him, as the great I am.

The great mysterious I am. You will never know everything about God. And yet he has revealed something of himself that you can grasp.

[9 : 36] But secondly, God reveals something else about his name. His name reveals that he's unchanging. God is immutable. He's eternally who he is. He reveals his name.

This is a bit geeky, but some of you will be pleased to hear this. It's in the present form of the verb to be. So, you think, why does that matter? Well, it means that God is not, I was who I was. And it means that God is not, I will be who I will be. But it's I am. Eternally present. And this unchanging nature is the ground and source of his faithfulness.

His faithfulness to his creation. We come, and we go, and we fluctuate, and we fade, and change. We have ups and downs, and yet God is the same. Yesterday, today, and forever, because he is eternally present, holding time in the palm of his hand, knowing nothing of the change of seasons affecting him.

I am is unchanging. So when the people cry out, how do we know that you can save us? How do we know that you can deliver? Well then, just look down at verse 17.

[10:55] The reason you can know is because God has promised, and he does not change. How do you know? How do you know that you'll make it through the day?

How do you know that God will come good on his promises to deliver you? Well, God does not change, and he has promised. But this one, I think, is a real kicker.

Something that I don't think about at all, until confronted by passages like this. But I am. God, revealing his name, shows us that he is independent.

Independent. With the kids, I've got everyone to take a big breath. But as that oxygen rushes into your lungs, you are dependent on it.

You are dependent on the laws of physics, water. You're dependent on the breakfast you had this morning. We're dependent in every single way. But two, well, perhaps teenagers, most of all.

[11:58] You know, we long for independence, don't we? Can't wait to get off the shackles of our parents. But here's a harsh reality for you. You will never be independent. As long as you are a creature, you will forever be dependent on him.

But being dependent on the God of the Bible is not a burden. It's a great joy, isn't it? To know that he is good and provides all your needs. For I am alone is independent, depending on nothing else, especially in his creation.

And everything else is dependent on him. This is hard to grasp, but Psalm 50 helps us a little. You can turn there if you want, Psalm 50.

Or you can just listen. Listen to what Psalm 50 says. Starting with verse 7. I am God.

Your God. Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you, that your burnt offerings are continually before me. I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your fold.

[13:07] Why? For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills and all that moves in the field is mine.

If I were hungry, God says, I would not tell you. For the world and its fullness of mine, do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and perform your vows to the Lord, the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you and you shall glorify me.

God needs nothing. Not even the sacrifices he's prescribed his people in the Old Testament. Silly question. Does God get hungry?

Of course not, but even if he did, he wouldn't tell you because everything belongs to him. He owns everything because everything owes their existence to him.

[14:07] That includes Pharaoh who's about to go in opposition against him. God doesn't even need sacrifices. Again, silly question.

Does God drink blood? Of course not. God does not need anything. And verse 21 of Psalm 50 finishes like this.

You thought that I was one like you. But he's not. He needs nothing. Yet we reduce God down and think of him nothing more than someone we're kind of in relationship with.

We think, you know, if I give God something, he'll give something back. We think God needs our help in order to accomplish his purposes. And we're so influenced by the culture surrounding us that we think I scratch your back, you'll scratch mine.

We think God is like a divine vending machine. As long as I put the right money in, I'll get the right thing out. But God does not need anything from you.

[15:20] So, I struggle with this so much that he does not need anything. He's so other. But this is such good news.

Because it leads to a really interesting observation. Moses wants to know who is God to go and fight Pharaoh. And you think the answer would come back, don't worry Moses, I'm bigger than Pharaoh.

Pharaoh. That's how we often pray, isn't it? You know, I've got this problem, and then we pray, but thank you that you're bigger than dot, dot, dot.

But that's not his response. His response is, I am. Because if he said, I'm greater than Pharaoh, that would kind of put God on just a continuum, a spectrum with Pharaoh.

I'm sure many of you remember playing Top Trumps as a kid. Children, maybe you still play with them and have them littered around your living room floor. And you're always hoping, aren't you, that you've got the car that beats the car your friend has.

[16:26] You know, the car that drives the fastest, or the snake that has the most venom. Or the animal that's just a bit bigger and faster. And as great as Top Trumps is, that is not what is going on here.

God is not just the next Top Trump card up from Pharaoh. It's not on a continuum where God has slightly higher stats than Pharaoh. That would constantly leave you worried, wouldn't it?

But what if one day someone plays the next Top Trump card up? What if one day there's a bigger God? What if there's someone greater that can thwart those prayers?

God simply answers, I am. Even Pharaoh, even the game, owns its dependence on me. God is not on a spectrum with Satan.

You don't just have to hope that God is further up the spectrum than Satan. Nothing is too difficult for him. Because nothing compares to him. We see that a little, don't we?

[17:38] When Moses hears from God what Pharaoh's response is going to be. You look down back at our passage, he even says what Pharaoh's response is going to be.

He knows what Pharaoh's response is going to be in the future to what God does because even Pharaoh is dependent on him. later on Romans 9, Paul tells us that even Pharaoh was raised up so that God might display his glory in him.

Everything in this world is dependent on God and displays his glory. And our big problem, it's always good isn't it to hear that line from a 27 year old preacher who has half the life experience of most of you.

But, our big problem, we stumble again and again into thinking that God is like us. we think, do you know what, I'm finding this really hard.

And we think, oh well, God must find things hard too. God finds nothing difficult. We ought to have great thoughts of God's and we so easily allow our thoughts to become small and narrow.

