

Let us pray.

*“Father, give us light that we might see clearly the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, the eternal Word, the Light of Men, who shines in our darkness, whom the darkness has not overcome, by whom You spoke light into being on the first day of the original creation week. This Sabbath evening we pray for the fresh ministry among us of the Light of the World, by whose resurrection life and immortality were brought to light and a new creation begun. Send us the Spirit of Your Son that, by His illuminating work in our sin-darkened minds, we might see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ from the pages of Holy Scripture and give You all the praise and the renewed surrender of our lives. These things we pray in Christ’s name, Amen.”*

This evening we have come to Exodus, chapter 3. This is one of those foundational passages in the Bible that anchors so much of the subsequent unfolding of God’s self revelation in core truths. It is a chapter focused resolutely on God Himself, and for that reason, it is a passage the importance of which I cannot exaggerate. If you want to know God, this is a critically important place to focus your attention. If you face uncertainties and doubts, if you wonder if you can really trust God, this is a key passage that will answer your questions. If you are not a Christian, this is one place where God Himself tells you both what He does and who He is. He shows Himself to you and invites you into a relationship with Himself.

Let me make a few introductory remarks before we dive into the passage itself. In verse 14 we have the revelation of the divine name, the meaning of which is profound. It emphasizes God’s transcendence, His otherness. Yet one of the unavoidable facts of this and the next chapter is that this transcendent God of infinity and eternity stoops down in accommodation to reveal Himself to limited, finite, weak men and women. He acts on their behalf to rescue them. He bears patiently with Moses when Moses talks back to God and even begins to demur over God’s call in his life.

The first thing to see about God in this passage is that He is simultaneously high and lifted up and near, accessible and available. He is wholly other, yet wonderfully close at hand. He stands enthroned above the circle of the earth. The nations are as a drop in the bucket to Him. Yet He comes all the way down to talk to sinful, puny men and women by His Word. Calvin said that “as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to ‘lisp’ in speaking to us.” (Calvin, *Institutes Book I. XIII. I*, 121, McNeil, ed.) God comes to us and speaks. It is like an adult babbling baby talk to an infant. It is accommodated to their capacity. It is a mark of God’s love and grace towards us that He stoops down from infinite glory to reach to us, since otherwise we could know nothing of Him.

Now let’s take a look at our passage tonight. Moses, you may recall, is now around forty years of age. He has fled from Egypt, having killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew. Coming to the wilderness of Sinai, he met and married one of Jethro’s daughters, called Zipporah. There the mighty prince of Egypt is reduced to tending flocks at the back side of the desert, and it really looks as though Moses was content to live out his life there. He thought he was called to lead Israel from Egyptian slavery, but when he took matters into his own hands, things went horribly wrong.

And so we join Moses in verse 1, tending his father-in law’s flock at the back of the desert where he comes to Horeb, usually called Sinai, and designated here “the mountain of God.” As he draws near the mountain, he saw a burning bush that was not being consumed by the flames, and he turned aside to investigate. What follows is a record of Moses’ commissioning. He is being called and sent by God to be the earthly savior by whom Israel would now, at long last, be rescued from slavery.

What we need to see is the way God reveals Himself to Moses. The way He does this is designed to reassure and enable Moses to go and to act on God’s behalf. Who God shows Himself to be changes Moses forever. And that, really, is my prayer for us all as we study this remarkable chapter. I pray that we would see more of God, and that God’s self disclosure to us would change us forever.

Specifically God shows Moses what He does, and then who He is. Suppose you were asked for a large personal loan. Before you gave anyone the money, you

would want to know them first, right? You would be foolish to simply give away your resources to anyone. You'd want there to be some relationship established first. You'd want there to be some understanding of their character. You'd want to be sure you could trust them.

God is about to send Moses back to the very place from which he has fled on a task at which he feels he has already failed to a people who have already rejected him in a country where he is an outlaw. The only thing that can really propel radical obedience like this is a depth awareness of the God-ness of God, His glory and His grace. I need to know God. I need to know what He does and what He is like and who He is so that I can be certain that there will be no circumstance into which He might lead me that is beyond His sovereign control and providence.

And so God shows Himself to Moses. And tonight I want us to think about what we learn of **what God does** here and then next week we'll come back and look at **who God is**.

