

The “I AM” Determines Who “I” am

22nd Sun. after Pent. – 11/06/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Exodus 3:1-15 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 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’**”.”

Introduction

✘ This Biblical story is widely known, especially in Sunday School circles and children’s books, as “Moses and the Burning Bush”. And while that is not technically inaccurate – because after all there is a burning bush (sort of) along with Moses in the story, I would submit that calling this the story of “Moses and the Burning Bush” misses the main point. Why? because it leaves out the main character – God, as well as His work that is far more miraculous than just showing up in a burning bush that is never consumed.

➔ The real point, you see, of this familiar text in Holy Scripture is that of identity. Who is it that reveals Himself to Moses; what are His defining characteristics and promises and how does His act of defining Himself to Moses determine not only Moses’ identity, but even yours and mine as well?

✘ Let’s explore this wonderfully, defining text about both God’s and our identities.

I. Who is the Great I AM?

✘ One of the most important characteristics of our God is that He actively shows up and takes part in all of His creation. He is not, as some philosophers from the early 1800s have led a growing majority of people to believe today, just the “Great Clock Maker” who created the universe and our planet but has since stepped away from all contact to just allow the laws of nature that He put in place to dictate all that happens.

➔ No, the one true God has actively had His hand at work throughout the annals of history, engaging with His people in very physical and specific ways, just as we see Him grab Moses’ attention while he is out tending to his father-in-law’s sheep.

✘ Verse two identifies Him as “the angel of the LORD...in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush”. Two things are especially significant with this title: 1) the presence of the definite article (the word “the”) shows that this is not just “an” angel of the LORD, that is “one” of a myriad of possible angels. No, this is “the” angel of the LORD, meaning that there is one, and only one who is like this guy. And 2) verse four tells us this is “God” Himself who “called to [Moses] out of the bush”. Throughout the Old Testament, “the Angel of the LORD” is understood to be the 2nd person in the Holy Trinity before He took on human flesh as the Son of God inside of Mary’s womb. (We’ll pull that together tightly later on.)

➔ But to back up this truly unique and holy essence of God here, Moses is directed to take off his sandals because “the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (v. 5).

✘ Yes, Moses quickly knew the seriousness of this because verse six says he “hid his face for he was afraid to look at God.” The contrast defined in this interaction is significant. Because God is perfect in every way to the core of His essence, He cannot be directly in the presence of any soul that is corrupted by sin or His holiness would be compromised. For this reason Yahweh says in Exodus 33:20, “you cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live.”

➔ And yet, God loves the people of His Creation with such a great love that He finds unique ways to physically come to His people in order to reveal Himself and convey His rescuing and saving grace as no other being could ever do.

- ✘ And what does Yahweh show us about Himself in His words to Moses? He shows that He truly is aware of and active in the lives of those in His Creation. In verses 7-8 He says, “I see; I know and I come...”. He sees the affliction of the Hebrews who are in slavery under Pharaoh in Egypt. He truly cares about each and every person because He “knows their sufferings”.
 - ➔ And since He is the God who defines what true love is, He cannot just sit idly by to watch it all. No, He says, “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...flowing with milk and honey...”. This is so important for you and me to understand that God reiterates His awareness and His plan twice in this text alone!
- ✘ These are the important characteristics that begin to shape God’s identity for Moses and all of us to understand.

