

Hearing From a Holy God

Exodus

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Bible Text: Exodus 3:1-15
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If you will take your Bible and turn with me to Exodus 3, I want to read verses 1 through the end of verse 15.

1 Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. 3 And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." 4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. 7 Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, 8 and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 9 And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. 10 Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" 12 He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain." 13 Then Moses said to God, "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?" 14 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.'" 15 God also said to Moses, "Say this to the

people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

This is God's word.

Before we pray, you'll see a picture of Kings Baptist Church, Pastor Derek. Let's pray for them as well. Would you join me?

Father, thank you for our brothers and sisters at Kings Baptist. These are people that you chose, you chose them just as you chose us, and so we are not the ones who do the choosing if the church, you do it and it's a beautiful thing. So we pray for them and as we pray for them, we pray for ourselves, that as the word of God is opened, as we sing, as we pray, as we give, as we do all of our worship, may you work in such a way, Holy Spirit, that our eyes would be opened and in the midst of this brutal, hard, cold world, may we see there is a God who reigns, there is a living God who speaks and hears, and may our heart be open and riveted by this great God. In his name we pray. Amen.

Now you're going to see a picture on the overhead of two people you might know but most likely you won't know. On the right hand side is a picture of President James Garfield, the 20th President of the United States. He took office in March, 1881 and he was assassinated in the month of September of that same year by the man on the left, Charles Guiteau. What has always fascinated me about the story of James Garfield and his assassination is that Charles Guiteau called the assassination "a divine command." In other words, he was persuaded and you can look this up, he was persuaded that God commanded him, that God told him, that God spoke to him to kill President James Garfield. In fact, Guiteau compared his plight interestingly to that of Moses. He said these words, "God kept Moses, he will me and I fear no man." You do see our dilemma, don't you? Why should we believe God spoke to Moses from a burning bush but not believe that God spoke to Charles Guiteau? Charles said God told him to do it and we're reading there that God spoke to Moses in a burning bush.

There's a new program on Sunday evenings on CBS called "God Friendened Me." How many of you have seen it? Anybody? Anybody? Some of you have, okay. I tuned in to the first episode, I wanted to just get a feel for how this was going to be handled. It's about a man by the name of Miles Finer, he's an atheist with a podcast. On the very first episode right at the beginning, and I was amazed at this, I wasn't expecting this, right at the beginning he's interviewing a female rabbi and he's saying there is no God and she's saying, hey, you need to be more open to this and he says this, "If I told you God sent me a message from a burning bush, you'd think I was insane." And I thought, "Hm, how current. How current, you know?" He brings up, in other words he brings up this bizarre, extraordinary, amazing thing that God spoke to Moses from a burning bush. Then the program is based on this, that Miles Finer, this atheist who has a podcast and is telling everybody there is no God, it's based upon this premise, he receives a friend request from

God. I thought why should we believe that God spoke to Moses from a burning bush but not believe that God sends friend requests?

Now let's be clear at the very beginning, the God of the Bible is a God who speaks. We know this because in the book of Genesis we find in the very first chapter God speaks and says, "Let there be light," and there was. We also know from a book of the Bible in the New Testament in Hebrews 1, notice these words, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets." Friends, I don't know of too many things that are more important than we understand that the God who made the world and everything in it is a God who communicates, a God who speaks. So, yes, God speaks but does he do it from a burning bush? I mean, let's just ask the question: should we believe this? Should we believe this? You see, this is a stretch, folks. This is a stretch when we read that God, the everlasting, eternal, almighty, holy, we could go on and on, this God spoke from a burning bush.

This is a stretch. In fact, I would go as far as to say that there are some Christians that might be embarrassed by this. "Oh, you know, I believe the Bible and I believe in Jesus but God speaking from a burning bush?" In fact, I read an article the other day where somebody just could not deal with it and they said Moses had to be on hallucinogenics, in other words, Moses was high. Look, we've got to ask the question: is this credible or is it incredible? By credible I mean is it convincing? Is it able to be believed? Or is it incredible which would be impossible to believe? Or can we just all agree that it's pretty difficult to believe, right? I mean, maybe you're a Christian and you say, "Look, I'm on board with a lot of things in the Bible but when I read something like this, I'll be honest with you, it's kind of difficult to believe." So for the remainder of our time this morning, even though this is extraordinary, even though it may be difficult to wrap our minds around, I want to talk about the fact that we should and can believe this happened and that this is truly God and explain why.

