

Exodus 3:1-15

Let us pray: Lord, as we listen for the word of God, help us turn aside from the worries and cares that imprison us in cages of our own making. May we listen with awe and wonder to the great I AM—the one who invites us to new and wondrous possibilities. In the Lord Jesus' name, we pray on holy ground. Amen.

If we want to be closer to our spouses, friends, or anyone else, we need to spend a lot of time with them and get to know their life story, right? Sometimes we fight with one another, though. I've known my wife for about 33 years, including dating, and I feel like I understand and love her more as a person now. The same is true of our Lord. In Hebrews 3:1, God tells us to "[thoughtfully and attentively] consider ... Jesus" (Amplified Bible). How can you do so? You can't do it by yourself. You can only do it through the entire 66 books of the Bible.

When I think of Jesus, I imagine a diamond, which has so many facets and looks different in light and color depending on the angle, right? Jesus is so much more abundant than that. How much we discover about him affects our relationship with him and our lives. We've been looking at the book of Exodus lately. It is one of those amazing holy books that richly reveals Christ Jesus.

Moses grows up as an Egyptian prince, but he has an identity as a Hebrew. When he's 40 years old, he kills an Egyptian while attempting to save his people. Pharaoh tries to kill him as his political enemy for that. So, Moses flees to a faraway place called Midian, where he marries Jethro's daughter and spends the next 40 years herding his father-in-law's sheep.

One day he is taking his sheep to graze, and he comes to Mount Horeb. There, he sees a bush on fire. It's not uncommon in the wilderness for thornbushes to catch fire. The strange thing about that day was that it didn't burn out. This fire represents the Spirit of God. In this way, God comes to us in the midst of our usual routine through ordinary things extraordinarily. Services that we routinely have on Sundays can also be a time for us to come under God's fire. That very common bush represents the lowest state in us, like Moses in the wilderness, the state of our flesh without the Spirit of Jesus. In Genesis, after the fall of the first Adam, the earth gave forth thorns and thistles. If we could produce good fruit, why did the Son of God have to come and die? We have to realize that no matter how nobly we try to love, we ourselves are thornbushes to poke

others, and the love of Christ has to be coated with them. How thankful we are that God can ignite those thornbushes!

Moses turns aside to look at the burning bush. That refers to a turning point in his spiritual growth. Among the early church fathers, Jerome interprets this to mean that "Moses left behind the love of the world and turned to the heavenly things." After we believe in Jesus and receive salvation for free, the Lord wants us to have growth. What kind of growth is it? It's not us growing. It's the measure of Christ in us growing. We are still thornbushes when we grow. We don't turn into apple trees.

In fact, this truth is the good news for you and me. I used to think that because I've been a believer in Jesus for so long, I must have changed a lot, but every time I find that my sinfulness and old self's nature are still with me, I understand the Apostle Paul's lament in Romans 7:24: "What a wretched man I am!" I may have increased in knowledge and built up a few more floors of morality and character, but the sinfulness of my soul is still there. How much do I have to change, and why does it seem like the pie in the sky to hope to change this world? Well, we and the world don't change because we are thornbushes and the world is Egypt. However, when the Lord Jesus Christ grows in us, when the extent and sphere of His reign in our lives grows, when the Spirit of Christ is kindled so that Christ is manifested through us, then, that is change.

We proclaim our mission statement every week. The UMC mission statement talks about the transformation of the world. Technically the world itself is not transformed because the world is like Egypt. Then, what is the transformation of the world? It is building the kingdom of Christ in it.

If I can change, it will be my righteousness, and I will compare myself with others and judge others like, "I've changed so much, why hasn't he changed?" We need to stop trying to change ourselves. If we try, it's just going to be a flash in the pan. We just need to look to the Lord. Right after that lament "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" Paul says, "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" in Romans 7:25. He's lamenting in the soul realm, but in the spiritual realm, he's thanking Jesus Christ for the answer to the lament. And then in the very next verse, Romans 8:1, he rejoices, saying, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are **in** Christ Jesus." Our growth begins with believing that we are **in** Christ Jesus. If we don't grow **in** Him, we don't benefit.

Exodus 3 is a tremendous chapter with so many deep truths, but we don't have time

today, so we're going to focus on the burning bush and spend a little time on God's name. We'll get to the meaning of taking off the sandals and the title, "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" some other day.

