

The Real Deliverer

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[0 : 00] If you would like to follow along, please take your Bibles and open to Exodus 3 and 4 on page 48. And as you do that, I want to say thank you to all the expressions of love and care for me this week.

Following my little back incident last Saturday, I threw my back out and had to lie down in the parking lot out there. Dan came and found me, as he said, not again. Called the ambulance. I would have been able to get up except Dan had his foot on my chest. When the ambulance officers kept giving me the laughing gas, Dan kept taking it and breathing it for himself.

It's a very valuable experience to be immobilized and not be able to get up when you have a sermon to preach on Providence. And it's an even more valuable thing to have someone like Dan, who I rang late Saturday night and through a drug-addled haze told him some of the thoughts that I'd had on the passage and he preached a better sermon than I could have in the first place. So from now on, I'm ringing Dan on Saturday night and that's what's happening. Well now, the Bible is like a huge marquee tent with high posts, high points holding up the rest of the canvas.

[1 : 23] The highest, of course, is when the Son of God came and died and rose again for us. And last year, we looked at the first of those high points, the creation.

And now this year, we are looking at the second high point, which is the Exodus. And what's very important about this is that when we come to this second point, the Exodus, we learn something entirely new about God.

God reveals his name to us and he reveals to us that he is not just creator, but he is saviour, redeemer, deliverer.

And by last year, we looked at how God created the seas and the stars and the Sierras, made us in his image, placed us in a perfect garden.

His purpose was to embrace us in fellowship, to be present with each other, living in harmony with each other in this world, which the Bible calls blessing.

[2 : 22] But in the garden, we rejected him and we set ourselves up as God. And God, the creator, also became the judge. And as sin spread, so did death.

And in the second half of the book of Genesis, God continues to show himself faithful, the faithful creator. Abraham and Sarah have a son. Isaac and Rebecca have two sons.

And Jacob has 12 sons. So that by the time we come to the end of Genesis, the Abraham family reunion now has to cater for 70 people. And that is why the book of Exodus began with all creation references.

Did Dan point that out last week? Very good. Look at chapter 1, verse 7. This is all taken from Genesis 1.

God's the faithful creator.

[3 : 27] But now, now that his people are in slavery in Egypt, God is going to show them he's not just creator. He is the savior.

He is the redeemer. And the way he brings us into fellowship, brings us back and restores blessing to us, is through deliverance, through salvation.

It's very important for us. This, the book of Exodus, is the great Old Testament act of redemption.

And it's a rehearsal of what God is going to do in Jesus Christ, the much greater redemption.

And the reason, one of the reasons we should look at this and study it, is because we see sin and slavery and we see rescue and redemption written in blood and suffering of real lives, showing us how God works.

Even the shape of the book of Exodus shows us what the shape of our salvation is. In chapter 1 of Exodus, where are God's people? They are in Egypt.

[4 : 31] They are under the crushing, degrading burden of slavery. Their children are being killed. They're crying out to God. Where does the book end in chapter 40?

God has gathered his people before him at Mount Sinai. And the last thing that happens in the book is that God's presence comes down onto the tabernacle as he comes to dwell with his people. And all his people worship him and serve him. And that's salvation. See, salvation is rescue from slavery to worship.

Salvation is a liberation. It's freedom from slavery. And that is not the way we think of freedom today, is it? We think of freedom as, I am free from any Lord.

I'm free to do as I want. I'm free to pursue my own path. I'm free to explore my potential and make my own way. But as the passage was read, and as we know from the book of Exodus, when God tells Moses to go to Pharaoh, he doesn't say, let my people go so that they might do what they want.

[5 : 36] Does he? He says, let my people go so that they might worship me. Until we have come to the point of being gripped by the glory of God, we are not free.

Until we have put behind us all those things that we desperately need. Until we are free from those things to worship him.

Until we see in the face of God everything that is beautiful and that we most desire. We are still slaved. It's impossible to be free without worshipping God.

If there's anything that I have to have to make myself happy or complete, I'm a slave. It's only when you come to see the true God and worship him that you and I are truly free.

That's salvation. It's the journey of liberation from slavery to the worship and knowing of the true God. One more thing before we get to chapter 3.

[6 : 42] This is a long introduction. Chapters 1 and 2 cover 400 years. From chapter 3 to the end of the book of Exodus is less than a year.

The obvious question is, why does God allow his people to languish in slavery for 400 years? Why does God go after Egypt like this?

Or why does God kick the Amorites, the people who live in Canaan, out of the land? If you keep your finger in Exodus, I want to just take you back to Genesis 15 for a moment so we can see the big context.

Genesis 15, back on page 11. And we start at verse 13. God has just appeared to Abram as a flaming fire and a burning torch.

And now in verse 13. The Lord said to Abram, Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs.

