

Exodus 3:7-12

I. Exodus 3:7a — Then the LORD said...

What the LORD is about to *say* and *do* comes *after* what the Lord has just revealed to Moses about *who He is*. The first and most foundational lesson that *fallen creatures* must learn and then keep on learning about God is that He is holy. He is separate from us, and set apart from us, and unlike us, and other than us, and this for two reasons – because He is not a creature like we are (He is uncreated), and because unlike us He is utterly pure (He is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all). Both because we are impure sinners *and* just because we are creatures, the holiness of God means that His unveiled presence is, and will always be to us, as a consuming fire. And yet this is not the sign of God’s “meanness,” but of His incomprehensible majesty, and splendor, and greatness. We will never, for all eternity, be able to see God as He is, in His pure, unveiled essence. Even in heaven, the vision of the God who is holy must be “accommodated” and “fitted” for those who are creatures – and still we may be compelled to cover and hide our faces. But once again, rather than being a disappointment to us, this should cause us to truly understand, maybe for the first time, the infinite preciousness, and worth of Jesus Christ who is “the radiance of the glory of God, and the exact imprint of His nature” (Heb. 1:3); the one who can say, “Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9; cf. Col. 1:19). It’s in the face of Jesus Christ that we will most truly and most fully behold the holy God for all eternity.

What the church needs today if we would have true worship, and true adoration, and true thanksgiving, and true joy, is *not more* emphasis on God’s “love,” but rather a renewed and right understanding of God’s holiness. It’s only in light of His holiness that God’s love can ever be rightly understood. It’s only in the light of His holiness that we can ever truly ascribe to God *His* rightful place of absolute preeminence in the Church. It’s only a renewed understanding of God’s holiness that will ever bring *true* revival (and not just the appearance of revival) to the Church. We need God to give us at Living Word Bible Church a constant, growing *awareness* of the fire of His holiness.

II. Exodus 3:7 — 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...”

These are tender, and compassionate, and beautiful words – full of love and pity. “I have *surely* seen the affliction of my people.” The Hebrew literally says: “*Seeing*, I have *seen*.” No matter what Israel may have ever thought, and no matter what it may have *felt* like for the past several hundred years, God had never been blind to Israel’s plight. To the contrary, God’s point seems to be this: “I have been *carefully* watching... I have been paying *very close* attention...” (cf. Stuart)

“Seeing, I have **seen** the affliction of my people... and their cry I have **heard**...” In the Hebrew God begins by saying, “I have surely seen...” and ends with the words “I have heard.” God is at *great pains* to *emphasize* the fact that He has not for one moment ever been blind or deaf to the sufferings of His people. It’s not just that for the last four hundred years God has never laid aside His *purpose*, or forgotten His *promises*, or been *unaware*. The point is that in all the last four hundred years, God has never stopped *caring*.

The *holy God* who speaks to Moses from the *burning bush* goes on to say this: “I *know* their sufferings.” The point here isn’t head knowledge, but an intimate acquaintance. I wonder if we could almost paraphrase: “Moses, I *know* their sufferings. It’s as if all along I have been carrying those sufferings Myself.” The sufferings of God’s people, even in the Old Testament, were always a sharing in the sufferings of Christ. And so in all those long years of Israel’s sufferings, God did “know” – and He cared. He was more intimately acquainted with Israel’s sufferings than they could ever begin to comprehend.

But when God’s people are in the middle of those times of suffering without any apparent answers or end in sight, do we *believe* this? Or are we tempted to think that if God isn’t *doing* anything, He must not care – or at least He must not care *enough*? That can be a terrible tension and struggle for us. But as God’s children, in the midst of every kind of trial and suffering we have to cling by faith to the words God has spoken: I have surely seen... I have heard... and I *know*.

But why, really, are these words so comforting? They’re comforting because this *same* God who sees, and hears, and knows, is also the God who is powerful to rescue, and deliver, and turn our weeping into songs of gladness. On the one hand, this is the cause of the tension – Why doesn’t God do it now? On the other hand, this is the source of our comfort – because the God who *cares* for me *today*, is the God who will *deliver me and who will fill my heart with songs of gladness one day*. Here in Exodus, after long centuries of suffering, that day is finally *here*. And so God continues in verse eight:

III. Exodus 3:8a — “and I have come down”

The holy God who is a consuming fire has come down! The point isn’t that God used to be far away and now He’s near. This is just a human way of saying that God will now intervene, bringing salvation to His people and judgment upon His enemies. The Psalmist cried out:

- ✓ Psalm 144:5–8 — *Bow your heavens*, O LORD, and *come down*! Touch the mountains so that they smoke! Flash forth the lightning and scatter them; send out your arrows and rout them! Stretch out your hand from on high; rescue me and deliver me from the many waters.

In another place, the Psalmist celebrates:

- ✓ Psalm 18:7, 8-9, 16-17 — The earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry... He *bowed the heavens* and *came down*; thick darkness was under his feet. He rode on a cherub and flew; he came swiftly on the wings of the wind... He sent from on high, he took me; he drew me out of many waters. He rescued me from my strong enemy and from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me.

