

Ben Libby

Sermon

July 25th, Nineth Sunday after Pentecost

To the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the One who is, who was, and is to come, to Him be glory forever amen. (Rev 1:8 NKJ)

Our sermon text for this Sunday is taken from the 3rd chapter of Exodus, the first 14 verses:

**Now Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, a priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 The Angel of the LORD appeared to him in blazing fire from within a bush. Moses saw that the bush was on fire, but the bush was not burning up. 3 So he said, “I will go over and look at this amazing sight—to find out why the bush is not burning up.” 4 When the LORD saw that Moses had gone over to take a look, God called to him from the middle of the bush and said, “Moses! Moses!” Moses said, “I am here.” 5 The LORD said, “Do not come any closer. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” 6 He then said, “I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. 7 The LORD said, “I have certainly seen the misery of my people in Egypt, and I have heard their cry for help because of their slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. 8 So I have come down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, to 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 Now indeed, the Israelites’ cry for help has come to me. Yes, I have seen how the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 Come now, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” 11 But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” 12 So he said, “I will certainly be with you. This will be the sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will serve God on this mountain.” 13 But Moses said to God, “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 is his name?’ what should I say to them?” 14 So God replied to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” He also said, “You will say this to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.”**

This is the Word of the LORD!!!

Mercy, Grace, and peace are yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of the King...

Have you ever heard the phrase, “It is what it is”? You probably have. I find myself using it quite a bit. If you think about it grammatically, it really is nonsensical. Basically, when someone says, “It is what it is”, they are saying something to the effect: “Things are the way that they are, and I can’t change it”. It’s a way of saying, “well, I may feel a certain way towards the situation, but what are you going to do? There’s nothing to be done.” The phrase is nonsensical shorthand for basically, “O well”.

Whereas that phrase is redundant, God uses a phrase somewhat similar to describe Himself which is anything but. In our text, Moses asks God what name he is to take to the Israelites as to whom sent him. God replies **“I AM WHO I AM.”** If we were to use those identical words to describe ourselves, if I were to say to you “I am who I am”, that basically means that I am not going to change my outlook or attitude for anybody. I am going to be me. But when God uses it, He is saying something much deeper. The words themselves, no matter how you translate them, really

can't begin to describe all that God entails in that answer. Those simple 5 words in our English language provide multiple subjects about God that one would have to write 10,000 words to even explain briefly.

But that fact of the matter is exactly what God says here. HE IS WHO HE IS. What does that mean? So many things. Here we will focus on just 3. He is the One and Only, He is that which He is, and He is the One who is, who was, and who is to come. We pray: LORD, SANCTIFY US BY YOUR TRUTH, YOUR WORD IS TRUTH, AMEN!

"Who are you?" When you hear those words, perhaps you are like me. I for some reason immediately think of the song "Who are you?" by the aptly named band, "The Who". If someone sincerely asked you that question, how would you answer it?

It's a question that's simultaneously easy and difficult to answer. "Who am I?" Well, Ben Libby. That's the easy answer. But unlike my God, my name doesn't really say much about me. Who am I? I am many things. I am a husband and a father, I am a brother and a son, I am a Pastor and an employee, I am a sinner and a saint. I am many things. "Who we all are" can be briefly answered, but to fully answer it means going a bit deeper.

Since it is a great task to answer, "who is God?", let's first start with the person in this text, Moses. **Now Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, a priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.**

Who was Moses? Well let's start simple. He was an Israelite man who was born in Egypt. Now, he was living with his father-in-law Jethro, who also went by the name Reuel. That's who he was.

But there is much more to him than just that. Moses is the man who wrote these words by the Holy Spirit. Whereas our names don't have all that significance to them, the name Moses describes how he got to where he was. The Israelites had been living

in slavery in Egypt for quite some time when Moses was born. The oppression had gotten so bad that the Egyptian Pharaoh commanded that every Israelite baby boy should be thrown into the Nile. When Moses was born, his parents put him in a basket which floated down the Nile. Pharaoh's daughter found him, adopted him, and he was raised in the royal court. She named him "Moses" and word that both in Hebrew and Egyptian means, "Draw out".

So how did that son go from royalty to shepherd? He wanted to deliver his people from their burdens. He took this matter into his own hands once, when he saw an Egyptian beating an Israelite. He struck down and killed the Egyptian. But word got out as to what he did, and he fled as an exile.