[7 : 53] They will be slaves there and they will be oppressed for 400 years. But I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve. And afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

For yourself you shall go to your fathers in peace and be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here to Canaan in the fourth generation. For the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.

You see, God is the ruler of all the nations on earth. And Egypt, as well as the nations in Canaan, are on probation.

If the nations in Canaan do not worship the true God, God will punish them. And God is waiting for their sins to be filled up to punish them.

And he puts them on probation for 400 years. For 400 years the Spirit of God is working in Egypt, in the Israelites, and in the people of Canaan. And I think 400 years is an extremely generous probation.

[9 : 04] But when we come to the end of chapter 2 of Exodus, the time is up. And now God is deciding to act. And we come to chapters 3 and 4.

And I need to tell you, this is just a momentous section of the Bible. Awesome, really. And we won't have time to look at much of it in detail unless you're willing to stay around for a few hours.

If you've got a lot of time, I have a lot of time. And I have a chair behind me here, which I can put in the pulpit if you want to stay. But I won't.

I just don't get worried. Don't get nervous. I was just kidding about that. We don't have time to look at it all in detail. You'd be amazed at how commentators deal with Exodus 3 and 4.

Mostly commentators make Moses the hero. And they say about this passage that what we ought to do is we ought to go out and find our own burning bush.

[10:09] And there are two problems with that. One is that you are not Moses and I am not Moses. And this is a unique call by God given to Moses. You don't need to get a group of sheep and go out the other side of the Sinai Desert and find a bush that burns.

You and I already have a commission from Christ. It is to make disciples of all nations. And I think we can be thankful that this is a unique experience, that we don't have to go out and find a burning bush, which I'm going to explain in just a minute, but that it's a unique experience.

And therefore, the things that God reveals about himself remain permanently true. And secondly, this chapter is not really about Moses. It's about God.

God is the real hero. In fact, did you notice as it was read in chapters 3 and 4, it's a conversation between God and Moses, where God the Lord reveals himself as God and Lord and Moses reveals himself to be a complete and absolute whiner.

Just making excuses. I mean, Moses raises five objections. Look at them with me for a moment. In 3.11, Moses said to God, Who am I?

[11:26] 3.13, Who are you? Chapter 4, verse 1, I have no credibility in Egypt. Absolutely right he doesn't.

Chapter 4, verse 10, I don't have the right gifts, God, which is partly your fault, God. You notice that in verse 10, he says, the RSV translation, I've always loved this, Oh my Lord, I am not eloquent either heretofore or since thou hast spoken to thy servant.

Sounds pretty eloquent to me, but what he's saying is, I've never been able to do this ever since I was born or since you started doing these miracles. It's still the same. And then in verse 13, finally and fifthly, he says, Oh my Lord, send, I pray, some other person.

Here I am, send Dan. So Moses is not really the focus. And there are two, we only really have time to look at this, there are two things I think we need to learn about God.

And the first is this, God is the dangerous God who delivers. Now, the first 40 years of Moses' life were lived in the lap of luxury.

[12:42] He had every possible privilege. Do you remember, at the age of 40, he decided to start the Exodus. So he went out and he murdered an Egyptian.

I don't know what his plan was, you know, to work through Egypt one Egyptian at a time. He had the best education money could buy, but he had not learnt lesson one about God, and that is humility.

And so he runs, and he becomes an outlaw, and lives in Midian a long way away, marries a shepherd gal, settles down to an ordinary life, and in chapter 3, verse 1, Moses has now been working as a shepherd for 40 years, which is very good training to lead God's people.

And he takes the sheep around the side of Mount Sinai, also called Mount Horeb, and this is what we read in chapter 3, verse 2. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire, out of the midst of a bush, and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

And Moses said, I'm going to turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, Moses, Moses, and he said, here am I.

[13:54] And then he said, stop, do not come any closer. Put off your shoes from your feet, for the place you are standing is holy ground. I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.

And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. God is a dangerous God.

For just a moment, God pulls aside the veil, and Moses has allowed a brief experience of the reality of God, and we see that God is fire.

The bush that flames, but does not burn, because God, he is the Lord of creation, he needs no energy, and burns with beauty, and love, and holiness.

This God is a very dangerous God. When he led his people out into the wilderness, you remember how he led them? A pillar of fire and smoke.

[14:56] And when they come to Mount Sinai, God's presence comes down upon the mountain, flames of fire, lightning and smoke. And in the last chapter of Exodus, when God takes up

residence in the tabernacle, it's the same, fire.

And smoke. And in verse 5, as Moses comes to the bush, God says, do not come any closer. You are standing on holy ground.

It's the first reference to holy. Because the fire shows that the presence of God endangers our very lives. And the reason is because of his holiness.

