

Daniel Waldschmidt

Exodus 3:1-15

3/8/15

In this passage Moses encountered a God with a cryptic name: **I AM WHO I AM**. Today we are going to explore what that name means. At the very least it means that God exists: I am. But it means more than that. Today we are going to consider two things about this God. **I. He is the God who is Holy II. He's the God who keeps his covenant.**

Moses was just going about his everyday life when he saw was a bush that was on fire but didn't burn up. The bush was on fire but it wasn't withering. It wasn't turning to ash. It says that **"the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within the bush."** That's interesting because in verse 4 it says that **"God called to him from within the bush."** So in verse 2 it says the Angel of the Lord was in the bush. In verse 4 it says God was in the bush. And that leads a lot of commentators to say that the Angel here is not a created angel but rather God himself. And some have even wondered if this Angel of the Lord is Jesus before he became a human being. It's part of the mystery of this burning bush.

**"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground," (Ex. 3:5).** Does your house have a rule that you can't wear shoes in the house? Do you have to take your shoes off at the door? What the reason for that rule? The carpet is nice and clean. And your shoes have snow and dirt on them. And if you trample on the carpet with your shoes it will ruin the nice clean carpet. What God is saying here is that he is clean and pure. God is holy. He is more pure than the cleanest carpet.

And we have the defilement of our sins. That's why he tells Moses **do not come any closer**. Now I'm very germophobic. And so if you have the flu I might say, "Don't come any closer." But I will say that because I'm afraid that you will hurt me with your germs. But when God says, "Do not come any closer." He's not afraid that you will hurt him. It's the other way around. He knows that he'll hurt you. You see his holiness is not like me hoping that germs will stay away. His holiness is more like a blow torch. And so he says, "Don't come any closer."

But God is not only holy, he is also loving. He still calls to Moses, **"Moses, Moses"** When he Hebrews said something twice that conveyed strong emotion and even love. So God wants to call us closer but he knows that his holiness will destroy us. How does he solve that problem? He solves it with Jesus. On the cross Jesus took all of our sins on himself and in exchange gave us all of his holiness. So that now when God looks at you he doesn't see your sins he sees the holiness of Jesus. It says in Colossians chapter 1: **"God reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish," (Colossians 1:22).** Through faith in Christ God looks at you and he sees no sin and he sees the holiness of Jesus.

Or consider this: The bush was on fire, but it didn't burn up. Can you imagine that? The bush was on fire but the leaves were still green. Now, was that just a distraction to get Moses' attention, or did it have some deeper meaning? Some people have thought that the fire symbolizes God's holiness and bush symbolizes God's people. So the holy God is among us but he doesn't consume us. Jesus said that wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them. If we take that seriously that means that the holy Jesus is literally in the room with us right now. Why don't we all burn up? A holy God who is among his people but doesn't consume them. Or think of Holy Communion. The apostle Paul says that holy communion is a participation in the blood of Christ and a participation in the blood of Christ. Why don't we all burn up? Moses

saw a fire that didn't consume the bush. We have a holy God who unites himself to us and yet doesn't consume us. And someday, through faith in the blood of Jesus, we will walk on the holy ground of heaven.

That's the first thing we observe about this God, he is holy. The second thing we observe about God is that he keeps his covenant.

The Israelites were suffering in slavery. And they must have been tempted to think, God is far away from us. But this passage says that in our suffering God is NOT far away from us. He listens to every single one of our prayers and cares about every single one of our sufferings. Look at verse 7, **"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. So I have come down."** We think that God is far away from us in our sufferings but he's not he's right there with us.

Before I told you a deeper meaning of that bush that did not burn up. There's another deeper meaning that commentators suggest. It may be that the fire also symbolizes suffering, and even though God's people are in the midst of suffering they are not consumed. And why isn't the bush consumed by the fire? Because the Lord is in the burning bush. Verse 2: **"There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up."** When we go through trials we sometimes think that God is far away. But he's not, he's right there with us. And because the LORD is right there with us, the fire does not consume us. Think of another Bible story, the three men in the fiery furnace. Remember Shadrack, Meshak and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace because they would not bow down to the king's statue. But even though they were in the fiery furnace, they did not burn up. And remember when the king looked into the fire he said, "I see four men! And one of them looks like an angel!" **"The angel of the LORD appeared to Moses in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up."** When we are going through suffering, God is not far away he is right there with us, and even though we are going through suffering we are not consumed.

When Moses asks for God's name, God says my name is "I AM WHO I AM." What does that mean? "I am who I am" means that he is completely self-sufficient. We like to think that we are self-sufficient. But if we went without food for 5 days, or if we didn't have a home and had to live in the cold open air, we would realize that we are dependent creatures. We are dependent on God and the things he provides. But God is completely apart from that he doesn't need anything. He's completely free and independent of us. But the amazing thing is that even though God is completely free and independent the Old Testament also says that he is a God who makes covenants. Now a covenant is a solemn, contractual agreement. Like when you sign a marriage contract and you are legally bound to this person. Or when you sign a payment plan and you are legally bound to make these payments. Even though God is free and independent of us he willingly makes covenants with us.

In Genesis 15, God had made a covenant with the Israelites' great-great-great grandfather Abraham. And listen to what was part of that covenant. God said to Abraham in Genesis 15: **"Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions."** God contractually obligated himself to rescue Israel from slavery. A covenant is a solemn commitment.

God has also made a covenant with us. A covenant to forgive our sins and grant us eternal life. Last week I was reading TIME magazine. On the cover was a little baby and it said, "This baby could live to be 142 years old." The story that went with it talked about a twin mice. The mice were three years old. That's really old for mice,

mice live about 2.5 years. One of the mice looked his age. But the other one was given a compound called rapamycin. The mouse that had rapamycin looked like he hadn't aged at all. His liver and heart and tendons were functioning just like a young mouse. And the point of the article was they are optimistic that they can use this on humans to slow down the aging process. That's awesome. I'd love to live until 142. But you have a covenant God who has promised that his people will live past 142. They will live past a million and 42.

One time Jesus was disputing with a religious group of his time called the Sadducees. The Sadducees did not believe in bodily resurrection. There;s even some evidence that they didn't believe in an afterlife at all. And Jesus quotes from our passage in Exodus 3. He says, **“Have you never read, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”** Now even at the time of Moses Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were long dead. But Jesus says they were still alive and would live forever in the resurrection. That article said that scientists are trying to “extend longevity to its outer limits.” When God said, “I AM WHO I AM” part of what he meant was I have no outer limits. And for you who believe in Jesus, your life has no outer limit, because of your faithful covenant God.

Moses encountered God that day and through reading this passage we also encounter God: A God who is holy and a God who keeps his covenant to give a life of holiness with no outer limit. Amen.