

# The Great I AM

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[ 0:00 ] This is God's word. Please do keep that passage open in front of you. Let us pray for the Lord's help with it as we come to it together. Father, we thank you again for your words. We thank you for your faithfulness. We thank you for your covenant promises.

We thank you that you come to speak to us now through your word, by your spirit. Lord, we pray that you would reveal yourself to us now through it, that you would reveal your son, Jesus Christ, that we might worship you rightly and truly through him.

In his name we pray. Amen. Well, I can't remember exactly why it came about, but it was only a couple of years ago that I found out the meaning of my name.

I'm not sure I'm quite living up to it, but I know someone who is giving it their best shot, because apparently the name Donald means ruler of the world. It might be a bit simplistic of a view of world politics, but maybe it's just someone doing their best to live up to their name.

All names have meanings, don't they? I'm sure most of you probably know your own. You'll be familiar with it. For the most part today, though, names are little more than a way of differentiating people, are they?

[ 1:15 ] I don't think anybody calls me Donald because they think it's an apt description of me. It's just the name that I've been given. But we've already seen, haven't we, in the book of Exodus, that the names in the Bible mean something.

That they carry more weight than just a kind of identification marker. They also give us a description of the person. They're like microbiographies.

Last week we saw Moses named it in verse 10 of chapter 2 because he was drawn out of the water. The Hebrew word for drawing out being Masha, Moshem, Moses.

It told us something of what had happened to him and what God was going to do through him. Similarly, near the end of chapter 2, we saw Moses name his son Gershom because he had been a sojourner in a foreign land.

Gershom sounding like the Hebrew word for sojourner. So we've already seen, haven't we, the significance of names in Exodus. And it's something you'll see right through the Bible.

[ 2:22 ] But when it comes to significant names in the Bible, in all of history, Exodus chapter 3 is the chapter.

Because in it, God reveals his name. This chapter will be familiar to many of us, I'm sure. But as we come to this passage this morning, as we dwell on what God's name dwells as about God, we also want to think about why.

Why does God reveal his name and why does he reveal it here at this time to Moses at this point in redemptive history? And I hope we will see this morning, by holding this passage in its Exodus context, we will see that God's self-revelation should not only cause us to know more about him, but should also give us every reason to hope and rejoice in him and in the promises he has given his people.

That is what I hope we will see as we go. So let's just begin, I suppose, by almost setting the scene in our first point this morning. Verses 1 to 10 there. God comes down to deliver his people.

Back in chapter 1 of Exodus, we saw Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, enslave the Israelite population and then basically try to carry out a genocide against them.

[ 3 : 52 ] But by the end of chapter 2, that has been going on for 40 years, at least 40 years. That's 40 years of slavery under ruthless taskmasters.

40 years of living in a country where the entire native population has been commanded to drown every baby boy you give birth to.

Last week we met, didn't we, one baby boy who was delivered from Pharaoh's dreadful decrees. It was an amazing story of God's providence working itself out in wonderful ways which he would use to free his people.

But that was just the story of one baby from one family. Every other Israelite family in Egypt continued to live enslaved and in danger.

So that for all the good news, the really good news of Moses' deliverance in chapter 2, at the end of that chapter, we hear the people of Israel groaning, crying out for help, crying out for rescue from slavery.

[ 5 : 02 ] We picked up last week on four amazing things that God does in response to that cry. He hears, he sees, he remembers, and he knows. But for the people of God to be saved by God, they need him to do something even more.

Something even more. I mentioned at the Carroll service about a month ago that a few years back, I was hit by a car while I was cycling fairly quickly kind of down a hill in Edinburgh.

It was basically a head-on collision. The whole thing actually happened just outside of the sheriff's court where there was police stationed. Watched the whole thing. The poor guy driving the car got charged on the spot.

It was a pretty miserable day, in more ways than one, and so the police officers kindly kind of took me into the court to shelter me from the ailments. But I was a bit stuck.

I couldn't really walk. My bike wasn't exactly in mint condition. I was stranded. And so when I phoned Mary to tell her what had happened and where I was, there were four words I needed to hear.