So before we do that, the first thing, I want you to step back just for a moment because we're going through a series in the book of Exodus and we're not going verse-by-verse, we're kind of doing a flyover to get the real gist of the story because this story is our family story. What I mean by that is if you're a Christian, if you know Jesus in a saving way, Exodus is our family story. It's a story about God setting people free from an oppressive slave master that they might come and serve him. Don't miss this, we should see that Israel's bondage is a picture of our own slavery to sin and until we come to faith in the Deliverer, Jesus Christ, we are living, you might say, in the Egypt of our sin, in other words, we are slaves to our passions and our desires. I know that to be true. If you can remember back far enough before you came to Christ and he rescued you and set you free, you know what it was like to be on the hook. You were a slave to your passions and your desires and so this story, friend, is important. It's pointing out the slavery of our sin and our need for a Deliverer in the person of Jesus Christ.

In Exodus 3, we're introduced to Moses, God's chosen human instrument to deliver his people, and Moses in chapter 3 is having an encounter with God. Now friends, this is big. I mean, for Moses to have an encounter with God and God speak to him from a burning

bush, this is not ordinary. This is not everyday sort of stuff, okay? So this is a big deal. So Moses has an encounter with God and you'll see a map, he has it in a place in the Middle East, Mount Horeb. You'll notice on the right hand side is the land of Midian where his father-in-law was from, Jethro, and on the left hand side would be the land of Egypt, and Moses is not in Egypt now, he is in this area where it speaks of being in the west side of the wilderness. So the author wants us to know that he's in the wilderness. He's not in the city, okay? And he's at a mountain that has three names: one, it's the mountain of God, we read that in the text; but also it's Mount Horeb; but later in this Exodus story, we're going to find that it's Mount Sinai. It's the mountain where God gathers his people to give them the law, his 10 Commandments.

Now to set our story here, notice something that's really important, I think, Moses is not looking for God. I think it's really important, Moses is not looking for God. He's not out in the wilderness going, "O God, where are you? If you'll show yourself, I'll serve you forever. If you'll reveal yourself, I'll do this." Moses is not, he's not in a temple, he's not praying, he's not fasting. He's not doing anything religious, in fact, what is he doing? He's tending sheep. He's doing a menial ordinary job, yet in spite of that, in spite of the fact that he's not looking for God, God comes to him. God comes to him. I find great great comfort in that. I wasn't looking for God, he found me. My guess is you weren't either.

Moses is not looking for God but God shows up and we see it in verse 2. Look at it, look at verse 2, "And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush." Bush. Now let me ask you, what else would you expect in the wilderness? Because, you know, we're just trying to wrap our head around this, is this a credible story? Is this real? Can we believe this? What else would we expect in the wilderness but a bush? I've read about this area, it's filled with bramble bushes, most likely a bramble bush, and what else would we expect in the wilderness? Would we expect God to speak from a PlayStation? A bass boat? That would have been really difficult for me to swallow, "And in the wilderness came along a bass boat and God spoke from the bass boat." I would have probably said, "I'm out." But I want you to notice he spoke from a bush. That makes sense. It's still incredible, I mean, it still will just blow your mind but it's still difficult to believe but we have a good starting place here.

Then also it says "angel of the LORD." Do you see that in verse 2? "And the angel of the LORD appeared." Now you might go, okay, you collect angels and that sort of thing and so you think about angels and you think, "Okay, it's a messenger from God. God sent this special angel down." The Bobby Helms song, "You are my special angel sent from up above." But did you notice what it says? It says "the angel of the," what? "LORD." Is that in all caps in your Bible, right? It's all caps? Okay, good. This is not any ordinary angel because in verse 4 here's what we read, "When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him." Friend, look, this is not some ordinary angel, this is God. This is God. So wait a minute, you go, "What? What? Why does it say angel of the LORD?" It's because this is what is known as a theophany. A theophany is "God made manifest." Now listen to me closely, okay? What do we know about God from the Scriptures? God is, what? Spirit. God is spirit therefore he is invisible. So if you're invisible, you're going to

have to do something to make yourself visible, right? A theophany is when the invisible majesty of God is partially unveiled and made visible, and friends, there are many examples of this in the Bible and you can read them, they're there, angel of the LORD, and in this case the invisible majesty of God is partially unveiled and made visible as a flame of fire in a bush and that the bush is not consumed is really interesting because it indicates that the fire was in the bush, not of the bush. As we said, he was amazed, he looked at the bush and said, "It's burning but it's not consumed."