You know this. Whenever human beings encounter the God, the real, the living God in scriptures, you know their instant reaction, I am terrified. I am undone.

And it's not because there's an infinite gap between the great creator and us as creatures. It is simply because we know we are sinful. And when God appears, he is holy.

[16:00] And the Bible symbol for God's holiness is fire. The real experience of the real and living God is not a happy, numinous or mystical experience.

It is, I'm going to die. And that is exactly the human predicament. We long for fellowship with God, but we know we cannot approach him. We long to see the face of God, but we know he must hide his face and so must we.

And that is what the book of Exodus is about. It's about God, how God is going to bridge this gap as the holy God and bring us into his presence. It's beautiful.

God does not say to Moses, Moses, look, it's okay. I am the all tolerant. I am the all accepting God. Just come a bit closer and I'll give you a great big hug.

He says, take your shoes off. You are standing on holy ground. You are in the zone of death. Now, why does God want Moses to take his sandals off?

[17:04] Or let me ask it a different way. Why doesn't Moses die? I mean, why is it that five times Moses complains and God continues to hold him before his presence?

And the answer is that God is not only dangerous, but he is also the deliverer. It is God's grace and his amazing love which spares Moses.

And he says to Moses, he just gives him one simple thing to do. Take off your sandals. It's not because his bare feet are holier than his sandals. That's not it at all.

It's a picture of what God is doing in Exodus. He says, just do this one thing and I will hold you in my presence. Later on, he gives to the Israelites the sacrificial system where they kill animals and God says, I will cover your sins.

And then we come to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, which it all points to. And Jesus Christ himself takes our sin upon himself and moves into the holiness of God and is incinerated for us.

[18:08] Because God is both dangerous and a deliverer. And we have to hold both of these things together. He is absolute fire.

He is absolute love. It's completely counterintuitive. It is not a God that you could invent. And I think one of our problems is we keep trying to want God to be just one or the other.

The God of fundamentalism is the God who is just fire but no love. He's got standards and righteousness and laws and morals and is going to zap you if you don't live up to those standards.

The God of the liberals is a God of love without any fire who won't judge anyone and just accepts and tolerates everything and is never going to say stop. But both of them are idols.

Both of them are not the true and living God because the Bible God is a God of absolute fire with zero tolerance for evil with a passion for his holiness who will punish evil and the Bible God is also the God of absolute love who holds Moses in his presence and is so committed to bringing us into his presence that he gives himself to the cross for us.

[19:23] That is why God says in the next verse I am the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob. Nothing attractive about those three characters. Weak, devious, self-absorbed, all of them.

Here is the God of all the universe saying I'm not ashamed to be their God. I've bound myself to them in promise not because of their potential but because of my great and holy love.

And in verse 7 he says I've seen the affliction of my people. I've heard their cry. I know their suffering. I've come down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptian to bring them up into the broad and spacious land a land flowing of milk and honey because the God of fire is the God of freedom.

It is his holy love for his unholy people which will begin their salvation. It's wonderful. They didn't deserve it. Abraham didn't deserve it.

But he says here every tear that was wept in those 400 years I have counted every single one of them. Every prayer has come up to me. Every agony. And I am going to rescue from this shocking

slavery.

[20 : 37] And I'm going to bring you into a land that sounds very like the Garden of Eden. Doesn't it? And the way I'm going to do it he says is through you Moses through a deliverer through a human deliverer and that becomes our permanent way of salvation now.

And Moses has a very big problem with this. In verse 11 Moses says to God Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the sons of Israel out?

You hear what Moses is saying. He's saying Lord I am not up to this job. You know what happened last time I tried? It's taken me 40 years to forget.

I am just not adequate. You have the wrong guy. God's response in verse 12 is beautiful. He says but I will be with you.

And he gives him a sign. I'll be with you. Now isn't that great? If God was a West Coast Canadian what would he have said to Moses? He would have said to Moses Moses, Moses you are fantastic.

[21 : 46] You need to believe in yourself more. You speak Hebrew. You speak Egyptian. You speak Midianite. You have the martial art chops. You have the best education in the world.

You can be great. You can be all that you dream you can be. Moses says Lord I am inadequate. God says yes but I am more than adequate.

It's wonderful isn't it? For God your resume and your self-doubt and your fear of inadequacy these things are all entirely irrelevant. They're irrelevant to what he wants to do through us and in us.

God does not want Moses to trust his own gifts and to be super self-confident but to be confident in him. God says I am with you.

That seems to be all that Moses needs. See what is the hardest thing that God has called on you to do? Do you feel adequate to do it? I hope you don't.

[22 : 50] What we need is not a great confidence in our adequacy. What we need is to hear the promise of Jesus Christ who says at the end of his ministry I will be with you even to the end of the age.

