

I AM – you’re not! (Exodus 3:10-18)

By Pastor Phil Layton (www.gcb.church)

Some of you have read the The Wind and the Willows. Its most famous character is Mr. Toad, but there’s a scene where the Rat and the Mole hear a heavenly voice calling like wind in the willow trees: “You shall look on my power at the helping hour... As I loose the snare you may glimpse me there... Helper and healer... Strays I find... wounds I bind...” It’s God speaking.

At first all the Mole can hear is the wind as they came to an island with willows. The Rat then whispered “in this holy place, here if anywhere, surely we shall find Him!” Then suddenly the Mole felt a great Awe fall upon him, an awe that turned his muscles to water, bowed his head, and rooted his feet to the ground. It was no panic terror—indeed he felt wonderfully at peace and happy—but it was an awe that smote and held him and, without seeing, he knew it could only mean that some [majestic] Presence was very, very near. With difficulty he turned to look for his friend and saw him at his side... stricken, and trembling violently...

Perhaps he would never have dared to raise his eyes, but...the call and the summons seemed still dominant and imperious. He might not refuse, were Death himself waiting to strike him instantly, once he had looked with mortal eye on things rightly kept hidden. Trembling he obeyed [the call], and raised his humble head... as he looked, he lived; and still, as he lived, he wondered... shaking. “Are you afraid?” [His friend replied] “Afraid?”... his eyes shining with unutterable love. “Afraid! Of Him? O, never, never! And yet—and yet—O, Mole, I am afraid!” Then the two animals, crouching to the earth, bowed their heads and did worship.’

That’s the right response of any creature before a holy God. We saw that awe last week in Isa 6 and this week we’ll pick up in Ex 3 where Moses also hears and looks at Him at a burning bush and hid his face, afraid to look at God. Other places say he trembled at the sight. Pastor Mark quoted from Proverbs: ‘*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is insight*’ (9:10). It’s been said fearing God ‘is both a doorway and a pathway. It is a new beginning, and it never ends.’¹ Others say it’s the beginning in the sense of the foundation of the house, it’s not just what gets you in the door, it needs to undergird or support everything. God later says at this same place to His people ‘*the fear of Him will keep you from sin*’ (20:20). True worship is a theme of Exodus, it’s why Moses tells Pharaoh ‘let my people go to worship.’

Ian Hamilton keeps saying over and over again ‘we always need to begin with God’

Last weekend at SGC a burning bush image was on the program for Ian Hamilton’s messages on the Holy Spirit. In Ex 3 the Holy One is a consuming fire, but in Christ His loved ones are not consumed. God’s majestic presence made the area around the bush holy ground and God’s voice called Moses to take off his sandals and not come near. We need this awe and assurance He gives Moses that He is the Helper and Healer of His people’s afflictions. God will loose the snare of Israel’s slavery and show His power. Man’s part: humbleness, reverence and obedience

Look at Ex 3:10 and listen to the voice of the Holy One we’re to fear: 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. ¹⁶ Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, ¹⁷ and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites ... [we'll stop there for now]

The title of this message I got from Steve Lawson, I can't improve on it: I AM ... you're not! Another way to say God is God and you're not. It wasn't about Moses, it's not about me or you. 3 questions from this text that are some of the most important questions anyone could ever ask:

1. Who am I?
2. Who is the LORD?
3. Who is Christ for His people?

We start where v. 12 starts: *But Moses said to God, "Who am I ...?"* We need to start there, too. Before this holy God, Moses feels fully inadequate: who am I to go to Pharaoh or deliver Israel? In Abraham's time, Job asked 'who am I that I should try to answer God...?' (Job 9:14 NLT). Abraham: 'I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes...' (Gen 18:27). Jacob: 'I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant' (Gen 32:10). Good response to God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob.