II. Moses’ Identity Crisis

- ✘ But we also see that Moses is really struggling with all of this. He struggles to fully comprehend how this person talking to him from the bush can actually be the one who says in the present tense, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (v.6). Those guys lived at different times over the span of hundreds of years, and none of them were currently alive on earth when we find Moses in our text.
 - ➔ Yet, here He says, “I AM” God right now, just as “I AM” God for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- ✘ Once Moses hears that God intends to send him to Pharaoh to bring God’s people out of Egypt; out of the oppressive hand of the very king that wants to kill Moses because 40 years earlier Moses defended a Hebrew slave that was being beaten by one of Pharaoh’s taskmasters, Moses reacts in understandable fear and apprehension.
 - ➔ Now we see how far off base Moses has allowed his own identity crisis to take him. Immediately after Yahweh has revealed Himself to Moses; even showing him physically how powerful and connected He is, what’s most important to Moses is not God; God’s power and identity but instead he is sinfully turned in upon himself. “Who am I”, Moses asks, “that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (v.11)
 - ➔ Is it fear of Pharaoh’s might, doubt about whether God’s power can overcome Pharaoh, just plain laziness or an unwillingness to commit to the unknown, or the bigger question about whether Moses himself is competent or sufficiently gifted to accomplish what is certainly a herculean task?
 - ➔ My answer is that it is probably all of the above. And I say this because, just like you, I have struggled with every one of those thoughts, doubts and fears countless times. And now, in light of the “opportunity” that I see God presenting to Moses, I realize that my challenges and my troubles and my “opportunities” were not nearly as severe or difficult. Yet that’s how Satan works in our sinful hearts, isn’t it? He loves to throw those questions of identity in our face all the time.
- ✘ For Moses it was one after another excuses. Verse 13, “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?”
 - ➔ After our text God gave Moses miraculous signs, his staff becoming a serpent (4:3), his hand becoming leprous and then being healed again (4:6), and a portion of the Nile’s water turning to blood on dry ground (4:9) as proof that He was who He said He was. Yet still Moses tried to tell God that He didn’t know what He was doing, saying, “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue”

(4:10). That one should sound familiar to something that has come out of our own mouths, or at least has played through in our own minds before, right?

III. "I AM" Determines who "I" am.

- ✘ And yet God sets Moses and all of His people straight about who and what it is that truly defines our identity. It's not about mine, yours or Moses' sufficiency or lack thereof. It never was; never will be! Instead it's about properly understanding, believing and trusting in and submitting to the identity, the power, the love and the care of the Great I AM!
 - ➔ In verses 14-15, "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'" "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" ... 'Yahweh...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." The point that God makes in revealing that His name is "I AM" is that there never was, never is, and never will be, a time when He is not God! He "is God" before Creation, through the earthly history of this Creation, and forevermore into the promised new Creation!
- ✘ And so, not only did the Son of God come to Moses in the bush, and actively work in and through Moses to lead His people out of slavery in Egypt, making them His chosen people; not only was this done at the exclusion Moses' sufficiency, but Jesus did it by His own miraculous work in making Moses a competent prophet and leader for His people. Yes, Jesus, the Son of God came at just the right time in human flesh to save people of every generation and time and nation from the slavery of sin and death to forever change them and empower them as God's chosen people right now today – whenever on the timeline of history that it "is today" for each body and soul ever to exist.
 - ➔ John 3:16 begins to show us how Jesus is God's physical fulfillment of His earlier manifestation in the bush before Moses. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life". Just as it was in Moses' day, "God saw" the affliction of His people in sin, and "He knew" of our sufferings, and so what did He do? "He came" down from heaven in the person of Jesus Christ "to deliver" us from our condemnation and to "bring us up" out of this fallen and corrupt land to "The Promised Land" of eternal paradise in His glory!
- ✘ In the Gospel of John, Jesus intentionally identifies Himself with the name of Yahweh which is the Hebrew pronunciation of "I AM", through His famous "I AM" statements.
 - ➔ For example He says in John 6:35-40, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst. ... For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me. ... For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day".
 - ➔ And in John 14:6, Jesus identifies the one and only way to salvation and eternal life. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me".
 - ➔ Also John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep". Jesus points us there to see His willing sacrifice on the cross in our place, to pay once and for all, for the penalty of all of our guilt.
 - ➔ John 11:25 is where Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live".
- ✘ So how does all of this determine who "I" am? In Galatians 3:26-27 Paul says, "in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put

on Christ". You see, your identity; my identity is not about you or me at all! It is about Jesus! About who Jesus is as the Great "I AM" and what Jesus has done for you and me as the almighty, ever-gracious Protector and Savior of the world!

→ Just as with Moses, Jesus saved us for eternity in heaven yes, but He sends each and every one of us out into the world to tell them "I AM has sent me to you" so that you too might be saved by His love and grace. And before either you or I might be tempted to make excuses or doubt our sufficiency as a witness to Christ, hear the promise God gives us in 2 Corinthians 3:5-6, "Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant...".

Conclusion

⌘ Dear Christians, we need not worry nor question who we are. We belong to Christ, and in Christ – the great "I AM" that makes all the difference as He works in us and through us every day into eternity. Amen.