So it indicates that the fire was in the bush, not of the bush, but why a flame of fire? I believe the answer would be this, it's because all throughout the Bible the imagery of fire is used to refer to the majesty, the glory and the holiness of God. We sang about, "Holy is the Lord. Holy, holy, holy." All throughout the Bible just look for it. When you look for it, you'll see it, it's there. This imagery of fire, now think about it, fire on a day like yesterday, you know, a bonfire, you want to move in and it feels good, it's comforting, but then there are times when fire is, like, "Whoa, get back. Get back. It'll consume you."

It's interesting that God uses that kind of imagery because we see this the closeness and warmth and then there are times when we realize God is holy, get back. But then look at verse 5, building a case here, "Then he said," now this would be God, "Then he said, 'Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.'" Whoa. Stop. Where is he? Where is Moses? Where is he? He's in the, what? Wilderness, right? Now wait a minute, just a few minutes ago he was in the wilderness and there's nothing special about that, okay? But all of a sudden now, "Moses, the place you are standing on is holy ground. Don't come any nearer." What turned an ordinary wilderness into holy sacred ground? Heaven and earth have intersected. A holy God has come down.

April of this year, let's go back to April of this year, Pew Research, periodically they will do especially interviewing the American public regarding religious matters. April of this year they took a survey to determine how many Americans believe in God. Do you want to guess how many? 80% You know what that means, right? Eight out of 10 say they believe in God and so you might want to go, "That's great. That's good. Eight out of 10 people in America believe in God. Bunch of Muslims over there, a bunch of Chinese Confucianism, but look at us, 8 out of 10 Americans believe in God." Question: is it a holy God? When you read the survey, you will find out it's not a holy God they believe in. Here's a question we've got to ask when 8 out of 10 Americans say they believe in God, is he the God – now listen very carefully – is he the God who when Solomon in the Old Testament dedicated the temple, the glory of God was so overpowering that the priests could not perform their service, is he that God? Is he the God when the Apostle John saw him, his face was like the sun shining in full strength and when he saw him, he fell at his feet as dead? When John saw the resurrected glorified Christ, he did not turn around and say, "What's up, Jesus? Let's sing some praise music, man. Come on!" No! He fell at his feet as dead. Is that the God that 8 out of 10 Americans believe? Is he the God who Isaiah, we read it this morning, he trembled, "I saw the Lord high and lifted up and his train filled the entire temple and I said," in response to that Isaiah said, "Woe to

me! I am ruined!" Notice, "I am coming apart at the sight of this glorious, majestic, holy God!"

Imagine with me, imagine you're having a church service and the one leading the service says, "Hey, brothers and sisters out there, are you happy this morning?" You know, that kind of a crazy mess. Then they say, "Hey, look, we're going to talk about the attributes of God this morning so I want you to call out to me. When I say, 'The Lord, you are,' and you fill in the blank." Can't you hear it in America, it would be like, "Lord you are," and then the crowd would say something like, "loving. He's loving." Okay, good. "Lord, you are..." "Merciful." And then over on this side someone would say, "He's gracious." Someone on this side would say, "Oh, he's kind. He's kind." Somebody on this side, "Oh, he's compassionate." Then in the crowd Isaiah sticks up his hand and says, "He's holy and he's terrifying." How do you think that would fit in American worship services?

