

What's In A Name

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[0 : 00] If you can turn back with me then to Exodus chapter 3 and we'll be looking at verses 7 to 15.

Exodus chapter 3 and we'll be looking at verses 7 to 15. I'll maybe just read the verse 7.

The Lord said, I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers and I am concerned about their suffering.

I'll perhaps just recap on, as you know, we've been looking at the early life of Moses from Exodus. And certainly it would seem that the hand of God has been upon this person and this man, Moses.

[1 : 13] Because when he was born, genocide was being unleashed on all the male babies of the Hebrew slaves.

And when Moses was born, as you perhaps most of us probably know this, his mother put him in a basket and into the Nile.

And one day, Pharaoh's daughter came along and saw baby Moses and ended up feeling sorry for him.

And therefore his life was saved. And his mother and sister were around and they suggested to Pharaoh's daughter, why don't we find someone to nurse the baby until he's such an age and then you can have him if you like.

And that's exactly what happened. And Moses was brought up in Pharaoh's household. And one day, Moses had a light bulb moment when he was 40 years of age.

[2 : 40] And he decided to go and observe where his own people, ethnically, his own people, the Israelites who were slaves, he wanted to go and just observe just exactly what their situation was.

And while he was there, he killed one of the taskmasters. And Pharaoh found out all about that.

And Pharaoh, if you like, put a fatwa out for him in order that he might be killed. And Moses fled for his life when he was 40 and ended up in a place called Midian.

And he ended up staying in Midian for 40 years. And his job was tending the flock of his father-in-law because he had married and he had also two children.

And he was tending the flock. That was his day job. And one day when he took the sheep to pasture, he saw this sight of a bush on fire.

[4 : 08] And he wondered what that was. And God, in fact, revealed himself to Moses at this point. And he said to Moses, I am the God of your father.

That is the father of Moses. That's who I am. And I'm also the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And this is where we were the last time we were looking at this passage. And at the end of verse 6 it said, At this Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

And perhaps he wondered, What is this visitation all about? Is it for good? Is it for ill?

Is it a portent of hope? Or what is it? But he didn't have to wait long. Because the Lord said in verse 7, I have indeed seen the misery of my people.

[5 : 24] Now I'm going to circle these verses, verses 7 to 15, with three themes. Reassurance, radical call, and revelation of the name of God.

Reassurance, radical call, and revelation of the name of God. In chapter 2, verse 24, we read this, God heard their groaning, and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them. So the narrator is highlighting, letting us know before the incident at the burning bush, that God was already remembering his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and looking upon the Israelites' situation and was concerned.

At this point, Moses doesn't know that, but we the reader do. And I suppose that in the biblical world of back then, the readers of this, I imagine, would look at this and, in an uncluttered way, see this as

a great reassurance of God.

But, just to speak for myself just now, I'm from a different age, obviously.

[7 : 17] The age that I'm from is post-Renaissance, post-Reformation, post-Enlightenment, post-the age of science, post-modernity, and post-modernism.

And therefore, I don't have the DNA or the kit that reads these verses the way that the people back then would have read them with no clutter in their mind and thinking, this is tremendous to hear these words of God.

When I was at university, I was doing literature for a couple of years and I did an essay on John Milton, the Christian Puritan poet, on his famous work Paradise Lost.

And at the very beginning of that poem, Milton says that what I want to have the ability to do in this great epic poem is to justify the ways of God to man.

And then somebody sent me an essay on how successful was Milton in justifying the ways of God to man.

[8 : 57] suffering. Suffering, my professor of theology once said to me, is the single biggest obstacle to people believing in God.

he said that it's not just the fact of suffering throughout the entire history of the human race, it's both, it's quantity, it's volume, and it's, if you like, if that's the right word, it's so-called quality.

In other words, the horrific nature of so much of it. So, when I read these words, the thoughts that crowd into my head that becomes very, very cluttered are, hold on a wee minute, we've been in this situation for hundreds of years.

have you been hearing them for hundreds of years?

Have you been concerned for hundreds of years? The problem of suffering is a problem not only for those who suffer, but those who suffer and those who are not suffering, especially those looking on at their loved ones' suffering.

[10 : 53] Suffering is one of the great insoluble mysteries. Philosophers usually put it like this, if God is all good, but not all-powerful, then we can understand as we presuppose a universe where God is on the throne, we can understand the suffering.