And the prophet Micah writes:

- ✓ Micah 1:3–4 (cf. Isaiah 31:4-5) — Behold, the LORD is coming *out of his place*, and will *come down* and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains will melt under

him, and the valleys will split open, like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place.

Here in Exodus, God says: “I have surely seen... I have heard... I know...”, and now He says, “I have come down...” Oh what thrilling, wonderful, beautiful, joyous words! We should remember that we live today in the age between the two great “comings down” of God. In Jesus, God Himself came down out of heaven and brought us His salvation. Jesus said:

- ✓ John 6:51 — I am the living bread that *came down from heaven*. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

And now we wait for the day when God will come down out of heaven again and bring our salvation to its completion. The Apostle Paul writes:

- ✓ 1 Thessalonians 4:16 — For the Lord himself will *descend from heaven* with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

God has come down, and He will again come down! But even during the times *before*, and now *in between*, God *still* intervenes at times in decisive and wonderful ways for the sake of His suffering people. We see this over and over again throughout the Scriptures, and over and over again throughout church history – God coming down. We see it here in Exodus chapter three. God says to Moses:

IV. Exodus 3:8 — “I have come down to deliver [my people] 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.”

So this is it, the day that God foretold to Abraham all the way back in Genesis 15 – it’s finally come. And the awesome *goodness* of God is now front and center. He will bring Israel up to a “good land... a land flowing with milk and honey.” And He will bring Israel up to a “broad land... to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.” God is not only good, He’s lavish in His goodness – because He’s God! We’re meant to be reminded here of Genesis chapter two:

- ✓ Genesis 2:8–12 — And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden... and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food... A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden.

A land flowing with milk and honey is a land rich in natural vegetation – so a land that can sustain grazing flocks of milking goats and also fruit trees and vines that provide sweet nectar’s and honey’s. (cf. Durham; DOTTE, vol. 1, p. 916) I think of the time when the twelve spies came to the Valley of Eshcol, cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and then carried it on a pole between two men. (Num. 13:23) An Egyptian story from before the time of Moses

describes the land of Canaan like this: “It was a good land. Figs were in it, and grapes. It had more wine than water. Plentiful was its honey [nectar], abundant its olives. Every (kind of) fruit [was] on its trees.” (Stern; quoted in Hamilton) We read in Deuteronomy:

- ✓ Deuteronomy 8:7–9 — For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey [nectar], a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper.
- ✓ Deuteronomy 32:13–14 — [God] made [Israel] ride on the high places of the land, and he ate the produce of the field, and he suckled him with honey [nectar] out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock. Curds from the herd, and milk from the flock, with fat of lambs, rams of Bashan and goats, with the very finest of the wheat— and you drank foaming wine made from the blood of the grape.

See how lavish, and abundant, and rich, and overwhelming is the goodness of God! A land flowing with milk and honey; a land broad, and roomy, and spacious. A land patterned after the Garden of Eden, just a small picture of the New Earth where we will all one day dwell for all eternity.

OK, so we’re set to go right? When will God start? And why is God bothering to tell Moses what *He* is about to do? Verse nine begins:

V. Exodus 3:9a — “And now, behold...”

That sure sounds promising! Surely, *now*, behold(!), *God* will go and *do* what He’s just said He’s going to do – deliver His people.

VI. Exodus 3:9 — “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.”

Now didn’t God just say that? Yes, He did – in verse seven! It’s as though God is starting over, emphasizing once again that He has *heard* the cry of His people and *seen* their afflictions, and that He *cares* for His people. When God made this point in verse seven, He went on to say: “***And I have come down*** to deliver [my people] out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land...” So this time, will God follow up with something like this, “And now, **I will go** and deliver my people out of the hand of the Egyptians and **I will bring them up** out of that land”?

VII. Exodus 3:10 — “Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”

The holy God who is a consuming fire has opened up the heavens and come down to save His people. But wait. Before He’s done any saving whatsoever, He comes to the failure, the exile and outcast, the lowly shepherd pasturing another man’s flocks out in no man’s land, and He says to

him: “Come, I will send *you* to Pharaoh that *you* may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”

In the Hebrew, there are two imperatives here – two words of command. We could translate like this: “*Come*, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. *Bring* my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt!” (cf. NLT; NCV; Currid; Durham) It seems preposterous, but this is how God almost always chooses to work. (cf. Hamilton) The holy God who is a consuming fire works out *His* plans and purposes through frail, and weak, and inadequate, and even sinful human beings. *God* would use *us* – He would use *you* and *me*. The God who bows the heavens and comes down would use Moses, the failure and the outcast. Now once we’ve accepted this preposterous truth, then we can move on to see that God hasn’t dropped this on Moses out of thin air.

