

# Exodus 3

*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: 04 October 2015

Preacher: Paul Levy

[ 0 : 00 ] And turn to Exodus chapter 3. Exodus chapter 3. I'm hopeful that this morning we are going to learn that God is in this passage. We're going to see a strange sight, a strange conversation and a strange command. First of all a strange sight.

Now it's worth pointing out those of us who are with us week by week you know that we're going through Exodus. The first two chapters of Exodus cover 400 years. 400 years in which the Israelites suffered terribly under slavery. But the rest of the book from chapter 3 to the end of the book counts as one year.

40 years in which the chapters. One year the next 38 chapters. It's a year of liberation as the Israelites are led out of Egypt.

But the description of that year begins not in Egypt but in Midian, where we were two weeks ago. In that place where Moses has gone to escape from Egypt. Do you remember he murdered an Egyptian? He's now being rejected by his people and Pharaoh's got a death warrant out on his life. And as a result he escapes. He goes to Midian. He is offered a place to stay by a man called Ruel who is the same guy as the man called Jethro in chapter 2. And Jethro gives his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage.

[ 1 : 44 ] Now as this chapter begins Moses has been in Midian for 40 years. He is 80 years old at this point. He is 80 years old and he's not even got his commission yet from God.

But any thoughts that Moses has got of being the deliverer of God's people. Any thoughts that he would be the one who will take his people out of slavery are probably they've vanished from Moses' dreams.

He's too old and he's past it. However, unbeknown to Moses things are about to take an extremely surprising turn. And you've got to figure out that this day started like every other day.

It started exactly the same way as it started for the previous 14,000 plus mornings in Midian. So the night before he's probably sleeping out under the desert stars with his flock packed with Mount Horeb over him and he sees no media flash across the sky.

There is no voice from heaven. And as he wakes up in the morning there is no angel tapping him on the shoulder of saying, you better pay attention today Moses. Something really big is going to happen.

[ 2 : 53 ] Now the sun came up the sheep are sheep and Moses started to another day in his wilderness office serving as his father-in-law's assistant.

And then this happens. Verse 1 of chapter 3 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 he 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 and yet it was not consumed. And Moses said I will turn aside to see this great sight why the bush is not burned.

So in Moses' mind it is just another unremarkable morning with all the sheep. And all of a sudden he noticed this bush that is burning. Now normally that wouldn't be worthy of a kind of much thought or consideration.

You've got to figure over the years Moses would have seen a bush or two catch fire. But it would take only a moment or two for that bush to resemble a church.

[ 4 : 01 ] There's a Christmas tree in the church garden. I think tonight children, if you come tonight after the church we will burn the Christmas tree. And you'll see what happens when you burn a Christmas tree. It goes, a couple of seconds and it burns up.

And eventually there's this little stub, isn't there? These little piles of small ring sticks and ash. But this is different here. This is different because the bush hadn't burned out.

And Moses, he just stood there didn't he? Watching and watching, watching and it burns and burns and it burns. And Moses thinks this is bizarre. This is odd.

And so he turns aside from the path that he was on in order to go and investigate further. And once again, and once God sees that he's got Moses' attention, do you see what he does in verse 4?

He says, Moses. Moses. Moses. And he says, here I am. God uses this strange sight, this bizarre sight, to interrupt Moses' normal day.

[ 5 : 07 ] Normal day, a normal beaten path that he was so familiar with. Now let me suggest to you, God is not in the habit of using literal burning bushes to get your attention and my attention. But I do think this, I think we can say God is in the habit of disrupting lives.

He is in the habit of disrupting your life and my life with strange things. And the fact is, he has to, because Moses is like so many of us, he just goes along in ordinary life.

We keep our head down, we do our job, we live our lives. And the truth is, unless something had come along to interrupt his normal routine, he would never have started to seek after God or to search after God.

Moses would never, when the alarm clock rang that morning, have sat up, yawned and stressed, I think I'm going to search for God today. What do you think, sheep? He just never would have done it.

You and I would never do that either. That's what ordinary garden variety life is like. It's all too busy. Too distracted. Too disinclined to have a search for God.