There are at least three things we learn about God's actions and commitments in this passage. First, ***God remembers His covenant promises***. Secondly, ***God hears His covenant people***. And thirdly, ***God acts in covenant love and power***.

That **God remembers His covenant promises** is everywhere in this chapter, isn't it? In fact, the whole episode is anticipated in the final verses of chapter 2, "Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged *them*."

Verse 24, "God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and with Jacob." Then later on it is the faithfulness of God to His covenant promise that is being emphasized in verses 6 with the repetition of the covenant formula- "Moreover," He said, 'I *am* the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'" The same formula is repeated in verse 15 and verse 16. God has not forgotten His commitments to the fathers.

God comes to Moses proclaiming Himself to be *that* God: the God who remembers His ancient promises. *Pharaoh* had forgotten Joseph and the history of Israel in Egypt. Perhaps Israel had forgotten God during their many long years of suffering. Certainly many would have wondered if God had forgotten them. But *God* does not forget. He always remembers His gracious promises. He has not forsaken His covenant love. He is faithful in His grace and never lets go of His word.

Friends, the promises of God are an anchor for faith. Too often we measure the faithfulness of God by our circumstances, and our faith ebbs and flows with the tide of our emotional state or our economic welfare or the stability and happiness of our family life. These are the waves, but the promises of the covenant are the solid rock. Do not be blown and tossed by the sometimes cruel waves of circumstance. Plant your feet on the solid rock of the promises of God. Rest there. There is security for faith only there. God never forgets His promises. Anyone who stands on them will never be forgotten either.

Then we see that God not only *remembers His promises* to us, but, secondly *He hears our cries* to Him. Again that is a point made in 2:23-24, “the children of Israel *groaned* because of the bondage, and they *cried out*; and *their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So God heard their groaning.*”

Chapter 3:7 makes the same point, “And the LORD said: “I have surely seen the oppression of My people who *are* in Egypt, and *have heard their cry because of their taskmasters*, for I know their sorrows.” And again in verse 9: “Now therefore, *behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me*, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.”

God keeps His promises and hears our cries. Aren't those precious promises? He never forgets His covenant, and never neglects to love His people and be gracious to them, to be their God and Father, to save them, to work out all things together for their good, to guide them, and to provide for them.

Brothers and sisters, if it is important for you to know in these days, despite your circumstances, that God always remains faithful to His word to you, is it not

equally important and precious to remember that the God who keeps His promises never neglects to hear you cries?

It is, when you think about it, especially in the light of what we will see about God's name and nature from this chapter next week, a thing of *wonder* that *God* should listen to *you or me at all*. We take prayer so much for granted, don't we? It is so much a part of life. It is so mundane and familiar. Dull even.

But consider what we are really doing. Consider the assumptions that underpin the activity of prayer. Sinful, finite, miniscule, puny little people like ourselves, pour out our everyday requests and petitions and the everywhere-present, almighty, infinite, glorious, unspeakably holy God *listens to us*. *He* listens to *us*! Beloved, that is *staggering*. That *God* should hear the groans of His children! That He is attentive to *our* tears. That He listens when *we* pray.

If we grasped that fact more clearly than we do, I suspect we would not consider the duty of prayer so burdensome or nearly so dull. I rather suspect that we would not neglect it so routinely or devalue its place in our lives so quickly. It is, when you think of it, extraordinarily arrogant of me not to pray because I am so busy. The presumption there is that prayer is a chore adding to the list of chores I need to get done today, and since I feel competent and sufficient and adequate for the day's challenges as it is, prayer is really an unnecessary, peripheral thing that can be left aside without any real impact on my life. Can you see how colossally arrogant and prideful that way of thinking is? I say this to my own shame. The busier I get, the more urgently I need prayer. The more there is on my plate, the more I need God's help. I can't get too busy to pray. I can only get too proud. It is, ultimately pride, friends, that kills prayer and allows it to be crowded out of our lives. If ever we are to restore prayerfulness to a central place in our piety, we must start by repenting of the arrogant and idolatrous love of self that thinks dependence on God is a take it or leave it thing each day.

No, what is taking place when you pray is that the Triune God of glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bends, hears you. You have His ear. You have an audience with Him. He has opened the way for you to go to Him at great cost to Himself. Christ died that sinners might approach Him freely. We trample on the

Cross work of Christ, and we dismiss the staggering privilege of addressing God without fear as His beloved children when we neglect to pray.