All along in these verses, God has been laying the foundation for Moses’ call. Verse ten, all by itself, would have been completely overwhelming, and even terrifying. But verse ten only comes *after* verses 2-9. Before God ever called Moses to the task at hand, He had already provided Him with all the assurance he needed. Moses, I am the holy God, a consuming fire. (2-6) I am the God who has surely seen, and heard, and who is intimately acquainted with all the sufferings of my people. (7, 9) I am the God who has come down now to deliver my people, and to lavish upon them my goodness in a spacious land flowing with milk and honey. (8) *This* is the God that I am. *So* now I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt. (10) What happens when we hear only the last verse? Paralyzing fear. But what happens when we hear the last verse in light of the God who has just revealed Himself in verses 2-9? Well, now everything changes. Now even the most “impossible” and unlikely thing becomes the most obvious thing in the world.

VIII. Exodus 3:11 — But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

Did Moses not hear anything that God just said? Has he tuned everything out up until only the last verse? God prefaced His commission to Moses by devoting six times the amount of space to a revelation of His own character, and power, and purpose – and that doesn’t even include the revelation of God’s holiness in verses 2-6.

We are so self-focused, and so self-absorbed that even when God shows up in a burning bush and speaks to us about Himself with audible words, we don’t see Him, and we don’t hear Him. Moses was no doubt thinking about the last time he tried to deliver just one Israelite from an Egyptian. All he could think of was the failure, the rejection, the running for his life, and now his insignificant status as a shepherd keeping another man’s flock. And this *self*-focus was so powerful that it blinded Moses to the God who was right there in front of him, telling Moses all about *Himself*. It seems that of all Moses has seen and heard in verses 2-9, only verse nine has registered. And so naturally Moses is filled with misgivings and fear. “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

IX. Exodus 3:12a — He said, “But I will be with you...”

This isn't new information. It's been the point of God's words *all along*: “**I** will be *with you*.” This isn't just some sentimental, mushy gushy, feel good kind of promise. In fact, on one level, it's very unsettling. Moses has protested his own inadequacy (“Who am I”), and God has not disagreed. Moses *is* unfit for the job. Moses *is* inadequate. And God as much as says so in His answer to Moses. God does not say to Moses, “Moses, you underestimate yourself.” He doesn't even promise him, “But Moses, I will make you fit and adequate.” (cf. Motyer) Instead, He repeats what has been the only point all along, “But **I** will be *with you*.” The God who has revealed Himself in verses 2-9 is the God who will be with the unfit and inadequate Moses.

Who am **I**? Moses asks. And God responds by turning Moses' question on its head, “But **I** will be with you.” The point is not who you are (it never has been), but who I am – the holy God who cares deeply for His people and who has come down now to deliver them and to lavish upon them My goodness. Is that not enough? Is that not all you need to know?

X. Exodus 3:12 — “...and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

Notice that the sign will happen only *after* Moses steps out in faith. And yet the sign is still designed to produce faith even *before* it comes to pass. God doesn't say, “And this shall be the sign for you, that your mission will be successful.” He says, “And this shall be the sign for you, that **I** have sent you.” If Moses will truly understand *who* it is that has sent him, then everything else becomes irrelevant.

And so the sign is this: “**When** you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God **on this mountain**.” In verse one, Moses called “this mountain,” the “mountain **of God**.” It's on this mountain that God reveals **Himself** to Moses, and now we learn that it's also on this mountain that God will one day reveal **Himself** to the entire nation of Israel so that they might serve and worship Him. Moses, this shall be the sign for you, that **I** have sent you: **when** you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on **this mountain** – the mountain **of God** – the mountain where I reveal **Myself**.

Conclusion

Here is a mystery. The holy God who is a consuming fire works out His plans and purposes through frail, weak, inadequate, and even sinful human beings. **God** would use **us** – He would use **you** and **me**. The God who bows the heavens and comes down chose to *use* Moses, the failure and the outcast. Now we may or may not be called to any mission that's out of the ordinary. But even the ordinary can be overwhelming – especially if we realize the things that God has purposed to accomplish even in the ordinary callings of life. So God *calls us* through His Word. God reveals that He would *use us* through His Word.

The problem is that we can be so *self*-focused, and so *self*-absorbed that even were God to show up in a burning bush and speak to us about Himself with audible words, we might not truly hear.

Our *self*-focus can be so powerful that it blinds us, as it blinded Moses, to the God who is right there in front of us, revealing Himself to us. In our self-absorbed unbelief, we may ask for signs like Gideon's fleece, and sometimes God is gracious to give them. But the "sign" that God most delights to give to each one of us is really just the revelation of *who He is*, and then the simple promise of *His* presence with us. We may believe that God is with us, but if we haven't truly seen who God is, and what He's like, it won't make much difference in the end, will it? Do you know who God is? Are you believing what God has revealed about Himself? Does *He* turn for you even the most impossible and unlikely thing into the most obvious thing in the world? May each one of us know the joy of being called and used by this God – whether it's where we are now, or somewhere we've not yet ever dreamed of going. I guess the ultimate question is this: "How big, and how wonderful, and how good, and how powerful, and how glorious is the **GOD** that you serve?"