[ 6 : 15 ] And more often than not, something has got to turn us aside because we will never, ever give God the attention that he is to do on our own. Something strange has got to come along, something out of the ordinary, something inexplicable.

In other words, when God comes disrupting our journey from the off the beaten path, there's something that kind of contradicts our view of reality. So what is it bringing a bush?

It is to lift us up to a level of life that contradicts our view of reality as it should be. One comedy that says, it's a paradigm bomb.

I like that expression. It's a paradigm bomb. Moses looks at this thing and thinks, what is this? This is bizarre. It contradicts his view of reality that you have. It's exactly what happens to Moses.

You've got to realise that Moses knew this part of the world. Moses knew the properties of wood and fire. He knew that a bush either burns but he doesn't know a bush that is not consumed.

[ 7 : 21 ] Here is a bush and he's burning and he's not consumed. Here is something that shows him that his understanding of life, well it just doesn't cut it. But there's something more to life. And he had understood, here was something to turn aside.

Let me try and tease out this and apply it. How does God do this? He brings inexplicable trouble into our lives. He brings inexplicable trouble into our lives.

We can't explain it. But it can be a global scale. An earthquake, a natural disaster. Or more often than not, it's something that strikes much closer to home. And we didn't see it coming.

So our job was all secure and suddenly we're out of work. There's bad news from a doctor. There's a phone call to say that someone has died.

And the trouble quickly destroys our view of reality. We thought we were in control of everything. We thought we were competent to run our own lives and we realised suddenly that is not true at all.

[ 8 : 24 ] And your view of reality has to change because of inexplicable trouble. Inexplicable people? Inexplicable people?

Let's say there's a person you know possibly. She's gone through the most horrendous year in terms of her personal circumstances. But this woman has a poise. She's calm.

She has a peace that you cannot fathom or explain it. So you ask her about it and she says well let me tell you I'd be lying if I thought it was easy.

I have really bad bad days but overall I've been able to cope with the strength that the Lord Jesus gives. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

And suddenly your view of reality is crumbling because how that person is able to deal with suffering. You just didn't think about it. Inexplicable events. Inexplicable people.

[ 9 : 24 ] Or inexplicable emptiness in your life. Boris Becker, do you remember him? He's the journeyman coach. He's the youngest Wimbledon champion ever.

He wrote this. I'd won Wimbledon twice before. Once as the youngest player. I was rich beyond my dreams. I had all the material possessions I could want. Money, cars, women, everything. I know this is a cliché. It's the old song of the movie of pop star who committed suicide. They had everything and yet they are so unhappy. I had no inner peace.

Inexplicable emptiness. I'm sorry I'm going to argue that the brilliant bush can take many forms really. But the message behind it is always the same because God is involved.

And it is this. God is the great interferer. Stop. And look. And do not ignore it. And that is true whether you're a Christian this morning or whether you're not a Christian.

[10:23] God gets your attention. And I don't know about you but I need my view of reality constantly reformatted because I easily slip into the routine, into the rut of thinking well actually I've got this Christian life sorted and sushed.

I've got God in the box. I understand how everything works and how God works and that's a very dangerous place to be isn't it? And it's a place actually that God doesn't let us stay in very long. Before God sends into our path a strange sight of a burning bush to get your attention again. A strange sight then is a strange conversation isn't there? Verses 4 to 6 verse 4 But the Lord said to Moses when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see God called him out of the bush and said Moses, Moses and he said here I am then he said the Lord said do not come near take the sandals off your feet for the place where 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!

And you might say that is odd isn't it? That is strange We know the story so well that we don't think it's strange But there's a contradiction isn't there there? Can you see it? In the words that God says to Moses because God's first words to Moses are to address him by name It's a very very powerful thing in the Bible It's a powerful thing in the book of Exodus that the God of the universe knows Moses' name and he addresses him by that We don't know Pharaoh's name But God knows Moses' name Not only that he knows his name but he knows exactly where he was on that day And he knows exactly what Moses would be doing And there's no need for Moses to introduce himself to God Because God already has personal intimate knowledge of Moses as he does of every one of his children And it's worth noticing isn't it that God doesn't just say Moses He doesn't say the name once He says it twice Can you see that?