In our text, we see him doing something which would foreshadow what he would do later. He was shepherding a flock when he came to Mount Horeb, which would later be called Mount Sinai. It is here where Moses, the one drawn out to lead the people of God, would meet that very same God. **2 The Angel of the LORD appeared to him in blazing fire from within a bush. Moses saw that the bush was on fire, but the bush was not burning up. 3 So he said, "I will go over and look at this amazing sight—to find out why the bush is not burning up."**

Why does the LORD appear to him like this? One of the principles we learn to avoid in seminary when dealing with a text is something called "allegorizing". To allegorize is basically to take the words written, put our own ideas into them, and say that something represents something else that the Bible does not say. It was a practice that was very prevalent before the Reformation.

It's hard not to allegorize the burning bush. Here you have this burning bush. I imagine it was quite the large fire. And yet, **the bush was not consumed (Exo 3:2 NKJ)** I am tempted to say the reason that God appeared like this symbolized His nature. God is often pictured with fire. Fire and brimstone. The pillar of fire and smoke. And yet, the bush isn't consumed. You could say that symbolizes the fact that God's holy

wrath does not dissipate. Or, you could say that represents God's mercy on humanity. His anger burns, yet we are not consumed by it because He is merciful. But all these pictures are not found in the text.

I think what is safe to say is that this a pattern that happens when mortal men meet either God or Angels. It starts out with wonderment. Moses was curious as to why this thing was occurring. So he comes closer, than it's revealed that it is God, and he becomes fearful. But it ends with comfort and promise.

What does the LORD say to him from the unconsumed bush? **"Moses! Moses!" Moses said, "I am here." 5 The LORD said, "Do not come any closer. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." 6 He then said, "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."**

Here, the LORD introduces Himself. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of his fathers. There are many different gods out there. The Egyptians, in whose courts Moses was raised, had something like 1,500 different deities that we know about. But this God who introduces Himself to Moses is different. He is different because he is the One and only God.

Why does He call out Moses' name twice? Well, that is sort of a Semitic traditional way of speaking to someone who you care about. Look at the way Jesus spoke. **"Simon, Simon! Luke 22:31 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem," Matt 23:37 "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Acts 9:4.**

Not only was this the One and Only God, but this was also the God who cared about Israel and Moses. He has him take off his sandals, because now this is holy ground. Sin had cursed the earth, but now God came to it and His holiness changed the nature of it. I always understood the removal of the sandals to be a way of not contaminating this holy ground. Feet are dirty after all. But he also removes the article separating his flesh from it. By removing his shoes,

Moses is now in more intimate contact with the Holy ground, and thus in more intimate contact with the God of his fathers.

**7 The LORD said, "I have certainly seen the misery of my people in Egypt, and I have heard their cry for help because of their slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering."**

The LORD IS different. When men make up "gods", they do so in their own image. Look at the Greek gods. One common theme with every single one of them is that they act like men. That is, sinfully. When we discuss the attributes of the LORD, every one of them declares how much different God is from us. Man is mortal. God is eternal. Man is flawed. God is holy. Man is limited in time and space. God is Omnipresent. Man is weak, both physically and mentally. God is Omnipotent and Omniscient.

The LORD remembered. It might be supposed that the LORD had forgotten His chosen people. The Israelites had been in Egypt for about 400 years at this point. They had gone from welcomed guests to being feared and enslaved. But God was always going to deliver them out of Egypt and deliver them to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God had not forgotten about them. He would deliver them. Now was the time when this deliverance would happen.

**10 Come now, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"**

Moses lived a total of 120 years old. He was 40 when he left Egypt in exile. He was now 80 when God called to him out of the burning bush. There's a famous quote that summarizes the life of Moses: *"Moses spent forty years thinking he was somebody; forty years learning he was nobody; and forty years discovering what God can do with a nobody."*

Moses had gone from thinking it was up to him to deliver his brethren to now thinking he was not worthy

of that very same calling. Truly age and experience humbled him, as it does to us all. But this God was not a fickle god like those of the Egyptians. He was steadfast, and He would strengthen this man who thought himself unworthy.

The fact of the matter was that Moses was correct. Was he worthy of this great calling? No. And neither are we. We are not called to liberate the people of God from physical slavery, rather we are called to liberate children of God from the slavery of sin. We take the gospel out into the world, and lead souls on an exodus out of sin into grace. That's what the great commission is all about.

