



Our Holy God

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Exodus 3:1-9

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***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 came to Horeb, the mountain of God. **2** 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, yet it was not consumed. **3** And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." **4** When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." **5** Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." **6** 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 to look at God.*

***7** Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, **8** and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. **9** And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.*

*(Pastor Prays)*

God has been gracious these past 15 years to sustain not just Connie and me, but to sustain his church. I am so thankful to serve and to preach to people who have an expectation of hearing a sermon from the Bible that is saturated with the gospel. You expect that it will be filled with grace and that it will go quickly from a text to the life and death and resurrection of Jesus and the grace that saves us. If that's the case, it's certainly not time for us to take our foot off the gas or to take our faith lightly. We've been doing it for 15 years together. We keep pushing away from an entertainment-driven experience. We're at a time of national, moral decrepitude and degradation, and we have to put down the things that don't make us strong and pick up the battle of solid theology, biblical depth, and spirit-driven lives. With that in mind, today we will go to one of the most theological texts in the entire Old Testament. In fact, originally when I plotted Exodus out for the year, I thought I would take Chapter 3 on one Sunday, but then I looked at it again. When it came time to preach it, I had to divide it up. I probably could have divided it again. In Exodus Chapter 3, God reveals himself to a man who is far away from home and far away from God. Now I know that the Book of Exodus is about Moses and is written by Moses. But when you read it, what you find out is that God is the main character. In chapter 3, God appears to the aging Moses in a burning bush. I don't know who said it, but it has been said that God tests his weapons before he uses them, and that would be true with Moses. Moses is on the run. He has been running for 40 years. He is out of place in this passage. He is in need of direction, just like some of you. And just like God did with Moses, God comes to meet you where you are and then changes you so he can use you. And he does all of that for his own glory. So here's what we learn when we look at this passage. We learned when we look at Moses that...

### **You Are Never Too Far for God to Reach**

Do you know somebody who's not here, who is wayward from God? Don't ever quit praying for them. No one is ever too far for God to reach. Each Sunday, I will typically go to the passage, read it, and then make some application. So, let me just tell you what happened with this sermon. This is our 15-year celebration, and I had a 15-point sermon. It kind of was like an anniversary gift to the church. But Connie said not to do that, so I've whittled it down a little bit. I normally will go back and read the passage like a running commentary and then come back

and make some application, but today, I'm just going to make the points as we go, like I used to do. Let's just talk about God. All this is just about God. Here's the first point, number one.

### **He is a searching God**

Do you see it right there in verse one? Look at Moses; what is he doing? He is keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, on the west side of the wilderness, and he came to Horeb. That is Mount Sinai. Years from now, he will get the 10 Commandments on that very spot, but not yet. Think about what he's doing in verse one. Moses has been in the desert for 40 years. When you look back on his life earlier, in chapter 2, 40 years ago, Moses was a prince. He was strong. He would be a ruler, but he kills a man and he ends up in the desert. Now that all that drive is gone, he's 40 years old in the desert. He is working for his father-in-law, of all things. Now, this is not a 20-year-old man; Moses is an 80-year-old man. I started thinking, how old is Jethro? He was decrepit. Moses is 80; he's out there working for his father-in-law, watching his sheep. Moses didn't even have his own investment. He has fallen so far from being an Egyptian. No self-respecting Egyptian would be a shepherd. And although he's raised as an Egyptian Prince, he's out there shepherding. Moses, at this point, is an 80-year-old, forgotten fugitive. He's out in the middle of nowhere, on the backside of the desert. He's out in the middle of nowhere, and God comes looking for him. Moses is not the actor in the story. God is the actor. Moses went out in the desert. He wasn't out there looking for God. God came looking for Moses at a time in his life when he was out of place; he was at the end of his rope, he has nothing, and God came searching.

When you read the gospels, you read where Jesus is teaching, and you see that he clumps them together. The lost sheep and the lost Son were not looking for the master. It's always God searching. Look, if you are a believer in Christ today if you've been saved, the Bible teaches us that you love God because he first loved you. He's a searching God. That's what we find out in verse one. What else do we find out? Here's a second point, number two.