He repeats it Moses Moses And in the Bible when you repeat a word it signifies magnitude It's like putting it in bold font and underlining it So in Genesis there's a situation where the author of Genesis is describing deep pits But he doesn't say deep pits He says pits pits He just repeats the word to give a sense of size and of magnitude And when you come to a name that principle applies again When it is doubled or repeated it points to an emotional intensity to a deep love So when you repeat a person's name you are saying I am or I am longing to be in relationship with you And that is what God is doing here with Moses Moses Moses And then he says not a step closer He said What?

[13:28] I love you Keep your distance What? Well God explains the reason doesn't he when he says take off your sandals for the place on which you are standing is holy ground It's not holy ground in and of itself There's something special about the earth there but it's holy ground because God the holy one is right there He is present there God's holiness is in essence His goodness It's what sets him apart from everybody else and central to His holiness is God's moral purity His perfection and that explains why God manifests himself here as fire in fact fire dominates the book of Exodus You don't just have fire here when God brings the law fire comes down on Mount Sidon When God leads the

Israelites through a pillar of smoke in the day by night fire at the end of the book of Exodus what is the centre of the tabernacle where God will dwell with His people it is fire Why?

Because God is white hot in His purity and therefore sinners like Moses and sinners like you and sinners like me God is literally too hot to handle Just as a burning building is impossible to enter for rescue workers even in protective gear God is totally unapproachable because of His holiness and it is His holiness that demands that Moses doesn't take a step closer to the burning bush it is His holiness that causes Moses to voluntarily hide his face he's afraid to look on God the one before he thought he could just casually go over and check out suddenly he realises who he is but what began as curiosity in verse 3 turns into a source of fear and reverence as Moses gets a crash course on the doctrine of God on holy etiquette and let me remind all of us that this revelation of

God's holiness is not ancient history it is not history with no relevance to your present life it is every relevance because like

Moses we are unholy I doubt whether you've murdered an Egyptian but you have confessed your sins this morning and you have acknowledged that and in the confessing of our sins we are saying God is holy and I am not and the Bible teaches that every single human being will stand before the throne of God's judgment that is you and that is me and when that day comes unless we are holy we will be condemned to everlasting punishment and that is a very very sobering thought and when people hear that they try and do well normally one of two things they try and do some kind of damage control in one of two ways one is to exaggerate their own holiness and our own goodness so you think well I can just prove I'm a pretty good person I'm nice to people and then maybe God will accept me so we enter into this lifelong project and put in our front of trying to promote ourselves and immediately we meet people we size them up as to whether they are superior or inferior to us and if we can promote ourselves by actually thinking when other people are slightly less holy than I am it makes us feel better for others the damage control isn't about maximising our own holiness but it's about minimising God's holiness so we minimise his standards

God Jesus just wants you to try your best nobody is perfect are they I say my prayers every night and in fact when we do that we try actually to make God of clay not a fire God so do you play with clay and play do isn't it the great thing about clay and play do is you can put it into a model of counter you and I like the model of the hairdresser have you seen that and you put it into the mold and you squeeze down and the hair comes out and you get the scissors and you chop it off that's a good one isn't it and you can make the clay into anything you want I don't know what your favourite is there's the animals isn't there or you can make a tower and play do it absolutely everywhere but you can mold it into whatever you want and clay is the same but children can you imagine if I said let's come around my house this afternoon and do you know what we'll do we'll play with fire wouldn't that be a really nice thing we'll take the fire gun off and you can put your hands in the fire you can jug with the fire wouldn't that be a lovely thing no because you can't play with fire you can't mold your fire we want a

