

Exodus 3:1-22 // Barefoot at the Burning Bush

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: 15 September 2024

Preacher: Jonathan Middleton

[0 : 00] Let's pray and ask for God's help as we get started. Lord God, as you spoke to Moses at the burning bush, we pray that as we meditate on your word to us this evening, you would speak to each one of us here this evening, that you would address us through the work of your Holy Spirit and that you would be building up your church.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, Carl Sagan was an atheist astronomer, an atheist scientist who lived in the 20th century.

He didn't believe in any gods or any kind of higher being. And he was once asked to comment on a photograph taken from space, a satellite photograph of planet Earth.

And this is what he said. Here we are like mites. Like mites.

Microscopic parasites on a plum. Like mites on a plum. And this plum, the plum is this little planet.

[1 : 18] And it goes around an insignificant local star, the sun. And that star is on the obscure outskirts of an ordinary galaxy, the Milky Way, which contains 400 billion other stars.

And this galaxy is just one of something like 100 billion other galaxies that make up the universe.

So the idea that we are central, that we are the reason there is a universe, is pathetic.

So that's one atheist scientist taking it. Looking at the vastness of the cosmos and the relative insignificance of our little planet.

Who am I? It's a question that we began to explore this morning in our new sermon series, Being Human.

It's a question Moses asks in verse 11 of our passage, Who am I? Carl Sagan's asked, Who am I? His answer, I am like a little mite on a plum.

[2 : 26] A mite on a plum. But there's another question, an even more fundamental question. It's a question that Moses goes on to ask in verse 13 of our passage.

Moses asked God probably the most important question in the whole book of Exodus. Probably the most important question that we can ask, that you and I can ask.

He asked God in verse 13, Who are you? That's what he asks basically. What's your name? Who are you?

God. And that's the question that matters. That's the question that matters for us. You want to know what Christianity is all about. You want to know what you get if you become a Christian.

You know, we sometimes think of it like this. You become a Christian, your sins are forgiven. It's a bit like a get-out-of-jail-free card.

[3 : 27] One day when I die, if I put my trust in Jesus, I will escape judgment. And that is true.

That's part of it. It's crudely put.

But what about the peace we heard of in the testimony earlier? How do you get that? Well, Exodus is the story of rescue, the story of redemption in the Old Testament.

The big picture of what it looks like to be saved by God. So you want to know what you get when you become a Christian. What you get is God himself.

What you get is rescued to be restored to God's presence. That's where the peace comes in. You want to know what God is like? Well, God shows us what he's like in the way that he rescues us.

In rescuing us, he reveals himself to us. And so redemption or rescue, redemption and revelation always go together in the Bible.

[4 : 30] In many ways, this passage this evening gives us the blueprint for God's saving purposes in our lives. Who God is and what God's done for us.

We've got two headings this evening in the handout. There's a bit of overlap in each section. But the first heading, the God who makes himself known. The God who rescues is the God who reveals.

And then secondly, we're going to look at Moses' great commission. The God who saves is the God who sends. So firstly, the God who makes himself known.

Like mites on a plum, God's people are enslaved in Egypt. That's their plight. It's been going on 400 years.

Moses, meanwhile, his life's taken a bit of a downward trajectory. It's going nowhere fast for Moses. Now an old man, 80 years old. And these past 40 years, literally in the middle of nowhere in the Sinai wilderness, tending sheep for his father-in-law, minding his own business.

[5 : 38] But then God shows up. And something catches Moses' eye. Well, on the 13th of June 2006, a photographer from the rather clunkily named Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments in Scotland, RCA HMS for short, was up in the sky over Glasgow near here when a big fire by Kelvin Grove Park caught his attention.

One of the townhouses on Park Circus, being renovated and subdivided into flats, went up to flames. Thankfully, nobody got hurt. St. Silas is just out of view in the picture there.

But these were the days before drone photography. So it was a remarkable coincidence that a photographer in a helicopter happened to be in the area at the time and captured this photograph. And of course, the fire caught his attention. But a bush on fire in the wilderness, in the heat of the desert, wouldn't necessarily be that out of the ordinary.