God's starting point for usefulness in His servant is unworthiness, lowliness, and meekness like Moses. It was said in 'the American Revolution, a relatively common phrase was the "meekness of Moses, which described the humility many were looking for in their prospective leaders. In a 1776 letter to a fellow revolutionary, John Adams, later to be the second president of the United States, wrote: "The management of so complicated and mighty a machine, as the United Colonies, requires the Meekness of Moses, the Patience of Job and the Wisdom of Solomon, added to the Valor of Daniel."² That's not our current president or our last one, but we need that

1 Tim 2 commands us to pray for our leaders, kings, president, governor on down

This isn't just what leaders need, this attitude we all need for what God calls us to: 'who am I?' This exact Hebrew phrase *who am I* is used 2 other times for humble acceptance of great grace:³ In 1 Sam 18:18: *David said to Saul, 'Who am I...that I should become the king's son-in-law?'* 2 Sam. 7:18 as God promised covenant grace: *King David...said, 'Who am I, O Sovereign LORD ...that you have brought me this far?'*⁴ 1 Chron 29:14 "Who am I and what are my people..." Elizabeth said 'who am I that the mother of my Lord should come and visit me?' Lk 1:43 NET.

Do you have this wonder? Look up, what is man that God is mindful of us or cares for us?

This Hope: who am I that the God of all the earth would care to know my name...feel my hurt?⁵ 'Who am I' is the right question. Moses didn't respond 'I understand why you would choose me - I'm the right guy, makes sense, I can do this.' No! Who am I to go to Pharaoh, he wanted me dead? Who am I to get Egypt's respect, they see shepherds as abominable and detestable? Who am I to deliver Israel, I tried delivering 1 Israelite 40 years ago and they rejected my leadership?

And notice God doesn't correct Moses here: 'Moses, don't talk like that; Who am I? You ARE somebody special. Who are you? You're the man of the hour! You ARE worthy and have the ability. Believe in yourself Moses, you got this, you can do it, you just need more self-esteem.' No! Look at God's reply in v. 12: *He said, "But I will be with you..."* Who am I was the right question, the answer is **but God; He's with me!** Moses may be incompetent but God is present! We feel weakness, but if God is with us and for us, who can be against us? ***I will be with you!***

Josh 3:7 'as I was with Moses, so I will be with you' (see also Josh 1:9, Judges 6:16, etc)

Application: AS PARENTS, WITH FRIENDS WONDERING 'WHO AM I' LIKE MOSES Feeling fearful or incapable? **But God will be with you.** What we can't, He can and will. Not 'you can do anything you set your mind to,' it's 'God is with you for anything He calls you to.'

So don't stop with 'who I am?' look to the God who says 'I AM' and 'I will'

That takes us from 1st question who am I (v. 11-12) to a 2nd: who is the LORD? (v 13-15)

This 2nd point and ? comes at end of v. 13: *if they ask what is his name, what shall I tell them?*

'God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,' what's your name, in other words, nature or character?

- God in v. 13 is the Hebrew *Elohim*, generic word for God but not specific to Israel's God
- Abraham also knew God as *Adonai* (Lord), *El Shaddai* (God Almighty), *El Elyon* (God Most High) *El Olam* (God everlasting) and *Yahweh/Jehovah Jireh* (the LORD provides)⁶
- Moses isn't just asking what you prefer to go by, it's by what power (in the name of...).

i.e., what authority or attribute do you want Israel and Egypt to know to know you?

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.*

In v. 15 the LORD in all caps is related in Hebrew to the 1st person verb '*I am*,' but it's a noun and name (God isn't a proper name). *He is*, LORD is a 3rd person form that the old writers and hymns transliterated as Jehovah, but today most think a more likely pronunciation is Yahweh. Whenever you see LORD in all caps, think Yahweh is His name, and He is the *I Am who I Am*. When v. 15 says '*this is my name*,' properly speaking, the LORD's personal name is Yahweh. This is His covenant name for His people, in the context of v. 13: '*I am*' and '*I will be with you*'

Yahweh IS and will be WITH His covenant people (Abraham-Isaac-Jacob-the-family-of-faith)

Kevin DeYoung says v. 13-15 are '3 of the most monumental foundational awe-inspiring verses in the Bible.'⁷ A book God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus says 'the entire Exodus narrative is an exposition of the name of Exod 3:14... the whole book of Exodus is concerned with explaining God's name... The rest of the book of Exodus, and in particular the manner in which the Lord will deliver Israel, will shed further light on the meaning of the name... It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of 'I am Yahweh' in the exodus narrative, for knowing the Lord is the theme and ultimate goal of the plagues...'⁸

LORD speaks of sovereignty and His saving nature will be revealed in the Exodus story

The implication of I AM is you're not. Yahweh is not like us. Several implications of His name: **INDEPENDENT** – "I" – already implied by a burning bush not depending on the bush for fuel. The "I" who speaks is independent of His creation or creatures, above and beyond all things. He doesn't need us, depends on no one and nothing, but everyone and everything depends on Him. Israel's deliverance won't be dependent on Moses and PTL our salvation doesn't depend on us!