[18:33] God that we can mold into our lives like clay do or clay so people say I need a place that suits me I'm exploring different faith because we've all got to explore and choose isn't it and we think will this faith will this faith affect how I spend my money well I don't want that won't my faith accept who I sleep with can't I sleep with who I want and still have this faith it won't won't this faith will it affect how much I drink and at that point what you're doing when you ask those questions you are looking for a clay God that you can mold into any country a God that will suit your preferences you are not looking for a fire God clay is molded isn't it by the toucher but fire when you touch it you melt that is the God that God is God is fire which means we fit to him he doesn't fit to us and if you want the real God the true

God he is the fire God he is the holy God the God of the Bible who can and I guarantee he will contradict you at times who can and will tell you things that you do not want to hear and in fact if the God you follow never contradicts what you think you are not worshipping the true God you're worshipping an idol I promise you I guarantee you that if you follow the God of the Bible he will contradict you this is the God if we try to approach him on our own in our own minutes you know what he will say to you he will say not a step further because he is holy and we are not and yet and yet that can't be the final word can't it God can't just say Moses keep your distance he's already said Moses Moses how do these two things fit together if God is so holy how can he deal with Moses how can he deal with you and me and the answer to that question is because of a mediator I want you to look at verse 2 and verse 4 of chapter 3 look at verse 2 and the angel of the lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush and he looked and behold the bush was burning and yet it was not consumed and verse 4 and when the lord saw that he turned aside god called to him out of the bush god called to him out of the bush Moses Moses and he said here I am which of the god calls him from the bush follows the angel of the lord who is it exactly well next week when we come back to Exodus chapter 3 Moses asks who should I tell Pharaoh what should I tell Pharaoh your name is you're sending me back to Egypt what's your name and God says I am that is my name I am sent you we've just finished studying John's gospel in house groups and you remember we read one occasion when he was having a discussion with the Pharisees in which the Pharisees were arguing they are the true descendants of Abraham and towards the end of the discussion Jesus says this your father Abraham rejoiced at seeing my day

very important verse he saw it and he was glad and the deuteronomy what are you talking about you're not even 50 years old and you've seen Abraham what are you doing and Jesus answered I tell you the truth before Abraham was I am now I know that is very bad grammar on Jesus part so he was making a point was he Jesus takes the very name of Yahweh of God in Exodus chapter 3 and he plays it to himself and he says before Abraham was I am and he says to the Jews do you want to know who was in the bush in the Midian that day to Moses do you want to know who it was it was me it was me that in some mysterious way this angel of the Lord in the bush was the pre-incarnate

Jesus Christ Jesus Christ existed before he came to earth as the son the eternal son of God as a mediator and that explains how Moses could get anywhere close to the bush and not be consumed and not be toast and not be ash himself it explains how God could be a fully holy God and yet still enter into a relationship with Moses it's because of the mediator and friends the mediator's name is the same today it is Jesus Christ and the New Testament tells us that when Jesus came again in human form when the incarnate the fleshly Jesus came he entered into fire again but that time it was different because that fire was the fire of God's judgment and this time he came as a substitute as a sacrifice to take the fire of judgment so that you would not have to be walked into the fire so that you don't but on the cross

[ 23 : 51 ] God's perfect holiness and God's perfect love come together God demanded payment for anything short of 100% holiness on your part and on mine but God's love demanded that we be saved from the penalty and God's son pays the price hallelujah what a saviour because if you have to pay you do not exist anymore we are punished and condemned and there is no relationship there is no intimacy and so Jesus paid it all all to him I own every last drop he went into the fire of God's wrath and was consumed so that you and I need not be consumed Christianity is far more serious than you ever thought isn't it see what used famous illustration the other Sunday night the family are hiking in the prairies in a dry and arid part of the world and they hear behind them a forest fire and it's coming quickly behind them and it's approaching them and the fire is moving faster than they are moving but instead of running the father takes out a box of matches and he lights a match and he burns a large circle of grass right beside they were and the family stands on the scorched earth and as the fire comes it passes them by unscathed why because fire only passes over somewhere once and God's justice demands that sin be paid for just once not two times not three times just once and this is the amazing thing that if you will trust in the Lord