[ 6 : 13 ] It was good that I could call on her. It was very good that she heard me, that she knew the situation that I was in. But sitting there, wet and cold and sore, stranded, there were four words I needed to hear.

And I did. I'm on my way. I'm coming to you. Last week, we saw the genuine comfort that God's people can know in the fact that God hears, He remembers, He sees, and He knows that.

There is real and genuine comfort in that. But when people who are stranded, who are stuck, cry out for help, we don't just need sympathy, understanding, do we?

Those things are good. But we need people's presence. We need them to come and help us. Last week, at the end of chapter two, we heard the cry for help.

This week, we see the response, and it begins in a fairly unexpected place, at least it appears that way to begin with, on the side of a mountain, not in Egypt, but in Midian, where Moses, who has just been rejected by the Israelites, is minding his own business, watching over a few sheep.

[ 7 : 37 ] But immediately in verse one, the author hints to us that while the events of the next few verses would have been utterly unexpected for Moses, it is meticulously planned by God.

Because this mountain is Horeb, the mountain of God, also known as Mount Sinai. And on this mountain, long before the Ten Commandments are given, the angel of the Lord, who's later identified here as the Lord himself, appears to Moses as a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.

Moses' curiosity is understandably piqued, isn't it? A bush that appeared to be kind of spontaneously combustible and simultaneously flame-retardant would have surprised him as much as it would surprise us if we saw it in our back garden this afternoon.

Definitely not normal. But this turns out to be far more than a natural phenomenon. It is a supernatural intervention. Because the call has been answered.

God has come. We'll kind of pick up on a few of the details around the burning bush in our second point this morning, but notice for now what God says to Moses there in verse 7 and 8.

[ 8 : 55 ] I have surely seen the affliction of my people. I have heard their cry. I know their sufferings. And I have come.

Not just I'm on my way, but I have come down to deliver them. When God's people call to him in need of rescue, God answers.

He comes down to deliver his people. That was good news for the Israelites in Exodus that they really did need redeemed from slavery in Egypt. But it is also very good news for us today because all of God's people in every generation have needed to be redeemed.

not from slavery in Egypt, but from slavery to sin. And when God's people need God's help, God comes down.

Just listen to what the Apostle Paul writes in Galatians chapter 4. We were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

[ 10 : 20 ] To a people in need of rescue, in need of deliverance, God comes. But the Word became flesh. Christ Jesus emptied himself and took on the form of a servant.

He was born in the likeness of men to redeem us from our slavery. It was one thing for God to appear for a moment in a flame of fire at Sinai.

It was another thing altogether more costly for him to come down from heaven to a manger in Bethlehem. To appear not for a moment, but to take on human flesh for a lifetime so that he could deliver his people.

Hearing our cry for help, he has come to deliver us from our sins. So we see, first here, that God comes to deliver. Secondly, we see God reveal himself to reassure his people.

A promise of help is only as good as the ability of the helper, isn't it? The other day, I was moving a table in our house. It's this kind of folding table that has a column of drawers down the middle.

[ 11 : 33 ] With the drawers in, right, it is too heavy for me to lift. But because I'm a man, every time it needs moved, I try and do it with the drawers still in and inevitably fail.

On this occasion, seeing me struggle to lift the table that I knew I couldn't lift, the resident two-year-old in the house came up to help. He really did come to help.

That was his absolute intention. He was present. He was eager. But he was useless. He puts his little hand under it.

He kind of strains with all his might. He does all that he can, but it's just not enough. But for us to have real hope when help comes, we need a helper who we know is able, who can do what they have said they have come to do.

God has revealed to Moses his plan to redeem his people from slavery and into the promised land. But this plan leaves Moses with two questions.

[12:46] Who am I and who are you? As part of his rescue plan, God has said in verse 10 that he is going to use Moses.

Come, I will send you to Pharaoh to deliver my people. God is sending him as a helper. And so Moses' first doubt is in his ability to help to deliver this people. Moses knows Moses.