But the thing that made Moses double-take, the thing that made Moses look again, Moses saw that though the bush was on fire, it didn't burn up.

[6 : 57] The bush is on fire, but the bush isn't burnt. It isn't consumed by the flame. So Moses thought to himself, he thought, I will go over and see this strange sight.

And Moses got, rather God's got Moses' attention now. And he draws Moses to himself. And that may be an odd way to go about it, you might think.

But this is the pattern of what's to come in Exodus, the sign of God's presence. That's how he'll lead his people in the Exodus, with a pillar of smoke and fire.

That's how he'll meet with Moses here again at Mount Sinai later on, with a cloud and thunder and lightning at the mountain. His glory at the end of the book fills the tabernacle in a cloud.

So it's fire and smoke throughout the Exodus. Well, God gets Moses' attention. And we heard something like that in the testimony earlier on.

[8 : 00] And I won't mention his name because this is recorded. But first, God got his attention, drew him to himself, first in his homeland, and then in bringing him here to St. Silas, the sign of a baptism, the Lord's Supper caught his attention, sparked his curiosity.

I'm going to find out what this is all about. He thought to himself, that's the first step. He gets his attention. And Moses is heading over. And then you kind of put yourself in Moses' shoes with sandals, and things get a whole lot stranger.

If you're Moses, you may be wondering what's going on. You may be wondering if this desert heat isn't getting to you. But it turns out the God of the universe is using this flaming bush as some kind of tannoy system, a P-A-A system, verse 4, to summon Moses by name.

And God calls out to him from within the bush, Moses, Moses. And Moses says, here I am. Do not come any closer, God says.

Take off your sandals, for the place in which you're standing is holy ground. So this is extraordinary. Moses, this tiny little mite on a plum, finds himself standing on the holiest place on earth at this moment in time.

[9 : 25] The most holy place on earth. And if you know the beginning of the Bible, back when Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden, driven out from God's presence, the way back barred by a flaming sword, things seemed hopeless.

Things seemed desperate. And at the flaming bush here, God takes the initiative. And God identifies himself, verse 6, not as some abstract, distant deity, but he says, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. And so the holy God, whose very holiness, meant that Adam and Eve could no longer be in his holy presence without being evaporated.

His very holiness means that none of us, sinners that we are, can approach him apart from Christ. What's so amazing here is that the holy God appears to Moses and beckons him over, summons him.

The holy God allows, even invites Moses to approach him directly. And that doesn't mean that there isn't a gulf to be bridged. Moses still has to take the sandals from his feet.

[10:48] He stands on holy ground, hides his face. The Lord appears in glory. You know, the most extraordinary thing about this burning bush is not that the bush is burning and isn't consumed, but that Moses isn't consumed.

That Moses comes into the presence of a holy God, glorious, holy presence of God, without himself being instantly frazzled. So this is big.

And God appears to Moses in verses 1 to 6, and then in verses 7 to 10, God speaks to Moses. And what we have here in these verses, in verses 7 to 10, in many ways, is the most basic biblical paradigm for God's saving purposes.

These verses 7 to 10 give us a picture, give us the Old Testament picture of what it means to be rescued by God. So you want to know what it means to get, what you get when you become a Christian.

You want to know what it means, what kind of God this is. You want to be paying attention to these verses. The Lord said, I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt.

[12:05] I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. I know their suffering. God sees his people's misery.

God hears his people's cries. God knows his people's sufferings. And this is the same God addressing Moses who cares about you here this evening, who knows what it is you're going through.

Whatever it is you're going through, knows this big thing that you're having to face perhaps, who sees your struggles and anxieties and difficulties, who gets your fears and concerns about the future.

A God, verse 8, who comes down and does what it takes. God says to Moses, I have come down to rescue my people.

Rescues them from the hand of Egyptian slavery. Rescues them to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

[13:14] In other words, a God who brings his people home, a God who brings his people peace, a God who brings his people to the promised land. And that's the pattern. And that's the pattern.

