

SLIDE 1

Introduction (Sermon, of course, not preached word for word)

Context/Background: Exodus is the second book of the Bible and follows Genesis. We learned at the end of Genesis that Joseph and his eleven brothers had settled in Egypt. Each brother's family becoming one of the twelve tribes of Israel, the name God gave their father, Jacob. In Exodus Chapter 1 we learn that the Israelites had become numerous and the new Pharaoh wanted to make sure they were controlled. The Egyptians enslaved the Israelites and at the close of Chapter 1, Pharaoh orders all the male babies of the Hebrews to be killed. In Chapter two, a lot happens. Jonathan spent much of last week on the birth of Moses and his being saved by Pharaoh's daughter. Chapter 2 tells us that a now forty-year-old Moses kills an Egyptian who was mistreating one of the Israelite slaves and flees Egypt to avoid Pharaoh killing him. Moses assists the seven daughters of Jethro, marries Zipporah, has a son, and becomes a shepherd. While all that was happening, it says that the current Pharaoh died, the Israelites cried out because of their oppression, God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and God was concerned for his people.

This begins Chapter 3. Moses is 80 years old when he meets God in the desert at the burning bush. So, Chapter 2 covered 80 years! Chapters 3 - 20 will cover only about a year of time!

One interesting tidbit about Moses' life is that it is broken into three 40-year periods. He spent 40 years in Pharaoh's court, 40 years in Midian, and 40 years leading the Israelites to the Promised Land. He died at 120.

There are easily more than a half dozen different exegetical sermons that could be preached on Exodus Chapter 3. Given that we are doing a survey/overview of Exodus, I want to make sure we cover the majority of the chapter and also highlight the most important theological concepts presented.

SLIDE 2

I believe that this quote captures my thoughts on the importance of the Old Testament and what I want to make sure we accomplish tonight.

“God reveals His nature and His purpose through His Word. To ignore the Old Testament is like making a new friend and never asking about his past. God is the same in the Old Testament as He is in the New, and studying the Old Testament allows us to know Him better and more fully understand our place in His plan.” – Got Questions Ministries

I think the most important things we need to pull from this passage are the things we can learn about God’s nature and character and the things that help us more fully understand our place in his story.

SLIDE 3

When I was a kid pictures that my stepfather painted for the annual Ratheon art show hung in our living room. They all depicted scenes from the Bible. There was one painting from Revelation which showed God on his judgment throne. God had a white robe and his where his face should have been was a ball of light. That image still pops in my mind quite easily when someone asks me to imagine God. How about you? If I ask you to imagine God, what do you imagine?

SLIDES 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

SLIDE 9

The truth is, we all have thoughts about what God is like. Most of us don't spend a lot of time worrying about what God looks like. All of us have an opinion on what God is like. There are so many people and so many churches that try to define God differently than he defines himself. I had a co-worker, who told me that he was a good person and at the end if he has done more good things than bad things God will let him into heaven because God is just and loving, and after all, that would be the just and loving thing to do. Have you ever heard anyone say, or have you thought yourself, well, I just don't think God would do that, or I don't think God meant that for today, or I don't like the God or the Old Testament, I just focus on Jesus. Well, God is a real thing, the ultimate real thing, and things are defined by what they actually are, and not what we think about them. God is self-defining, and this passage in Exodus is famous as God reveals his personal name to Moses, I am, or Yahweh. But, even before that, we can learn a lot about God in this passage, so let's start at the beginning.

BUILD SLIDE

God is superior to us:

“Do not come any closer,”: Much like the fire in the bush, God is both alluring and dangerous. Fire often draws us closer, but get too close and you get burned. Well, God also draws us closer, but if we don't respect the power, we can get hurt. Keeping appropriate distance from God is a theme in Exodus that gets repeated.

BUILD SLIDE

“Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”: God is not like us, he is holy. He is set apart, distinctive, righteous, etc...

“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.: This is the proper response by Moses, for we see in Exodus 33:20 that God tells Moses he cannot see his face or he would die. In fact, Isaiah 6:2 tells us that the seraphim cover their face with two of their wings in God’s presence.

There is a fear, a reverence, an awe that goes along with approaching God that should not be lost because of his grace and love. He is both

SLIDE 10 – BUILD SLIDE with each point

God is with us:

7 The Lord said, “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.

SLIDE 11 – BUILD SLIDE with each point

8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey

SLIDE 12 – BUILD SLIDE with each point.

I have indeed seen the misery: God is sees, God is watching

I have heard them crying: God hears, God is listening

I am concerned about their suffering: God cares, God is concerned

I have come down to rescue them: God meets us where we are

and to bring them... into a good and spacious land: God desires to give good gifts

Honestly, you could preach whole sermons on those five concepts!