And so to him, this doesn't sound like it's going to work. Verse 11, Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?

We might expect a kind of a pep talk from God, an arm around the shoulder. You're better than you think you are, Moses. You've got this. I believe in you. I know you can do it.

But God doesn't even respond to Moses' question because God's rescue plan has nothing to do with who Moses is. It has everything to do with who God is.

[13:47] In God's response, he says nothing about who Moses is. He just says, I will be with you. He's saying there, verse 12, it doesn't matter who you are as long as I am with you.

It doesn't matter if you're the most gifted man in the world or the least gifted man in the world. All that matters is that I will be with you. That is good news, isn't it?

Moses looked at himself, looked at God's plan and thought, there's no way I can be of any help here. Maybe you've had that thought yourself. God has said, I'm part of his plan to build up his church.

But look at me. Look at the state of me. Look at my failings. What use can I be? God doesn't flatter us with false praise. He simply says, but I will be with you.

We don't have to pretend to be more than we are. We just have to rest in the fact that God is with us. And we can rest in that fact because of who God is. God's response to Moses' first question turns the spotlight in and of himself and Moses falls in that direction with his next question, verse 13.

[15:00] Who are you? If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you and they ask me, what is his name?

What shall I say to them? What is your name? Remember where we began this sermon, names in the Bible mean something.

Moses isn't just kind of doing an ID check on God. He is asking God to reveal something about who he is. And when it comes to God describing who he is, he simply says that he is.

Look at verse 14 with me. God said to Moses, I am who I am. And he said, say this to the people of Israel.

I am has sent me to you. You'll see in the footnote there of the ESV that you could also translate that I am what I am or I will be what I will be.

[16:12] I think we can safely assume the ambiguity is no accident. Every understanding of the phrase together is a revelation of the true nature of God.

There is so much that could be rightly said about what this simple statement reveals to us about who our God is. We're going to think very briefly.

Let me just pick out, it sounds like a lot, it's not going to be hopefully too much, five things, five things we learn about God from his name here. And once we've kind of gone through those five things, we'll see why they all matter to the audience of this book and to us today.

Five things. First of all, God is self-existent. God owes his life who he is to no one and nothing.

Were there to be nothing else apart from God? God would continue to be God in his fullness because he has everything in himself. Not only has all creation been made by God, but every other living creature relies on external things to sustain life.

[17:28] How long would we last if we had no food, no water, if you removed the oxygen from the atmosphere? We all depend on things, don't we?

We depend on God for our existence. We depend on other parts of his creation to be sustained in that existence. Not so for God. He is self-existent and self-sufficient, as the Westminster Confession of Faith says, not standing in need of any creatures which he has made.

We saw a wonderful illustration of that in the burning bush earlier in the chapter, that the bush was burning, but it was not consumed.

It burned, but it did not burn. God did not need to appear in a bush because he needed some kind of life source to draw from or attach himself to.

He appeared as a flame, but that flame, like God, required nothing nothing to fuel its fire, nothing outside of itself in order to exist. God depends on nothing else.

[18:42] He is self-existent. Secondly, God is eternal. He has not become. He simply always has been. We've seen repeatedly, haven't we, through this chapter that he is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

we know, don't we, that he transcends generations, but as he reveals his name, we see that he transcends all of time. His being does not experience the passing of time in the way that we do.

He always has been. He always is. He always will be who he is today. Thirdly, very closely related, though, God is unchanging.

I am who I am. Not who others will make me. Not how others will shape me, but I am who I am.

We are, well, we cannot say the same, can we? We are very changeable. We learn, we grow, people's character changes, sometimes the better, sometimes the worse.

[19:46] We start young, we become old. We change, and who we are is changed by others. You'd be a very different person if you grew up with different parents in a different part of the world.

But we are shaped by others. We are influenced by people. Our whole industry has sprung up in the last five years, built on the very true premise that people can be influenced.

But God is never influenced. He is never changed by anything. He is not swayed by something outside of himself.

He is who he is. So that all that we learn of who God is is always true of who God is. Who God is in Exodus is who God is today, and who he will be forever.