You see, I'm asking this, when 8 out of 10 Americans believe in God, is he this God? Is he the God of verse 6? Look at verse 6 with me, "And he said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'" Look at this, "And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God." My Lord in heaven, why did this happen? Why didn't Moses come out and write a book and go on the book circuit and on Christian radio and Christian television, "I want to tell you about my experience. I looked in there and I saw this light." No, he's afraid. He's struck with fear, turned his face away. What a mighty God. Why, why in the world did Moses turn away? I think the answer is this: friends, we were made to gaze upon the glory of God. We were made for that. We were made by God for his good pleasure to enjoy him, to worship him and to serve him, but what do we find in the Bible? We find that Adam and Eve were enjoying out in the garden, they were walking with him and talking with him and gazing upon his glory, but then they rebelled against him and when they rebelled, what happened? They hid themselves and were afraid and in our unholy condition which we inherited, and brother and sister, know it, we inherited that unholy condition and because we did, it's no longer safe to come into the presence of a holy God. That's why Moses turned his face.

So how do we solve this problem, holy God, unholy people? How do we fix that? There are a couple of ways that we have tried as human beings, we've tried this one: one, we try to solve the problem by exaggerating our own holiness. What does that mean? This week I saw an interview, Dan Rather, Rod Stewart. Rod Stewart was wearing a cross. He was wearing a cross and so Dan said, "You're wearing a cross, are you a religious person?" "Oh yeah, Dan. Yeah, I tell my children this, here's what I tell all of my children, listen, do good and be good." There it is. There it is. That's the American mantra. That's the exaggeration of our holiness, just be a good person. He actually went on to say, "That's my religion. Be good, do good."

Friends, that is an exaggeration of our holiness, to think that, "I'm okay." You see, that's one way we try to solve the problem, "I am a good person. I do good things. I'm not perfect but I'm good. I do good things." We exaggerate our own holiness in an attempt to solve this bridge between a holy God and unholy people, but then there's another way we try to and that is by minimizing the holiness of God. We carve out the certain attributes of

God that we are uncomfortable with. "A holy God, a just God, a loving God, I'll take that. I'll take a loving God, I'll take a compassionate God, I'll take a kind God, I'll take those things." Then we end up thinking God's not at all concerned about this behavior, God's not at all concerned about this and God's alright with this.

Just a few years ago, there was a woman by the name of Kelly Ann Walz. She took in a black bear cub as a pet. Now Katherine and I have a puppy. She took in a black bear cub. She named the black bear cub Teddy. Of course, Teddy Bear. But how many of you know that naming a black bear cub Teddy doesn't mean you have done away with their animal instincts? They are still not a domesticated pet and that's why that in 2009 this now 350 pound bear killed Kelly while she was cleaning its cage.

Friend, we cannot minimize the holiness of God. We cannot domesticate God and say, "I'll take this kind of God and God can be my little pet." It will not end well because he is a holy God and that brings me to this and I'm going to try to wrap all of this up quickly, that's why I believe this really happened, I believe that what we're reading in Exodus 3 fits the pattern of a holy God perfectly because if God is who he has revealed himself to be, it makes sense because, you see, it's not safe for the unholy, in other words, God doesn't just, you know, people want God to just show up, show up in my bedroom. Well, you can't take that. You couldn't stand that. God will say later to Moses, "You see my face, you can't live." So this idea of God just showing up in my bathroom or showing up on the front porch or whatever, no. This fits very well with the fact that he is a holy God and that if he is, he must prescribe for us how he will come, not us prescribe how he will come.

Now let me just, you're going, "Okay, got it." What can we take away from this? 1. This begs the question does God speak today? I mean, we're reading this and you're probably sitting there going, "Man, man, I'll tell you, I could sure use God speaking to me right now."

I read a sermon title while I was doing some research for all of this, one of the titles I ran across was this, "God has burning bushes set up in your life, are you seeing them?" No. As if to say this is the kind of stuff you can just wake up every morning and, you know, you run over here and God said something over here and God said something over here. Should we be looking for and expecting God to speak in this manner today that we're reading about in Exodus 3? I'm going to let the Bible answer this. Hebrews 1, we read the first part, let's read the second part. "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son."