The reason we need to grow is that we have a reward before us. Hebrews 11:26 testifies that Moses "regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward." There is a reward. For what? It's a reward for counting suffering for Christ's sake better than the good things of this world. That's the Exodus faith, and that's the stage of spiritual growth we're to pursue. What's amazing about this verse is that Moses suffered **for Christ**. He knew Christ. He knew the reality of the joy and peace that Christ offers. Moses could live a life of faith because he became a burning bush that received the Spirit of God.

If you have not yet received the Spirit of Christ, invite Him in now and begin to live as a burning bush. If you have received the Spirit of Christ, live with the identity that you are a burning bush. We are outwardly the same as others in the world, with thorns in our flesh, but those of us who have accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior have had the fire of the Holy Spirit coated in our flesh and it is burning in us right now. So it is not the person that changes. It is the amount of Christ in the person that determines what kind of person he or she is.

The angel of the LORD appears to Moses in a flame of fire out of the bush. The word "angel" is "malak" in Hebrew. Its original meaning is "a messenger." It can be literally an angel, a ministering spirit (cf. Heb 1:14) or it can be a manifestation of God. Here today's passage says later, "The Lord saw..." and "The Lord said," so this angel is not a ministering angel but a manifestation of God.

When Moses asks God for His name, God gives the enigmatic answer, "I AM WHO I AM." This is "YHWH" in Hebrew, and "ego eimi" in Greek, translated into English as "the LORD." Jesus referred to himself as this "ego eimi" many times during his life on earth. He said, "Unless you come to believe that I AM, you will surely die in your sins" in John 8:23 and "before Abraham even came into existence, I AM" in John 8:58. In other words, Jesus himself said, "I AM YHWH." In John 6:20, when the disciples in the boat were frightened at seeing a person walk on the sea, Jesus said, "Egō eimi; do not be afraid." Jesus gave himself many "ego eimi," "I AM," names, including "I am the Bread of Life," "I am the resurrection and the life," and so on. When Peter preached about Jesus Christ, in Acts 2:21, he quoted the Old Testament prophecy of Joel 2:32, "... everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved." He was saying that the Lord is Christ Jesus.

Therefore, the Old Testament is not a book of a god called YHWH who has nothing to do with Jesus. It tells us that YHWH is Jesus Christ, who is 100% full of God the Father. So, we don't just believe in God but we believe in God revealed in Christ Jesus. When I have tried to talk about Jesus to some people, some have said, "I believe in God, but I don't believe in Jesus."

There's no way to know God the Father except through Jesus. In the Old Testament, in God's manifestations, too, God didn't appear except through His Son, Jesus Christ. Of course, he sent angels to deliver messages, but in many instances in the Old Testament, God himself appeared as a malak. The early church fathers saw the one who appeared in the burning bush as God the Word, and the unharmed bush as symbolizing the body that God the Son would take. So the burning bush typifies also Christ Jesus, who is filled with the Spirit of God. He was the first person to be ablaze by the fire of the Holy Spirit, and he is still choosing disciples to become burning bushes.

"Ego eimi," "I AM." God gave this name to us as if He were playing a game of matching objects with a toddler. It is our faith life to search for the "I AM" for us. In other words, "The Lord is" something for us, or "YOU ARE" something for us. David found many "YOU ARE." "You are my rock," "you are my fortress in which I can hide when I am fleeing," and "you are my shield against sin, Satan, or the world," and so on. We need to keep looking for "You are..." or "the Lord is ..." in the Bible: The Lord is my Savior, life, shepherd, light, love, etc. To keep looking for this "I AM" and to keep experiencing it is the life of faith. Christ is actually everything. "I AM" can hold everything. In Colossians 3:11, Paul says, "Christ is all." So, we "shall not want" as in Psalm 23:1

My friends, truly expect the God of ego eimi, "I AM," every day. Stop trying in vain to change yourself. Instead, fill yourself with His Word, commune with Him in prayer, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, who gives you a blazing energy in every circumstance. When you do so, expect Christ to reign over you stronger and more abundantly than ever before. May it be so. Amen.

Let us pray: God, who comes to us through our daily lives, pour into us today the fire of your Holy Spirit and keep this flame burning within us, so that we may live in response to our higher calling for your kingdom. Fill us more and more with your amazing presence, so that we may live to share the flame of your Spirit with others, and experience more and more of your wonderful name. In the name of I AM WHO I AM, Christ Jesus. Amen.