If God is not all-good, but all-powerful, we can still understand why there's all this suffering, and throughout the entire range of history, it has not been prevented.

And so, the question then is, but there is a problem once we propose that God is both all-good and all-powerful.

and therefore, I'm just sharing this with you at a very personal level to let you see that there are some people whose minds get into clutter when we read.

These are just words, but all of us, I think, have to bear in mind that when we're reading words from the Bible, make sure you're taking in what you're reading.

[12 : 33] Nonetheless, God does bring those statements to bring to Moses not only reassurance, but an awareness of why he has appeared at the burning bush.

and he is telling them that he has seen indeed the misery of my people in Egypt, and I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned.

Where it says in this NIV here, I am concerned, it's actually the Hebrew word, I know about their sufferings. And of course, he's also a God who's omniscient, we're told, infinitely omniscient, which means he's known about them from the first, second of them.

And what is therefore the comfort that God is offering his people in the eye of the storm of suffering?

Well, he's saying to them that he remembers his promise and his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

[14 : 05] He's saying to them that he knows about their suffering and he's going to do something about it. Verse 8, I'm going to come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and I'm going to bring them out of that land into a good land.

In other words, he's bringing the comfort of them, one that he has not forgotten them, in spite of the tremendous tracts of time that they've been experiencing and subjected to the suffering.

He's telling them that he knows and he's concerned and he's telling them that he intends to bring them salvation.

one of the things that enable me to shall we say go on in the face of the shocking suffering in the world and throughout history is Jesus Christ.

That's what enables me as a person and as an individual to keep going not because there's an answer not because there's an answer I again speak personally that satisfies me either intellectually or emotionally that's not what keeps me going I don't believe there is and ever will be I go on because of Jesus Christ why is that because he has been become part of the suffering that all of us are subjected to because he has joined the club because he has donned a human nature and not only that he is the pinnacle and the supreme righteous sufferer and therefore he has entered into our suffering he has entered into solidarity with us but most important of all even although

[16 : 47] I cannot understand it when God becomes involved in the suffering it becomes redemptive concealed in that cross concealed in the horror of the cross was redemption and salvation so maybe I'm a victim of all these post things that I was sharing with you there and maybe it would be good if I could get some of that clutter out of my mind and out of my head and join the club there of the readers in Exodus that brings me to my second theme the radical call of

Moses remember Moses fled because he heard that the Pharaoh was wanting to kill him and yet here we have now in verse 10 so now go says God to Moses I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt here is the great if you like missionary call of the Old Testament to Moses God and we must bear in mind the key elements of this call because they're very instructive I believe for you and for me notice what God says I am sending you you're not sending yourself you're not deciding that

I will be I'll call myself and go to some great world power leader like Pharaoh no no let's notice very very seriously the key elements of this call God says I am sending you and God says I'm sending you to Pharaoh is that not incredible one of the greatest powerful world leaders of that time and God is standing there if you like or Moses is standing there and God is saying to him I'm sending you to the greatest world leader Vladimir Putin and I want you to bring my people out of Egypt and you know God is sending you and I as his people he's sending us to the Pharaohs of our age to the rulers of our age and I'm not just talking about human rulers I'm talking about spiritual rulers in high places he's sending us into an arena that is absolutely way beyond our ability to have any impact on unless God uses us and of course this is what he promises to do and this is what he did with Moses don't call yourself secondly don't dictate to God where you will go and don't dictate to

God when you'll go we need above everything else especially I think in the West maybe that's not true maybe people from other areas of the planet would say differently but from where I stand my perspective my vantage point we need in the West above everything else a visitation from God a burning bush experience we cannot dislodge the powers and the principalities or the forces of evil that keep people bound in a life of oppression and slavery and what about the response of Moses well there's his response in verse 11 but Moses said to

[22 : 13] God who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt I want to say to you if you don't have that sense of your own inability and the fact that you are in no way competent to be used of God for God no way competent on your own strength to do battle with spiritual forces then I would worry very very much for you this is in a sense not so much a question I don't think as rather a protest that's what he's saying who am I Moses I'm a nobody I'm unknown