[18:55] He is a great mystery, isn't it? But maybe you're struggling to grasp the concepts. But these are just words that are coming to you and you're finding it difficult to really wrap your head around them. Well, God knows that we might struggle and so he gives us a picture of it as well.

We read about it today and talked about it last week. But it's there in the burning bush. Just think about it. All we've described is displayed for us in the fire of the burning bush.

I am revealed as the God who is mysterious. This mysterious fire in the midst of the bush.

Unchanging fire, perpetually burning and in need of nothing in the midst of the bush yet completely independent of it.

I am God. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God of us this morning is the self-sufficient eternally burning fire who requires nothing to exist.

But the picture of the burning bush is also really comforting. Because where is the fire? fire? Well the fire being in the midst of the bush leads to our second point.

[20:11] Just look down at verse 15 of our passage. 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 the God of Jacob has sent me to you.

this is my name forever and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. Hearing God as I am should just provoke awe and wonder.

But hearing that I am is your God should just bring pure joy. I just think this is the best news.

The picture of the burning bush helps us understand it because the self-burning perpetual eternal fire of God isn't just kind of floating around abstractly but he is in the midst of the bush and the bush picture his people.

God is in the midst of his people. I am is God but I am is your God. In the same breath of telling of his otherness he speaks to his closeness his condescension again we sang with the kids earlier closest than the closest friend.

[21 : 30] And that's what's going on here. He doesn't need us. He doesn't need anything and yet he wants you. He wants to be in the midst of his people.

He longs to be with you. So God stoops down to make it a way to make it possible for us to be with him and for him to be with us.

And we talked about it last time didn't we? That he knows, he sees, he cares about the affliction of his people and he's not watching it on the news abstractly and distantly this independent burning fire no he's with his people experiencing it and knowing and caring and he stretches out his mighty arm to deliver his people.

God is not aloof he is close and this God is your God he's the same he has seen your suffering you know I always think you look around a congregation and there's no one that hasn't had at least some difficulties in the week but yet God has seen it even if we don't show it on our faces and he's seen your sin he's seen that thing that we stumble into again and again he's seen your suffering and he has seen your sin and he cares for you he has heard the prayers of his people and he's acted in history in a way once and for all to deliver us but each day he hears the prayers of his people and tends to them sustaining them caring for them taking them home perhaps you believe in God but more in just kind of an abstract way you don't know God as your God you kind of believe he's out there I urge you to come and bow the knee to him that you might know him as your God because think about the Egyptians is the fact that God is I am good news to them it's terrifying but to know that I am is your God that brings the greatest comfort you know in Exodus we see God mightily displaying his name I am as he stretches out his arm with miraculous plagues sent on Egypt to deliver his people the crossing of the Red Sea but in the same way last week we saw that was just a shadow well it's just a shadow this time isn't it in John's gospel John records for us Jesus drawing on this revelation of his name I am again and again

[24 : 29] I am we see Jesus is the fulfillment of I am God dwelling with his people in the midst of his people Jesus says I am the bread of life I am the light of the world I am the door I am the good shepherd I am the resurrection and the life in the same way I am the way the truth and the life I am the true vine and Jesus summarizes it by saying before Abraham was I am and I am is me Jesus stood walking talking seeing knowing caring is obviously with his people that here he's revealing that he's the God of his people each time making it clearer and clearer and clearer as he is identifying himself with I am the conversations I've had with Muslims where they say Jesus never says he's

God it never comes out of his mouth well the Jews were so clear what Jesus was claiming as he says I am that they sought to stone him for blasphemy make no mistake what Jesus is claiming for them but we shouldn't be surprised should we because the burning bush is a picture of the incarnation I am in the midst of his people but it's not just a picture this is the pre-incarnate Jesus revealing what God will do in the climax of history when he doesn't just appear for a moment in time in a bush but when he truly becomes God with us it's a detail that we skimmed over last week but Moses saw in the bush a being in human form the Bible says the angel of the Lord appeared to him in fires of flame from within the bush but this must be Jesus like no angel would accept worship from Moses let alone command it the angel of the

Lord who is with God and is God revealing himself this could be no other person than the second person of the Trinity Jesus revealing himself as I am coming to rescue his people and this astounding picture what is it makes so much sense of John 18 Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane the soldiers come seeking to arrest Jesus and hand him over to the Jews to have him put on trial and killed and then verse 4 of John 18 Jesus knowing all that would happen to him just like he knows exactly what will happen with Pharaoh and the unfolding of his plan then here he knows again he came forward and he said to them whom do you seek they answered him

Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus said to them I am and they fell to the ground they drew back and fell to the ground they drew back and fell to the ground like Moses did when he saw Jesus in the burning bush simply by revealing that he is the ancient of days I am present in their midst but the thing is I am I am has not come down to stretch out his arm in mighty acts and miracles but by simply and humbly stretching out his arms on a cross not to defeat Pharaoh but to defeat sin and death the infinite God clothed in humanity I am making it possible forever to be God with us what do

you need to know what do you need to know in order to have confidence that God can accomplish his purposes that God really can come good on all he's promised sure what do you need to know that today you'll get through and that he will take you home one day you need to know that I am is God but that

God is I am and he will do whatever it takes to save his people and if you ever doubt it if you ever doubt it just look to Jesus and see the I am in the midst of his people going to such great lengths let me pray as we finish