He never changes. Fourthly, we learn in his name that God is holy. Pull the first three points together, and we can say, can't we, and we should say that God is in a category of one.

[20:57] He is different from us. That there is an absolute otherness to him. Not just different from us, but separate from all of creation.

Again, we saw that at the burning bush earlier in this chapter. The first thing God said to Moses, do not come near. Do not come near because God is holy, and an unholy people cannot stand before a holy God.

That is the message of the fire. Untouchable, unapproachable, unreachable, unless he himself provides a way to come before him. Last week, we thought about kind of God and Pharaoh in this book and used the analogy of two mismatched boxers facing off in the ring.

I think that is kind of a helpful analogy for the book going forward, but it's shortcoming, though, isn't it? It's that it implies that the king of heaven is just a bigger and better version of the king of Egypt.

But really, that's not the case at all. It's more like heavyweight boxer versus grasshopper. God is not merely a kind of version of us with all the traits maxed out to 100.

[ 22:14 ] He is a completely separate category of being. That's why when Moses asks him what his name is, what he is like, his description depends on nothing outside of himself because he's not like anything else.

He doesn't say, does he, I am like, dot, dot, dot. He simply says, I am who I am because there is nothing to compare him to.

The only way that he can describe himself is that he is who he is. There is none like him. And then fifthly, and finally, God is personal.

We learn lots from God's name. There is much more we could say than what we've said already. But we also learn something simply in the fact that God does reveal his name. If you want to enjoy any kind of relationship with someone, knowing their name is step one, isn't it?

It's the first thing we do when we meet someone if we want to get to know them. But Moses knows that God is God. He's aware of his title. But now God reveals to him his name.

[ 23:26 ] It is, I mean, even today, isn't it, it is a sign of gracious condescension. If we refer to someone respectfully, Mr., Sir, Madam, Your Highness, I've never met royalty, but you would do the same thing, wouldn't you?

But if they turn around and say, no, no, please call me, call me Charles, call me Camilla, they are stepping down, aren't they?

That they're not saying I'm not a king, but they are saying I want to be more than a king to you. God would have every right to remain far from us in his holiness, but he comes down to us, he reveals his name to us because he wants us to know him.

He makes himself known because he wants to be known. So God is self-existent, he is eternal, he is unchanging, he is holy, he is personal.

But why does he reveal all that here? As with every Bible book, Exodus was penned with a specific audience in mind.

[ 24:40 ] The book of Exodus, that audience was what we call the wilderness generation, who are on the cusp of the promised land. After the Exodus from Egypt, wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, they are almost there, but they are not there yet.

Yet. And here, God reveals himself to reassure them that he is able to deliver them.

Able to deliver them from slavery and into the promised land. The people who were first reading this had already been taken out of slavery, but they had not yet been taken into the promised land, and I think in many ways their situation was like ours.

delivered from slavery, but not yet delivered into the promised land, came in for them, a new creation for us, for both a hope that still lies before us, and maybe, maybe today you have struggles very similar to the wilderness generation, because they felt like they were in no man's land.

they weren't where they belonged, they didn't feel like they fitted, they were looking back to the days of slavery and wondering, was it really that bad back then?

[ 26:07 ] Looking forward to the promised land and not completely confident we will ever actually get there. To people in need of reassurance, God reveals himself as the one who is absolutely able to deliver on his every promise, not like a toddler trying to lift a table, but the self-existent eternal and changing holy personal God, who has existed apart from and before all creation, who is unshaken, unmoved by every force that might try to sway him away from his promises, unchanging in his character, never for a moment, lacking mercy or patience, never for a moment, faltering in his love or faithfulness, holy and yet personal, able to deliver because there is none like him, going to deliver because he wants us to know him, to be with him.

The name would have been great reassurance to the elders in Egypt as Moses went there. just as it would have been a great reassurance for the wilderness generation, just as it is great reassurance for us today.

This is who our God is and always will be because he is who he is, the I am who I am.