A couple of years ago, my wife is a diabetic and she went into what's called ketoacidosis. Didn't know a thing about it. To me it looked like a really really bad bad bad flu. So over a few days she got worse, she got worse, she got worse, and so on a Sunday afternoon, I left church, went home, Candy was staying with her, and she said, "Dad, she's not getting any better." The thought dawned on me, "Maybe we ought to go to the hospital." I knew she didn't want to go. It's February, it was cold, just a nasty day. No, we're going to ride

this out. So as the day got longer, we're going to ride this out. I'll never forget this, about 7 o'clock I was sitting there and let me be real clear about this, I did not hear a voice. I have never heard a voice. Never and I don't expect to. I really don't, but what happened was I had this sense of urgency of, like, go to the hospital and go now. So I called Candy to see if she could help me. We took her to the hospital, went to the emergency room, let me be quick about this, the emergency room doctor, I told him, I said, "Look, we thought it was the flu," and I'll never forget him looking across the room at me and he said, "Look, if you would have waited, at minimum she would have been in a diabetic coma in the morning, at worse she would have been dead."

Now listen, here's what I want to say to you: did God speak to me? No, no, what it was, I think, was providence, not prophecy. In other words, I didn't hear a voice, I did not hear a voice as if God was speaking to me in any way, what was happening, I believe, is God was working providentially in my thoughts for which I will be forever thankful. I say that to say this, there's a difference between God working providentially and prophetically speaking. You see, when I get up every day now, that is not my primary source. I don't sit in the same chair, okay? I don't sit in that same chair and go, "Lord, the last time, you know, speak to me." I don't do that. I don't look at the tea leaves in my life and try to figure out, "God, is that you speaking?" Do you know why I don't? Because he's spoken to his people in these last days, today, through his Son. I don't look at the tea leaves, I don't listen for voices, I look at Jesus. I want to know what he said. I want to know what he said to his apostles to write down. In other words, look to Jesus. Look to what he said. Look to his life. Let that speak to you. That's God speaking to you.

Secondly, what is God's bush today? God spoke in a bush there, and you're like, "That bush was kind of like his temple, where he dwelt." Where does God dwell today? Where does God dwell today? In his people. In his church. You see, this fact wondrously solves our problem between a holy God and an unholy people.

You see, how can the unholy come into the presence of a holy God, what's the answer? Do we exaggerate our holiness? No, that won't work. Do we minimize the holiness of God? No, that won't work either. But what will work is we must be made holy ourselves and the wonderful truth is that Jesus Christ came and obeyed the law of God with perfect holiness and he died on the cross to take away our unholiness, and through faith in Christ, what? We are made holy. That's why the Bible calls us saints, holy ones. We have been made holy and he gives us his Spirit to empower us now to live out what we are. Notice in 1 Peter, "But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct. Strive for peace with everyone and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."

Quickly, can we come near to God today? Remember God said to Moses, "Don't come any closer. Don't come any closer." Can we draw near to God today? Oh yeah, there's what it says for New Testament believers in Hebrews 4, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Isn't that great? He looks at Moses, "Moses, don't you come any nearer." He looks at new covenant believers and says, "Come on. Come right up here to my throne. Come here, tell me what you need." Isn't that great? Because of Jesus we have

that access, isn't that wonderful? I mean, maybe that's what those folks were dancing about over there, I don't know. Maybe they read in the Scriptures, "Come near! Come near you who are afar off. Come near." That will make you want to dance, that'll make you want to shout, that'll make you praise the living God.

One final thing, we said does God speak today? Yes, he's spoken to us by his Son, but here's an important thing, an important thing, does God listen today? I know a lot of people who speak and they won't shut up. You know them, right? You say, "Yeah, I know that person." You're looking for an ear to hear, you're looking for somebody to hear and then you come and you tell them and then they go, "Oh yeah, I know what you're talking about. That happened to me." And you're going, "Look, I don't need anybody to compare, I just need somebody to listen." God speaks, yes he does, but he's the best listener.

Look at verse 9, look real close, "And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me." Charles Spurgeon was preaching in this chapter and here's what he said about God listening. Listen to this, he said, "Sinner, tell God your misery even now and he will hear your story. He is willing to listen even to that sad and wretched tale of yours about your multiplied transgressions, your hardness of heart, your rejections of Christ. Tell him all for he will hear it. Tell him what it is you want, what large mercy, what great forgiveness. Just lay your whole case before him. Do not hesitate for a single moment. He will hear it. He will be attendant to the voice of your cry."

Friend, I don't know what God it is that 80% of Americans believe in. The God that I believe in is the God of the Bible who is holy, he speaks, he listens, he saves, and for those in Jesus, he says, "Come on up here to my throne room. Come on up here. I want to give you the help you need."