That's what it means to be rescued by the God who reveals himself. And it's a pattern that, of course, finds its fulfillment ultimately and most fully in the Lord Jesus, who left his heavenly throne above to come down and to appear in flesh and blood to rescue us from slavery, to sin, to rescue us to the promised land of a new creation.

And he returns to make all things right. It's the same pattern. It's the same pattern we've already seen in Exodus. God comes down to save his people from oppression.

And Moses is about to find out that the God who saves is also the God who sends. Verse 10. So now, go.

I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt. So that leads on to our second main heading, Moses' Great Commission.

[14:32] Now, I never got to meet a man called Sam Larinsky. He'd have been 72 years old this Friday had he been alive. But a lady from our previous church, Anna, had been brought up in a Christian home but rebelled against her faith as a teenager.

At some point in the 1970s, she went down to London to see the band The Eagles at Wembley. And the friend that she was staying with happened to be staying at a squat in Maida Vale with a bunch of young people.

And Anna was shocked to discover that at this squat, they were all on drugs of one kind or another, mainly heroin. And it was there that she met this guy Sam, a heroin user enslaved by his addiction to this drug.

And she'd heard his friends say that he basically didn't have long to live, months at most. A desperate, hopeless situation, humanly speaking.

And even though that Anna was far away from God at this point, she felt compelled to confront Sam. She felt convicted to confront him about his addiction and even to share Scripture with him.

[15:58] And at first, his heart was hardened to the Gospel. Eventually, he did become a Christian. And by the way, it's a crazy story, way too long to relate tonight.

But on one occasion, they were in a pub together and this one particular song came blaring through the jukebox. The lyrics go like this, it's no secret what God can do. What he's done for others, he can do for you.

Well, God addressed Moses through the burning bush. It seemed to Sam in that moment that the living God was addressing him there and then in this Camden pub through a blaring jukebox. And he freaked out and he ran out of the pub and ran out of the door and just one of the steps in his journey towards faith. But God saw Sam.

God knew his problems. He knew his addictions. God appeared to Sam eventually through his word. And God rescued Sam from his slavery to sin and his addiction to drugs.

[17:02] And then God sent Sam to reach others for Christ. And Anna would later reflect that although the Lord used me to help Sam, he used Sam to bring me back to himself.

And much later on, Sam was sent to be a pastor in a small church in Dumfries along with Anna, of course. He got married. Well, that's the pattern. Revelation, rescue, sending.

And back in Egypt, it's basically the same pattern, isn't it? The God who rescues, who reveals himself to us, reveals himself in rescuing us.

in rescuing us. And the God who saves, sends. So God says that he has seen their suffering, he's going to rescue them, he's going to bring them to the promised land, and that he is therefore going to send Moses to Pharaoh to bring them out.

At which Moses responds, you what? This is literally the worst idea I can think of, Moses' thing. And he says, who am I?

[18:11] Who am I? A mite on a plum. And actually, he's not asking who am I in the kind of existential sense that we're thinking about this morning.

But notice, it's an entirely appropriate question for Moses to ask, given the massiveness of the task in hand. An entirely appropriate response.

A shepherd to confront the leader of the world's biggest superpower. a shepherd. Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?

Who am I? Answer, God says, in effect, who you are doesn't really matter.

It isn't so important. Who I am is what's important, verse 12. He says, I will be with you. See, the Exodus doesn't depend on the competence of Moses, but on the presence of God.

[19:20] God doesn't need Moses. Moses needs God. And again, this is absolutely typical of God's saving purposes. God uses human weaknesses to demonstrate his divine power.

God uses people like Sam Larinsky. God uses unlikely, sinful, flawed people like you and me. And God is able to accomplish his work through those he saves, whatever are flaws and weaknesses. So it really doesn't matter who am I. And if it's not Moses who matters, but God who matters, then the really crucial question is who is God.

And so that's what God, what Moses asks God in verse 13, who are you? If I go to the Israelites and say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me what's his name, then what shall I tell them?

And when Moses asks God for his name, he's really asking who are you? Tell me who I am dealing with here, God. And Moses wanted to know the name of the Lord who called him first by name.