Because the qualification for serving God is not my adequacy or not my gifts. it's knowing that God is with me. That's the first thing we know about God.

He is the dangerous God who delivers and I want to come and just spend a couple of moments on the second issue and it is God's name. The real question of the book of Exodus is not who is Moses but who is God.

Moses says I can't do it. God says you're absolutely right beside the point. And so in verse 13 Moses asks the really big question who are you?

What is your name? And this is what God says in 1415 God said to Moses I am who I am. Say this to the people of Israel I am has sent me to you.

[24 : 00] Say this to the people of Israel the Lord the God of your fathers the God of Abraham the God of Jacob and the God of Jacob has sent me to you.

This is my name forever. Thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. This is the only place in all the scriptures where God names himself and I feel as we come to these verses we ought to take the sandals off our feet.

It's an astounding text. There's more written on these verses than anything else in all of the Old Testament. The name is not just a label name is who the person really is it is their personal character and here the God of grace and the God of fire says I am who I am I am has sent you I am the Lord and if you have your Bible open you look down at verse 15 can you see the word Lord is in capitals and there's a little F beside it and in very small font at the bottom of the page there's a helpful footnote it says the word Lord was spelled with capital letters stands for the divine name YHWH which is here connected with the verb Hayah to be it's four Hebrew letters Lord and theologians pronounce it

Yahweh a hundred years ago they used to pronounce it Yehovah theologians call it the tetragrammaton because they need a long word when there's a really simple word it's from the Hebrew verb to be like I am is the verb to be and it's closely connected to God and anywhere in the Old Testament where you see the word Lord Lord in all capitals you can just about every page in the Old Testament has that that's not his title that's his personal name Yahweh this is the personal name of the living God and it means it means he is Lord and it means he is living and it means he is present with us forever there is no past there is no future to him we are present to him he is present to us all the time he is unchangeable absolutely gloriously himself he is the same

yesterday and today and forever he is without beginning he is without end he is everything in between he causes everything everything depends on him he depends on nothing outside himself he has no unmet needs he has no desires that are unsatisfied all life and glory and goodness come from him he is

Yahweh and when God says I am who I am he is saying it to Moses and Moses is arguing with him and he is saying I am this is who I am I am I am not the God you want you can't construct me in your own image which of course makes the idea that we keep hearing that you know it is true for you I am glad for you but it is not true for me it makes it absolutely absurd and ridiculous if you try and construct a God who is going to meet your needs that God will never contradict you so when you start to feel overlaid with guilt he is never going to come to you and say to you you are innocent look at the cross of Jesus Christ you are forgiven one of the US commentators this week I read said the God of the Bible often says things we don't understand we find very difficult we don't even like and that's how we know we are dealing with spiritual truth and reality most of us have already made up our mind when we come to God who he should be and what he should do and what he should act like and when we find he's not like that and when we find his word offends us then we hold on to our we have a choice don't we we hold on to our own delusion or we believe the truth and this is what the book of Exodus is all about who is the

[28 : 12] Lord who is this God who is this self-existing self-sustaining absolutely sovereign deity who is this one who is so personally committed to his people that he reveals his name so that they will know him that he saves them from slavery with an outstretched arm and brings them to himself and comes to dwell with them the God of Abraham the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob Yahweh and my question to you of course is do you know him do you know the danger and the deliverance of God do you know his holiness I know we've got lots of excuses just like Moses did but have you come to the place of worshipping him of seeing in his face all that you desire his glory and his beauty do you feel your own sinfulness and know that he yearns for you and me to stand in his presence and has provided for that deliverance have you specifically asked him to free you from all those things that enslave and to bring you into his presence by saving grace that's the question and I wish we had more time this morning because there are dozens of ways in which we can trace this out into the

New Testament fulfillment because Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the name of God but I just want to leave you this one do you know that in John chapter 8 when Jesus is in debate with the Pharisees he stops them in their tracks and he says to them before Abraham was I am and they knew exactly what he was claiming and so they picked up rocks to kill him with because in the person of Jesus Christ God has revealed to us more of his name and God has given to Jesus that name which is above every name his own name Lord it's the only name by which we must be saved because Jesus was this God in the flesh the eternal God of fire the eternal God of love who on the cross brought together the absolute holiness and absolute love of God and died in our place to rescue us from slavery to bring us into God's presence so that we might worship him Blaise Pascal became a Christian famous mathematician I finish with this this is how he described his conversion the year of grace 1654 Monday 23rd November from about half past ten in the evening until half past midnight fire the God of Abraham the God of Isaac the God of Jacob not of the philosophers and intellectuals certitude certitude feeling joy peace the God of Jesus Christ my God and your God this is our God let's kneel and pray to him to the God God so good then God God