And you know there is an important and often overlooked connection between God's faithfulness to His promises and our prayer. The secret of power in prayer lies here. The secret to answered prayer lies here. Let the great Puritan, John Owen, explain. He said that the promises of God are, "the measure of prayer and contain the matter of it. ***What*** God hath promised, ***all*** that He hath promised, ***and nothing else***, are we to pray for; for 'secret things belong unto the LORD our God' alone, but the declaration of His will and grace belongs us to us, ***and is our rule***. Wherefore, **there is nothing that we really do or may stand in need of but God hath promised the supply of it.**" (John Owen, *Book IV*. 275, Banner of Truth)

That is the secret of power in prayer. Pray what God promises to give. God has never failed to answer when His faithfulness to His own promises are at stake. If God neglected to keep His word, He would not be God.

When Christians pray God's promises, they have grounds to look with great expectancy for His mighty acts in response. That is what was happening here in our passage, wasn't it? There was a wonderful coming together of Israel's cries and groans on the one hand and God's covenant promises on the other. When we pray for what God has promised, how can we doubt that God will but act? Therefore, study the promises of the covenant. Find out what God has bound Himself to give. There are no real needs in your Christian life that are not covered by some promise of His. Find His promises and plead them before His throne. Press God to give what He has bound Himself to give. He cannot be other than faithful to His own word. His glory and His honor are at stake. But when we press Him for His promises, He gets great glory and honor by answering.

So here in Exodus 3 the promises and the prayers of God come together. And so naturally enough here, God not only ***remembers His covenant promises*** and ***hears the cries of His covenant people***, but He **acts in His covenant love and power**. He "***comes down***" in verse 8 to deliver Israel. He sends Moses in verse 10. He promises to be with Moses in verse 12. He will stretch out His hand and strike Egypt with all His wonders which He will do in their midst in verse 20.

In short, God will save His people as they cry to Him for deliverance. I know that some of you struggle to be certain that God has forgiven and accepted you. But these verses remind us that no one who ever applied to God for rescue was turned away. No one who ever went to the Lord in need of salvation was left in their sin. God saves all who come to Him through Jesus Christ. He acts. He has acted in His Son to provide for your deliverance.

*The* great act of deliverance for Israel is the Exodus. Throughout the remainder of the Old Testament, the exodus of Israel from slavery becomes a paradigm of God's saving actions on behalf of His people in every age. When Christ came inaugurating the New Covenant, His work is described in terms of a new exodus. As we saw last week, Jesus recapitulated Israel's story in His own actions, but whereas Israel disobeyed and fell, Jesus obeyed and triumphed. In Luke's account of the Transfiguration, in Luke, chapter 9, Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus and speak with Him about His departure. The word in Greek is His exodus. They speak with Jesus about His Exodus. Jesus, by His death and resurrection, accomplishes a new exodus. The great salvation to which the mighty acts of God in the exodus of Israel from Egypt pointed, an exodus promised by God here in Exodus 3, is the salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ. He is both covenant Lord and covenant provision. He is the Great I AM who hears our cries and keep His covenant. And He is the greater than Moses sent by the Father to redeem His chosen people from slavery to sin. And He is the Passover Lamb, slaughtered that the wrath of God might pass over us and we might be led to freedom.

The mighty acts of God's outstretched arm, the God who came down to deliver His people, find their final and true fulfillment in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When He died in the room and stead of sinners, God was acting to rescue you. God has provided already the redemption He has promised to give. You need only cry to Him, therefore, and the deliverance Christ has provided will be yours.

God remembers His covenant promises, He hears His covenant people, and He acts in covenant love.

That is our God. That is what He is like. That is what He does. He loves His word and He loves His covenant and He loves His people. He loves these things so much that He does not shrink back from giving His Son to be faithful to them.

What then will you not do for Him? Moses was being called to service. He was being shown God in His glory and grace as the great basis for confidence as he obeyed that call. What will you fear when such a God is with you? What obedience is too difficult when such a God promises to hear your cries? Of whom will you be afraid when such a God is with you? He has given up His Son for us all, how will He not also along with Him freely give us all thing?

Adore God who, in Christ, is a covenant keeping God. Adore God who hears the cries of the weakest believer. Adore God who acts by His mighty right hand to deliver all who call upon Him.

Amen.