I've been in Midian for all those years I fled from the possibility of doing work for you and now you're asking me who am I it's a very very healthy attitude for those that feel called of God to ask the question of themselves who am I and without that humility without that self awareness danger lurks ahead God answers his question well he doesn't really he replies to him and he says this to him God said I will be with you and you see if there is one thing that the church of

God needs and it's a missionary activity if you like and it's mission to the world out there in all its strategy in all its plans in all its designs what it needs more than anything else is that God is with them and that God is with us God also says to Moses not only will I be with you but this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you when you have brought the people out of Egypt you will worship God in this mountain God gave that sign and that pledge to

Moses and Moses had to accept that sign that God was giving him because it didn't come like that it didn't come for a long time and you and I are the same even if we are reaching out to people God will give us a sign if you like but that ultimate sign will be that one day we will rejoice in the presence of God that there will be weeping during the night but joy in the morning so the radical call of Moses is something that we can draw guidance and instruction from in terms of making sure that we're not

calling ourselves in terms of making sure that we go where

God wants us to go and not where we want to go and that we're trusting in the presence of God with us to that helps me to move on to the final theme here which is the revelation of God's name and that comes out in verses 13 to 15 when Moses said suppose 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 then what shall I tell them now what does Moses mean here I think that's the first question that we've got to ask here first of all Moses knows that it's the God of his father and the God of his ancestors that has visited him at the burning bush and that's been speaking to him and he also is aware that the

[27 : 40] Israelites know that but as God is asking him to go and to Pharaoh and to rescue his people out of the power of Pharaoh his grip and so on Moses wants to ask this question supposing 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 does Moses mean by that question what is his name perhaps Moses felt there would be a need for the Israelites to know more about God in relation to the great task he had called Moses to perhaps Moses is saying what is there about you that will give the

Israelites assurance that you will deliver them from the grip of the Egyptians after all this is a world power that you're asking me to go to and they've got hundreds of gods perhaps Moses was saying to God what part of your being what aspect of your being are you going to reveal to the Israelites are you going to reveal to me and the answer that Moses gets is mind blowing because it's not another title and in a sense it's not even another name but it's an explanation of the name of God which they already had namely Yahweh which is translated in our English

Bibles as Lord in bold capitals there is God's answer God said to Moses I am who who I am and this is God not so much revealing some kind of attribute of his and it's God not revealing any kind of title of his it's God if you like opening up just a tiny little bit to the mysterious eternal being of God indeed it is both revelatory and hidden I am says God who

I am I'm not the God of past history I'm the God of the present and the God of the eternally present this is what you're to say to the Israelites I am has sent me to you and when I decided to do the I am sayings of Jesus in John's gospel I was very much aware of this great statement and revelation of God that we find here in Exodus chapter 3 and because some people have wondered when Jesus was using those I am sayings is he alluding to his oneness with

God and some people would say yes and some people would say no because in the I am statements like I am the bread of life I am the light of the world I am the resurrection the life the I am is followed by a descriptor a predicate if you like but this is not what is the case here in Exodus 3 I am that I am I am the continuous always existing being and I am not a knit this in fact is an interpretation of the Hebrew word Yahweh and the significance of the

[32 : 46] Hebrew word Yahweh is it has the consonants as well as the vowels of the verb to be in other words to remember Hamlet to be or not to be to exist or not to exist in other words it's the verb of existence and God is saying I continually and eternally exist that that is what I'm going to say to you tell them that I am has sent you as I say it both reveals and it hides the revelation of the name is not something abstract but rooted in God's redemptive activity and when God reveals himself he doesn't only reveal himself verbally but he reveals himself in action and in fact what people can take from that is that

I am that I am and part of that I am that I am is that I'm coming to redeem you the angel said of Jesus call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins there's the revelation of his name tied inextricably to the action of salvation and God makes it known that it is no different God from the God of his ancestors I mentioned about the I am sayings of Jesus that have predicates such as the bread of life the resurrection and the life and so on but there are non predicate I am statements of Jesus as well and the question then is asked once again in those

I am statements that are just without any descriptor or predicate is Jesus linking himself with this great I am revelation of Exodus anyway as we close this evening I simply want to ask is this great I am that I am God of Moses your God have you heard his call and have you heard his promise that he will be with you for time and eternity may it be so and may the Lord bless these thoughts to each one of us for his glory and for our good.