The God we serve is both superior to us and with us. It is the fact that he is superior to us that makes the fact he is with us impressive.

SLIDE 13 – BUILD SLIDE

God is:

God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’”

This statement is antithetical to our logic and our language. We generally say I am a student, I am a mother, I am a cancer survivor, I am a soccer player, I am an artist, I democrat, etc... But God is not defined by anything outside of himself. He is who he is.

SLIDE 14 – BUILD SLIDE with each point

A better literal translation is I be who I be and it can be past, present, or future. I have always been who I have always been, I am who I am, I will be who I will be. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (past) has come to rescue his people (present) and bring them to the Promised Land (future). God tells Moses in verse 12 “this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.” He is basically saying, if you want proof that I am the one sending you, the proof is that you will be successful, the proof is in the Exodus. Moses will discover who God is by God’s actions. God says, look at my track record, see what I am doing now, and trust me with the future.

God is able to do anything he wants to do and no person or thing can force him to do anything. He is only constrained by his own character, nature, and promises. God is dependable because he has the power to carry out his promises, like the ones in versus 16-22, and because he is not just I was, the God of the Bible that we read about, but he is I am and I will be!

SLIDE 15 – BUILD SLIDE with each point

Now, let's try to understand what we can learn about our place in God's story.

God has a plan to rescue his people and bring them to the Promised Land. God could do that all by himself, he doesn't need Moses. As we discussed a lot during the fruitfulness on the frontlines series, God chooses to use people to carry out his plans. Moses had the same reaction many of us have probably had when we felt God calling us to do something: Who am I? Moses feels inadequate, something that will be fleshed out in next week's sermon on Chapter 4. But, God has the perfect answer; I will be with you. When people tell us they aren't good enough, we often try to list all the things they do well and convince them they will succeed. If we do say, I will be with you, it often isn't very comforting. But, God does not argue with Moses about Moses' abilities, he simply assures him that He, God, will be with him.

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The whole experience with planting a church has allowed me to understand even better this concept. When I was on the elder board at Immanuel and we started talking about planting a church here in Westford, as it started to become clear that I was being asked to lead that team, I thought who am I? When I was asked to be the worship leader, I thought who am I? When Jonathan asked me to preach I thought who am I? And, even preparing this, my 4th sermon, I thought who am I? With the work I am a part of at the Orphanage in Haiti I am always thinking who am I? Every time I fail as a parent I think who am I? I never had a burning bush, or an audible voice telling me to do these things, and I have never had the audible voice back saying I will be with you. But given Moses' response in Chapter 4, whose to say it would help. But, a strong sense that God is calling me to do these things and the very real feeling that God is with me keeps me going. As it has been said so many times before I

am sure, including on a plaque that hung in home I grew up in, God doesn't care about your ability or your inability, just your availability.

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

So, I think we have pulled out some of the most important things we can learn from Exodus Chapter 3 about the nature of God and about our part in his story. And, I would sum it up this way:

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God sees, hears, and cares for people and uses his followers to rescue, guide, and bless one another.

SLIDE 18 – BUILD SLIDE

Before we close, I want to spend just a little time on one other thing that is important to me when looking at Old Testament texts, tying them to Jesus and the New Testament. They are all part of one story.

When Jesus was talking with the Jews on the Mount of Olives in John Chapter 8, they were confused about his claims to be the long awaited Messiah, he said, “before Abraham was born, I am!”, the very same name God uses for himself in Exodus Chapter 3. Jesus is saying that he is God in

the flesh. God with us. The same character God showed in Exodus 3 as well as he came down to rescue the people from the Egyptians. This time, God has come down to rescue people from their sins.

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And, when Jesus was leaving his disciples, and had given them their final, and difficult instructions to make disciples, the great commission, he didn't give them a pep talk about being good enough or smart enough. No, he simply told them that he would be with them. That was enough for Moses, it was enough for the disciples, and it should be enough for us.

There are countless places we cannot go without the right person. Have you ever been in that situation? You get to a security checkpoint and the person you are with says, "they're with me" and you are waved right through. What an amazing and humbling experience all at the same time.

SLIDE 20

My stepfather probably got a lot wrong in the paintings he did over the years, but when that day comes that we are face to face with God, it isn't going to matter who we are or what we have accomplished. It is not a list of abilities or merits that will get us into heaven. It will be Jesus saying to God the Father, I know them, they're with me.

Please pray with me.

Prayer, and don't forget the offering.

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Benediction: Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.