Application to Moses and Israel and us: You're not independent, depend on Him

SELF-EXISTENT – “I AM” – Eternally being is part of His being. Existence is His essence.⁹ He has no beginning or end, as the Shorter Catechism says ‘infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.’ Or as we sing, ‘the great unchangeable I Am, the King of Glory and of grace.’¹⁰ He changes not and so His compassions fail not. He always IS who He is, He never becomes, He always just IS. Alexander MacLaren said: ‘God lives forevermore, a flame that does not burn out; therefore his resources are inexhaustible, his power unwearied...His gifts diminish not...he gives and is none the poorer. He works and is never weary...he loves and loves forever...the fire burns on...’¹¹

Application: we owe our existence to Him in whom we live, move, and have our being

SELF-SUFFICIENT – in this context, Moses feels insufficient and asks what’s your name, so God reveals Himself as the self-sufficient *I AM WHO I AM*. Nothing sustains God, He sustains everything, and the implication for Moses and Israel is He will sustain you in any difficult task. Moses felt weak but needed to trust His grace is sufficient, His power is perfected in weakness. Matthew Henry:¹² ‘The greatest and best man in the world must say, By the grace of God *I am what I am*; but God [alone] says absolutely...*I am that I am*.’ He flat out IS and it’s grace for us

Application: admit you’re insufficient and weak and trust His sufficient grace and power

KEEPING-COVENANT – v. 14 ends telling God’s covenant people *I AM has sent me to you*.¹⁵ *God also said to Moses, Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The LORD [covenant name Yahweh] 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*

...

And then v. 17 repeats the covenant promised land. Ex 2:24 says God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When God first identifies Himself to Moses, if you look at 3:7: it’s ‘*I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham...*’ Not ‘I was,’ but ‘I am.’ He’s still their covenant-keeping God beyond their lifetime. Jesus used this verse and verb tense to correct the Sadducees who didn’t believe in a resurrection or life after death (why they’re so sad, you see).

Mk 12 says ‘*Jesus answered ... you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God ... have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke ... ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken*’ (v. 24-28 NKJV). In other words, right now present tense God is the God of all His covenant people in history, they’re alive with Him. The I AM is still in covenant relationship with His people after they die, keeping His covenant.

Turn to gospel of John chapter 8 to see another time Jesus applied what God says in Ex 3

Moses will say later ‘*Yahweh your God, He is...the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousand generations...*’ (Dt 7:9 LSB). Daniel will later write ‘*I prayed to Yahweh...the great and awesome God, keeping the covenant and loyal love...*’ (9:4 LEB). He is the same covenant-keeping God yesterday, today, and forever, and of God of loved ones who die in Christ. The God of our Fathers can say of families here ‘I am the God of Dean, of Kemp, of Don, of Joan, of Wes, of Marion, of Ty, of Kevin, of Jerry, of Bill, of Alvin, of Frank, of Howard, of Bob, of Art’ ... you can add your departed beloved or babies that died, I believe. Trust the *I AM* who IS the independent, self-sufficient, self-existent, covenant-keeping Yahweh

Rev 1:8 ‘I am ... who was and who is and who is to come, the Almighty.’

That’s who this LORD is. Now a 3rd & final question of application: who is Christ for us? Look at Jn 8:58, speaking to Israel’s elders, *Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself...*

Why pick up stones? For blasphemy, they understood 'I Am' as a claim to the name of the Lord who's eternally existent. 'I Am before Abraham' is the Lord's name in vain if you're not. They knew Jesus is claiming to be the God of Abraham before Abraham, the I AM of the OT! A man saying he's an angel is off his rocker, but if He says He's the Rock of Ages, we pick up rocks!

Jn 10 has 2 more 'I am' statements, they say 'we...stone you...a man, claim[ing] to be God'¹³

Jesus says '**I am** the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved ... In Ex 3 God is who saves. **I am** the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me ... **I am** the resurrection and the life...everyone who lives and believe in me shall never die. Do you believe' ... Jesus is our only hope and only way to a holy God, trusting His life, death and resurrection for your sin. He says '**I am** the good shepherd [who] lays down his life for the sheep.' His sheep follow His voice and obey Him. Do you? If not, turn from your sin, trust Jesus the great 'I AM.'