### **He is a pulling God**

The old Puritans would say he is a wooing God. Let me show you where I get that verse two. I want you to look at the strange things that God does in verses 2 and 3. Moses has been in the

desert for 40 years. He feels like he has seen everything at this point. Now, God will show himself in a small bush before he shows himself in a big thing. God will show himself in something small before he shows himself in something big. Let's read it. The Angel of the Lord, which is another way of saying the Lord himself, they're interchangeable. <sup>2</sup>*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, yet it was not consumed.* <sup>3</sup>*And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned."* That's not so interesting. If you've been in the desert, it just sometimes happened, a desert wildfire. You've seen something on fire before. That is not what's so interesting. But you see it twice in verses 2 and 3: he looked and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. So Moses scratches his head and says, I'm going to turn aside and see this great site. Why is the bush not burning up?

You know when Christmas is over and the Christmas tree is out of the house and you put it sometimes out on the curb, but if you are a little bit of a redneck, you're taking it out in the backyard, and you're waiting for a good day when you can put a match to that dried up Christmas tree and watch it just burn in a blaze of glory for a little while. And then it's gone. So Moses sees that this is not like a burning Christmas tree. He looks over there, and this bush is burning in a blaze of glory, but it's not burning out. What's going on over there? So Moses says, I am going to turn aside and see why this bush is not burning up.

And then, what does the Lord do? The Lord gets his attention and pulls him in. You see, Moses wasn't out there looking for God. God gives him something to pull him in. At the very best, Moses is coasting through life. At the very worst, he's living off of his father-in-law. He's been 40 years out there, and he's doing the very minimum; he's coasting through. Or maybe, worst than that, he's running. Look, brothers and sisters, God has so many compassionate and irresistible ways to pull you to himself, big things and small. Things you wouldn't think of that God uses to get your attention. All creation is at his beck and call. And he uses it to pull you to Christ. He's a searching God and a pulling God. And if I were going to use all the 15 points, there are so many things to see here. I'm just going to sneak some of them in here real quick. When you read verses two and three, you see that in the Old Testament, there is a reminder that he is a purifying God. He purifies that which he burns up. When you see that he has caused this to happen, you're reminded that he is a powerful God. When you pray, remember who you're

asking. You're asking God, the master of all creation, to intervene. He's a powerful God. When you when you read verses two and three, you're reminded that he's a glorious God. That brightness of God receives the attention. He's a glorious God. When you look at this bush burning, you find out he is an eternal God. His glory never ends. It burns and burns, and there's something else. When you look at this bush burning, you see that he is a self-sustaining God. He burns his own fuel, and it will never go out. Let's get to the next point, number three.

### **He is a calling God**

In verse 4, he's a calling God. <sup>4</sup> *When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."* Go and read Romans 8. God calls people. When you hear the gospel and the spirit of God moves in your heart, what is that? It is God calling you. When your heart is moved to see the beauty of Christ and his life and death and resurrection, and for you to trust that that will save you, that is God calling you. God called him out of the bush, Moses, Moses. And he said, here I am. Let's talk about that for a little bit. There are a couple of things I want you to notice. Notice the urgency. There is a sense of urgency. Those of you who know the Bible remember in Genesis Chapter 22 when Abraham is commanded to sacrifice his son. He goes through the whole process; he puts Isaac on the altar, and the text says Abraham has a knife in his hand, and he raises his hand up to come down and plunge it into his son, and God calls with urgency, Abraham. Abraham! That's sort of the feel of this right here. Listen, Moses is God's chosen instrument that he's going to use, but Moses had to change. God will not use Moses like he was. There are some of you in this room right here that God would use so greatly. But like Moses, you need a fundamental change. Something's going to have to happen in your life for you to hear God's calling to you. I don't know who said it or where I got this quote, but it's been said that great people are prepared for great deeds by a great change at the hands of a great God. And just like God called Moses, he calls you.