Moses wasn't worthy. But it didn't matter. Why? Because the LORD would be with him... **12 So he said, "I will certainly be with you. This will be the sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will serve God on this mountain."**

God gives Moses an interesting sign to tell him that He would be with him. It was a sign that would be fulfilled in due time. Once Moses had led the people out of Egypt, they would come to this very same mountain and worship Him. And that's what happened. It was on this very same mountain where God would hand down the 10 commandments.

Yet this self-proclaimed "nobody" was still hesitant. Despite great promises and pronouncements, Moses still waivered. How relatable this is for us today. We have the whole counsel of God at our fingertips. Moses didn't because he had not by inspiration written it yet. We have been shown promises in the Word. Yet we too are so hesitant to believe. Moses was worried about what people would say. That's a fear that we have constantly as well.

**13 But Moses said to God, "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 is his name?' what should I say to them?"**  
**14 So God replied to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He**

**also said, "You will say this to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you."**

You can still see the reluctance. "IF I go..." But God tells us something about Himself. He answered the "who are you question", again, in both a simple and complex way. Our names don't mean a whole lot. His name does.

Have you ever heard someone described as "that person being that person"? The first time I think I heard this was about the former Boston Red Sox outfielder, Manny Ramirez. He was known both for being an incredible hitter as well as for his antics. One time he made a leaping grab into the stands, jumped back up into the stands to high five a fan, then threw the ball back into play to double off the runner. He was as confusing sometimes as he was talented. Always the explanation given to why he did what he did was the phrase, "Well, that's just Manny being Manny".

When asked for a name of God, God replied, "I AM WHO I AM." What are the full implications of that? He is. He is the only God. He is. We are, and then we were. When someone dies, they are referred in the past tense. Never the case with God, He's always "IS". He has no beginning and no end. God is being God here, and that's about as well as He can explain Himself to limited people like us.

And really, that's the whole problem. God is so different from us, there is no common ground where we can meet Him. Let's go back to that burning bush. Fire is a good way to picture God. Certainly, we would be nowhere without fire. Without it, we would die of exposure. But, if you get too close to it, you are going to get burned. The same is true with God. He is holy and we are sinful. Without Him, we would be lost eternally. But, His holiness would destroy us sinners.

When Moses realized what was going on here, what did he first do? **Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.** Why would he hide his face? Because that is the natural reaction of sin and guilt in the presence of the I AM. Like a child in trouble with their father, they look away. So too must we.

Yet, God IS. God is, among many other things, merciful. The fire wasn't consuming. Moses by all accounts should have died then and there. A sinner in the presence of God Almighty. There was an answer to all of this. The answer would say about Himself: **"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Rev 1:8 NKJ)**

Who calls to Moses? **The Angel of the LORD** This term is talking about God, and many people think that when it's used, it is talking about the preincarnate Christ. Jesus is the answer to all these problems Moses was facing. We cannot meet God because of our sinfulness. But God is merciful and meets and comes to us! Jesus was born. THE I AM, THE LORD, come down to earth in human flesh. **For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. (Col 1:19-20 NKJ)**

We need Jesus to be able to come to God and come to a knowledge of Him. We need a go-between so that we are not destroyed. We need a sacrifice. That's why Jesus came to this earth. He is the One who purged your sins on the cross and made you holy. Now, instead of being destroyed, we are saved and able to take part in the spreading the saving message of Christ crucified to others.

When God told Moses, **Yes, I am aware of their suffering**, another way to translate that is **for I know their sorrows. (Exo 3:7 NKJ)** God was not just saying that He was aware of the Israelites pain. He knew it. No one knows better! Why? Well, A. He knows all. But B. He was the One who bore them! **He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; (Isa 53:3-4 NKJ)**

"It is what it is" It's a phrase that says, "O well, there's nothing that can be done." Our sin truly is what it is. There was nothing we could ever do about it. But God could and did! God IS WHO HE IS. He is the only God, and He Himself bore our sins in our place. Now, our sin is no longer, it's in the past tense! THE I AM always is, was, and who will come again in glory.

Moses felt inadequate in the face of this I AM. So do we. But now we don't have to! Jesus is the reason we are not consumed. We now longer have to look away in shame. Our shame was taken away by the blood of the Lamb! **But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:4-6 NKJ)**

God would be with Moses. God is with us! He is with us in Christ, and we are now in Him forever. He came to us, and He will gather us to Him forever. All praise and thanks be to the I AM GOD, for truly, HE IS WHO HE IS! AMEN!!!