Jesus Christ that he bore the fire of God's judgment already two thousand years ago hanging on the cross you now can I say you shelter in the circle underneath the cross and there there is no more fire there is no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus the God of the bush the interfering the holy and the loving God invites you and says to you there is nothing to stop us from having the most wonderful relationship of all this morning strange conversation and briefly and lastly a strange command verse 7 to 10 do you remember what we saw two weeks ago God sees God hears God knows God remembers well look at these words again verses 7 to 10 and 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 task masses

I know their suffering and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land to a land to a good and a broad land a land flowing with milk and honey God says I have seen and I have heard and I know and I have come down to rescue my people from something I am going to deliver them from Egypt into a spacious good land oozing with milk and honey now they have milk no honey really it's not a great picture for me growing up but think of the greatest thing that you can imagine it's a picture of joy and you can imagine Moses finally thinking at last God you're going to do something God is going to rescue my people and then God says now Moses you go you go to Pharaoh and you bring my people out of Egypt Moses must have thought no no no no no way Moses comes up with five excuses well see them next week why you shouldn't do it and God's command seems strange to Moses but it doesn't seem strange to God made perfect sense for God there is no contradiction that he will do something in person and he will send someone here to do it Moses God works through means usually maybe always God normally accomplishes his will through the willing obedience of his servants and that's going to be the case with Exodus God is going to rescue his people but he's going to rescue his people through his servant Moses the deliverance of Israel will ultimately be God's work so God says I am the one who is sending you in other words you are going with my backing with my power and with my

authority Moses that is part of the reason why I just showed you this why I showed you the burning bush because this bush shows you something of my nature and of my being and my power that I have power over all nature Moses you've got to understand that bushes do not normally remain uncoursed when on earth but as you're about to see

Moses neither do rivers turn to blood normally and neither do frogs or flies or locusts invade a nation or gnats normally come from the dust nor do hail and darkness normally fall on my command but so that you will know that you have my full backing and the commissioning power of God who is over all creation it is me that is sending you I am like the burning bush I never flicker in my brightness I never flicker in my holiness I never run out of fuel I am totally self-sufficient it is me Moses that is going to rescue the people Moses I will rescue but I will do it through you my servant and that is essentially how God works for the end of Matthew's gospel as God commissioned Moses Jesus issues a commission to every follower of his who is standing there and I would argue every follower since which includes you and me do you see what he says he says all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit teaching them to observe all that [ 29 : 59 ] I have commanded you and behold I am with you always for the end of the age and Jesus says I am going to save people Jesus says to you I am going to rescue people I am going to transform their lives I am going to turn their lives upside down and I am going to do it through you and just as God could have saved his lives through Moses Jesus could have done all his work without us but the triune God father son and holy spirit they work through the means of ordinary broken earthly people like Moses like you and me and I think in Exodus 3 God shows us that in terms of what God works through any old bush will do there is nothing special about the bush it is in the wilderness it is an ordinary bush but it was the one in the bush that made the difference 40 years earlier if I can use the analogy if I can play with the image a little bit

Moses saw himself didn't he as this fine upstanding looking bush who was very impressed with his own foliage thought he had very strong branches and lush green leaves and now 40 years on he is an 80 year old old man who doesn't think he's worth much at all and God says it's it's not the state of the bush that matters it's who's in the bush who goes with you so it's very important for you and I to remember why because some of you tomorrow in the workplace or in school when there is even a sniff of a conversation about Christianity we clam up don't we because we don't think we're smart enough or we don't think we know enough about the Bible we tend to triple brown words and we get very nervous or suddenly the bravest of us go quite shy and so we're hesitant to think could God ever use me there are some of us out there who are so hesitant to pray out loud because we're afraid that we're going to say the wrong thing there are some of us who are hesitant to build relationships in the church because we don't want people to judge us or we don't want people to think bad of us but you see the

God of the bush is the God who says anything I ask you to do I go with you I'm the one who sends you and I'm the one who equips you and I'm the one who empowers you and God says to you you are not the power I am so as you leave this morning let these words go ringing in your mind and in your heart God says as I commission you as I send you which is what the benediction is I am with you always I am with you always and last time I checked always means always I am with you always let's pray Thank you.