What is God calling you for? For those of you here who are not in Christ, it is the call of God in your life to put your faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in the Lordship of Christ. Some of you would say, I've done that. I would say God calls you to surrender your heart to take what you've confessed seriously. Let me give you something else to notice about God in verse 4. He is not just a calling God.

## **He is a loving God**

Let us not stray from the fact that he is our loving God. God loves us in Christ. God and his love are not this sappy, sentimental, squishy love. The love of God is real, changing, and sustaining. The love of God is that which holds you up. Don't run past it here in verse 4. When you see, *"Moses, Moses!"* That is not just a cry of urgency. That is a cry of endearment. That is a cry of God calling with affection. Those of you that read the Bible, think all of the times that God has called people audibly. When God called to Samuel, Samuel becomes a great change agent. Samuel answered, like Moses, here I am. Or remember David and his son Absalom. He was such a traitor. And when Absalom is killed, remember David weeping and him saying, Absalom, Absalom. Or think about the Lord Jesus hanging on the cross, and his prayer is, my God, my God.

Think about Saul, who would persecute the church and then wrote most of the New Testament. When God came to him, the Lord said, Saul. Saul. Look, when God calls you, he calls out to you, not as a taskmaster. He's not calling you to some terrible slavery. This is God calling as a father searching for a wayward child. And in Christ, he has provided a way home. But he's not just a calling God. Let's just keep pressing this issue here. Here's the fifth point, number five.

## **He is a sanctifying God**

Remember we talked about His Holiness in verses two and three with the burning bush. So, just bring that forward here. What does the text say in verse 5? It's interesting. God has used the burning bush to attract Moses. He is there now, and the Lord says to him, do not come near. That's interesting to me that he used the burning bush to bring him near, and when he gets to a certain point, the Lord says don't come any further. Why does he tell him that? Because he is standing on holy ground. Now, there's been a whole lot over the years done with this little phrase right here in verse 5. <sup>5</sup> *Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."*

I've known preachers to do all kinds of things with this verse. I knew a guy that would preach this passage, and a lot of times when he would preach in church, standing up there, he would take off his socks and shoes and walk around barefoot. Like nobody wants to see your big

hammer toes, man, put your shoes back on. That is not what this passage is talking about. It's a weird thing to do, distracting away from the path of what is going on here. The Lord says don't come any closer; you are standing on holy ground. But just a few minutes ago, this is where the sheep and the goats have traveled. It's terrible ground, but now the presence of God has transformed it into holy ground. This is the very first time we see the word holy in Exodus. Here, for the very first time, we find out that this God is not some capricious God. God is holy. God is teaching Moses that this is something extraordinary, that he is separate and distinct. That's what we mean when we use the word holy. So, when you think of worship, think through what to do on a Sunday morning. We come together, and we say that the presence of God is here because the body has assembled. The congregation ought to be praising God. When we sing praise to God, there is a sense that God is calling us and speaking from his word. And we are called to listen and respond.

Moses is going to respond. If you want to give a theology of worship, you probably could do it from right there. I think there's more to it, though, than that. There will come a time in Moses' life when he has spent so much time with God that his face is glowing, and the people ask him to put a veil over his face. How would that be for your own identity complex? Hey, can you cover your face? They do it to Moses because he is so wrought with the holiness of God. There's something else interesting here in what God says to Moses. God says, the ground on which you're standing is holy ground. Are standing on holy ground. Keep that you're standing on holy ground. Now reach all the way back to Genesis chapter 3, after the fall, when God is giving the curse, he says to Adam and Eve, cursed is the ground because of you. The ground is cursed. And now we come forward to Exodus chapter 3, and God says the ground is holy. Now, take that to salvation. We are born with a sinful nature. We are condemned by God. We are cursed like the ground is in Genesis chapter 3, but when God comes to visit us, and he calls you, he opens your eyes to see the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, and you trust that what happens is that the curse becomes holy. You are sanctified. This is a New Testament truth. This is what the blood of Jesus does. The blood of Jesus sanctifies. No matter how polluted you might be, no matter what you've done, don't let that be the excuse you miss God moving in your life. God takes what is condemned and cursed, and in Christ, he makes it holy. Jesus has made it so that you are a new creation. Don't you love 2 Corinthians 5:17? *Therefore, if anyone*

*is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* Isn't it good that he is a sanctifying God? There's more here. Let me give you a sixth point, number six.