[20:36] If we're going to put our trust in God, then we want to be sure that we can trust him. We want to be sure that we can trust God's plan for our lives, God's timings, God's agenda, and it's something we need to be clear about too.

If you're going to get in a car with somebody, go on a journey someplace, you want to be sure that you can trust him. It wouldn't be wise to get into a car with somebody you didn't know. If verses 7 to 10 give us the blueprint of what being rescued by God looks like, then in verse 14 and the verses that follow are given the definitive answer of the Old Testament about the revelation of who God is, God's very being and character.

God says to Moses, I am who I am. And this is what you're to say to the Israelites, I am has sent me to you.

Moses asks God, who are you? God says, I am who I am. now we could spend our time thinking about we could start a new sermon series thinking about all that we might infer from the name meaning i am who i am a god whose self-existence is determined by himself the unchangeable the incomparable the immortal god but god doesn't dwell here and spelling out the name meaning instead god fleshes out the meaning of who he is by saying what he's going to do in verses 16 and

following and again it's revelation who god is and rescue what god's gonna do and they go hand in hand and there's a past there's a present and there's a future here so look with me at the past verse 16 god has made himself known before go assemble the elders of israel and say to them the lord i am or yahweh that's um in in your bibles when you see the the lord with small capitals about seven and a half thousand times in your old testament that is um translation of i am that is the lord's covenant name yahweh go assemble the elders of israel and say to them yahweh the god of your fathers the god of abram the god of isaac the god of jacob has sent me to you well this is the third time that god identifies himself in this way verses 6 15 and 16 so we need to be paying attention to that why does he do so well i i want us to jump to genesis chapter 15 and uh we'll see why so genesis chapter 15 page 16 in your bibles and verse 13 400 years before the events of exodus 400 years before the events in our chapter god said to abram know for certain that for 400 years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and ill-treated there but i will punish the nation they serve as slaves and afterwards they will come out with great possessions so at the end of those 400 years here at the beginning of exodus god is about to do this big thing god's about to do the thing he promised to do 400 years before what does this tell us it tells us that god is the faithful god who keeps his promises always does exactly what he says he's gonna do what else does it tell us it tells us that this god is in no hurry but he knows exactly what he's doing and he has his reasons and we're not always privy to them of course if you're here this evening and you're confused about god's timings in your life know this god is not in a rush but he knows exactly what he's doing and moses needed to trust that the people of israel needed to trust that and we too need to trust and know that god is faithful god keeps his promises that's the past the present god restates in verse 16 second half of verse 16 he restates that he sees their present condition i have watched over you and i've seen what has been done to you in egypt again god sees god knows their situation your situation your circumstances he's intimately acquainted in your affairs god's on it i'm not going to dwell on that we've covered it in the last part the future thirdly god reiterates god reiterates his ancient promise to bring his people to a new land verse 17 i have promised to bring you up out of your misery and into the promised land rescued from slavery rescued to a new and better future and moses is going to have to trust him and take him at his word trust that the elders verse 18 will listen to him trust verse 19 that even though fear is heart is hard and not going to listen to him it's going to happen just as god says it's going to happen because god is going to do it god's going to be with you moses he will perform saving wonders and for us here we are like mites on a plum and the plum is this little planet and it goes around this local star the sun and the star is on the obscure outskirts of the milky way which contains 400 billion other stars and this galaxy is just one of something like 100 billion other galaxies that make up the universe and yet the god who made all this a self-existent one who is the reason why this universe exists at all sees us sees you hears your cries appears through the lord jesus christ and makes himself known to us and brings us into relationship through christ and rescues us therefore pathetic though we may be and then sends us to reach others around us that's what christianity is about that's what you get when you become a christian you get god this god who rescues who reveals and who sends who gives us purpose the god who states that he is i am who i am so let's pray to him amen heavenly father we thank you that you are a god the great i am who has seen us in the helplessness of our situations who has left your throne and come down to us and rescued us for your purposes to the lord jesus christ so we pray that you would be with us by your holy spirit and embolden us to go wherever you send us in jesus name amen