Go to ch 18 and there's an even more powerful encounter when they arrest Him in Gethsemane. The gospels tell us there was a great multitude of both police and armed soldiers with weapons in the garden, but it's dark and they need to identify Christ. 18:4 *Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?"*⁵ *They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he."* [The original is just 'I am,' ego eimi, the exact same phrase in their translation of Ex 3] *Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.*⁶ *When Jesus said to them, "I am he,"* [lit. 'I am'] *they drew back and fell to the ground.*

Your Bible may have *he* in italics, meaning it's added, or one translation has 'I AM' in all caps. Every Jew there would have recognized those same words from the burning bush, and as Jesus says 'I AM,' they all fall down. They feel the force of Him saying 'I AM' and feel the force of the eternal powerful I AM knocking them off their feet. Jesus is Yahweh of the burning bush! He's in sovereign charge, and basically says 'you want to arrest Me, you and what army? The guys on the ground? I'm the I Am, you're not! You can't take me in, I willingly turn Myself in.'

So turn back to Ex 3 and see Jesus is the I Am. What Yahweh was for Moses, Christ is for us.

What the Lord says in the burning bush is what the Lord Jesus says to His people in the gospel

- v. 10 '*Come I will send you...*' (Jesus says '*come*' and '*even so, I am sending you*' Jn 20:21)
- v. 12 '*I will be with you...*' (what Jesus says as He sends in the Great Commission, Mt 28:20)
 - '*This shall be the sign for you*' (Christ's birth announced by angels this phrase, Lk 2:12)
- 15 '*This is my name forever and thus I am to be remembered...*'
 - o The NT calls us to remember Jesus and praise His name forever, the name LORD
- v. 16b '*I have observed* [NASB 'concerned about...' LSB 'I indeed care']
 - o The disciples asked Jesus in the storm '*don't you care...?*' Jesus arose and told the wind 'peace be still' and told them not to fear (Mk 4). Jesus cares and is in control
- v. 17 '*I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction ...*'
 - Ultimate promised land for believers in Heb 11, other texts?
- v. 18 ends with '*that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God*'
 - o NT calls us to offer up a sacrifice of praise, present our bodies as living sacrifice
 - o All this for Jesus 'the great unchangeable I Am, the King of glory and of grace'!

And like Moses said in v. 11 'who am I,' I heard of this song of Jesus at the GCBC Bible study

When I think of how He came so far from glory
 Came to dwell among the lowly such as I
 To suffer shame and such disgrace On Mount Calvary take my place
 Then I ask myself this question Who am I?

Who am I that the King would bleed and die for,
 Who am I that He would pray not my will, Thy Lord
 The answer I may never know Why He ever loved me so,
 But to that old rugged cross He'd go For who am I?

When I'm reminded of His words I'll leave Him never ... life forever
 Oh I wonder what I could have done To deserve God's only Son
 To fight my battles until they're won For who am I?¹⁴

¹ Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., *Preaching the Word: Proverbs—Wisdom That Works* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 25.

² Dennis Prager, *Exodus*, p. 42.

³ “The exact expression, “Who am I” (*mī’ānōkī*) occurs two other times in the Old Testament, in each instance as part of expressing polite *acceptance* of an honor rather than as an attempt to decline it.” Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 118.

⁴ NIV.

⁵ “Who Am I?” Also performed by Casting Crowns.

⁶ Genesis 14, 17, 21, 22.

⁷ www.sermonaudio.com (Kevin DeYoung sermon on Exodus 3:13-15).

⁸ W. Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 28, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2012), 34-40.

⁹ Duane A. Garrett says God ‘is the only being for whom existence is a part of His essence,’ *A Commentary on Exodus: Commentary*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2014), 207.

¹⁰ Charities Lees Bancroft, “Before the Throne of God Above.”

¹¹ Alexander MacLaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* (Eerdmans, 1952), 1:23-24.

¹² Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (New York: Revell), 1:284.

¹³ John 10:9, 11, 30

¹⁴ https://www.hymnlyrics.org/newlyrics_w/who_am_i.php