### **He is an unchanging God**

*<sup>6</sup>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 to look at God.* God identifies himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of your fathers. God lets Moses know he is the same God that he heard about when his mom was nursing him, and singing those songs to him, and telling him about God before he went off to the Egyptians. I know you don't know who I am, but that's who I am. What you have here is known as the immutability of God. He does not change. God is teaching Moses that there is a long line of evidence, reaching all the way back to creation, that makes it clear that he is the same God he's always been.

It's not something new. So, how do we apply that here? You look at our church, and you look at the history of Christianity; the legacy of our great God is that he is moving, redeeming, and meeting the needs of his people. You need a God that has a history instead of some of the strange things that we hear about today. Look, I know we must continue to be creative in the way we reach people. We have to continue to find new ways to reach people for Christ. God has positioned this campus in a great location to reach people. We ought to be as innovative as possible in reaching people. But God has not changed, and neither has his message. The message that says God is holy, and man is a sinner in need of a savior. That savior is given to us by God the Father in his son Jesus. Jesus lived as a man perfectly; he died on the cross to take away the wrath and judgment of God. God victoriously raised him from the dead, and any sinner that trusts in Christ will be saved. He's an unchanging God. Let me give you the seventh point, number seven.

### **He is an inspiring God**

That's what I'd get out of verse six. *<sup>6</sup>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 to look at God.* Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God. And let me just say that is the right response. He is trembling before God, like Daniel and Ezekiel did. Think about how it



opens up when John has a vision of the resurrected, exalted Christ. He falls on his face. Listen, our nation doesn't fear God. For so long, the church has preached a therapeutic Jesus. Jesus that is soft as a kitten and just as harmless. But the Bible teaches that he is the lion of the tribe of Judah. We here at Hickory Grove believe in the perseverance of the Saints. There are some things that we evangelicals believe in. We believe in the word of God; we believe in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We believe in the gospel that saves. The old Nazarenes used to believe that you could lose your salvation. They said that our God is a God to be feared, worshipped, and obeyed. However, let's not forget I'll make this number eight.

### **He is a compassionate God**

Don't leave that out. Last week we talked about how God heard, and God remembered. God saw, and God knew. Here's the compassion in verse 7. *<sup>7</sup> Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings. And then in verse 9, <sup>9</sup> And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.* It is good to know that he knows. The psalmist says he knows that we are dust; he knows that, so he gives us Christ. The gospel is tied up in the full humanity of Jesus, who lived in our place. The gospel reflects the compassion of God. I'll close with this: number nine.

### **He is a saving God**

Verse 8 is a beautiful verse. Verse 8 tells us that he is a saving God. Look at all the language there in verse 8. *I have come down.* Don't you like that? *<sup>8</sup> and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.* The old preachers will say he was condescending, but that is a bad interpretation. If you say somebody is condescending, they're treating you like they are bigger than you. But when God comes down, that's grace right there. And notice when God saves, he saves us from something. *<sup>8</sup> and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians.* He saves us out of something, and he saves us to something. What are you saved to? *And to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.* And then there are six tribes there, and God says, I'm

gonna get all rid of all of them. What do we learn there? God saves us out of slavery, and saves us to the promised land, a peaceful land, a fruitful land, an abundant land. The way God rescued Israel is the way he rescued us. What does Paul say in Colossians 1:13-14? <sup>13</sup>*He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,* <sup>14</sup>*in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.* Our God is a God who saves, and he does so through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It's you, turning from your sin and by faith believing Christ did that for you. Look, among the many things that this story teaches, you are never too far that God can't reach you.

*(Pastor prays)*