God gives us the kind of shorthand of his name there in verse 15. In our translations, we have kind of Lord in all caps, that's kind of derived from the Greek translation of God's given name. And that name, every time we see that the Lord in capital letters there throughout the Bible, it should be to us, as it was to them, a reminder.

Not only of God's covenant promise to save us from slavery to a promised land, but of his unswerving, unfailing ability to carry out what he has said he will do.

[ 28:12 ] The covenant keeping God who is able and eager to keep every one of his promises to his people. Let's just bring things towards a close with our very brief third and final point.

Things have been moving in this direction anyway, so we don't need to spend too much time here. But we see, thirdly and finally, that God promises to provide abundantly for his people.

Having revealed himself from verses 16 through to the end of the chapter, God reiterates again his promised protection and provision for his people, and it is an abundant, full provision.

It is a promise you know he is going to keep because he knows exactly how everything is going to play out. But at the end of it, he promises not just to take a people out of slavery and into the wilderness, because they are being saved for a purpose, to worship God, to serve him in a place flowing with milk and honey, accompanied by all the riches of the land from which they are being saved from.

In verse 21 and 22, the last couple of verses there, God promises to fill the people's hands in the present with riches they can barely carry. They were, of course, weren't they?

[ 29:38 ] They were being delivered from a different kind of slavery to us, and so their blessing looked different to ours. Coming from a physical land of slavery, they went out with physical possessions, but as with everything in the Old Testament, there is a picture of something even better to come, a foretaste of the spiritual blessings that accompany our deliverance in Christ, and the eternal blessings waiting for us in a new and perfect creation.

Paul says in Ephesians that we already have every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus. Let me encourage you to go and read Ephesians chapter 1 this afternoon as a wonderful reminder of all that you have in Christ.

And then perhaps go and read Revelation chapter 21 as an equally wonderful reminder of the wonderful hope we have waiting for us.

As we wait expectantly for the coming of our promised land, the promised land that these people ultimately were looking to, it is a hope worth holding on to, and it is a hope we can hold on to with confidence, not because of who we are, but because of who God is, because of who we have seen God reveal himself to be.

it is a hope we have seen. It is easy, isn't it, to look at Moses and think, wow, if only I had an experience like that, if only I could hear God speak to me from fire in a bush.

[ 31 : 23 ] But Moses would have longed to stand where we stand, because we have it even better. We read earlier from Colossians 1, that we, likewise, have been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the beloved Son.

And so we can have even greater confidence in that promise of God than Moses did in the promises of God then, because we have an even greater revelation of who God is in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

We have a revelation of God that surpasses even what Moses saw, the one revealed to us through all the Bible, shining most brightly in the New Testament.

The Apostle John writes his whole gospel as a revelation of Jesus so that we would believe, trust, hope in the promises that have been made through him to all who believe in him.

This God of Exodus 3 is still our God in the very same sense. So remember him, remember these verses every time you read of the Lord in those capital letters, but in Jesus, we have the joy, the privilege, the reassurance, the sure and certain hope that comes with an even fuller revelation of his character, a fuller picture of even greater promises with even more abundant blessings because God has heard his people's cry for help and he himself has come down to deliver all those who have their faith and trust in him and he will deliver us into his promised land, not because of who we are, but because of who he is.

[ 33 : 23 ] Let us pray together in closing. Great God, we do praise you as the one who was and is and is to come, the great I am, who always has been and always will be.

Lord, we thank you and praise you for who you are. We thank you and praise you that you have made yourself known to us, that you are the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable God, that you are holy, holy, holy, that there is none like you, and that you, the great God, the great I am, have made to us, your people, promises to provide abundantly every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus, to take us into the promised land, the new creation, the hope that is waiting before us.

Lord, we pray that as we dwell on who you are, as you reveal yourself to us through your word, that we would be able to hold on to that hope with absolute confidence, and so live faithfully for you in the present, knowing for sure what is coming in the future.

We thank you most of all for your son, Jesus Christ, for the image of the invisible God, that through him we come to know you and love you and praise you. We pray that all would be done for his glory above all else.

In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.