

Chosen for Mission

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[0 : 0 0] for a few minutes to Exodus chapter 3. Exodus chapter 3, the second book of the Old Testament. I'm very sorry that we haven't got our former missionary Ralph Martin with us tonight.

Ralph was to be here and to be speaking to us tonight, but I'm afraid he's laid aside in bed with a very nasty virus. So we're praying for Ralph to get better. But I do want to just bring us to a close, really, of this portion of our service this evening with some thinking about the Word of God.

And on Wednesdays we've been studying at our lunchtime services this great chapter, Exodus chapter 3, under the title The Real God of the Old Testament. Really, I suppose, trying to correct some of the complete distortions of Richard Dawkins in his book The Delusional God.

Well, it turns out it is Dr. Dawkins who's deluded, or at least dishonest, in fact, we have to say, because his portrayal of the God of the Old Testament is really quite erroneous.

The flyleaf of his book says this, that he attacks God in all its forms, from the sex-obsessed, cruel tyrant of the Old Testament to the more benign but still illogical celestial watchmaker favored by some Enlightenment thinkers.

[1 : 2 0] Well, it really is one of the most ignorant books I've ever read in my life. And when you read the Old Testament and you look at the evidence of the God that's presented in the Old Testament, we find something very different indeed, and we're seeing that to our prophet, I think, on Wednesday lunchtimes.

But on Wednesday past, we looked at some of these verses, and I want to just pick out one or two thoughts this evening, just in these verses that lie at the heart of this chapter, really, verses 11 to 15 of Exodus chapter 3.

God has met Moses in the burning bush. He has told him that he is not a distant God, but he's a God who sees with his eyes and hears with his ear, and indeed feels with his heart the plight of his people, and he is stretching out his strong arm to save them.

And in verse 10, he says to Moses, Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt. And not without some, I suppose, understanding, we can see Moses' response.

He said to God, Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt? God said to Moses, But I will be with you, and there shall be this sign to you that I've sent you, and you've brought the people out of Egypt.

[2 : 4 9] You shall serve God, all of you on this mountain. 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? God said to Moses, I am who I am, or as the footnote has it down at the bottom there, I will be what I will be.

And he said, Say this to the people of Israel, I am or I will be has sent me to you. God also said to Moses, Say this to the people of Israel, The Lord.

Again, if you look at the footnote, the word there is the personal name of God, Yahweh or Jehovah, sometimes it used to be pronounced. The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, he has sent me to you.

This is my name forever. Thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. Now keep that passage open before you.

[3 : 53] I want to just say a few words about this name that God reveals here to Moses. It is a name that is of huge significance all through the scriptures.

And it tends to pass our understanding really because we don't tend to give a huge significance to names. We tend to choose names that we like. But the significance of names does live on in some of our surnames, for example.

I don't know if we have anybody here called Mr. Fisher. But if that's your surname, then it's very likely that somewhere in the past in your ancestry there's been somebody who's a fisherman.

And he was called Jack the Fisher or Jack Fisher. Likewise, if Baker is in your name, well, sometime in the past I've no doubt that one of your ancestors was called Tom the Baker.

And Tom Baker became his name and it stuck. So we recognise these meanings to names and we certainly recognise them, don't we, when we use nicknames. Nicknames do still tend to convey quite a lot of quite a lot of meaning.

[5 : 04] I had a friend at school called Rubik and he was called Rubik because he had a square head and and he's still called that to this day. I had an old flatmate at university called Fat Boy.

I don't have to explain why that was. But I had another friend who was actually a minister who was known in our family as the news of the world. And you can guess what that was all about.

But these names we give to people and they do convey meaning. Now this name that God speaks to Moses here is different from that. It's not a nickname but it is a name full of meaning.

It's not a name that somebody else has given God. It's a name that God himself gives to his people to tell them to tell us who he is and what he's like and what his character is.

And we need that because the word God on its own is virtually meaningless today. If you were saying 70 odd percent of people in this country would claim to be Christian you go out on the street tonight and ask people do they believe in God?

[6 : 09] I guess 70 percent maybe more will say yes I do. But what on earth does that mean? Which God? What kind of God? Any number of gods in the world today any number of vague notions but God gives his name to tell us exactly who he is.

And this name the name the Lord Yahweh it tells us everything about God in a very wonderful way and knowing that name means that we don't just know information about God but it means we do actually know personally in a relational way this God.

Sometimes I guess some of us have rather pet names for somebody in the family might be your spouse might be a son or a daughter and very few people know that name and if you know that name and use it it conveys a depth of intimacy and relationship and that's the case with the name of the Lord.

You will notice if you're a Christian that many other Christians I'm sure yourself included you'll use that name you'll speak about the Lord where somebody else might just talk about God you'll probably much more frequently speak about the Lord when you're speaking to other Christians and that means you know his name it conveys something about you it's not just a distant God you're talking about you know the Lord and in these verses we're told above all that this is the God who by his very name tells us that he's the one who's present with us he's not distant he's not disinterested but he is present with his people and he's present for his people he is above everything else the God who is present look at verse 12 one of these wonderful words that he gives to Moses he says to Moses I am present with you I will be with you he's a God who's present with his prophet who am I says Moses to do all of this well we can understand he felt like that how could he possibly feel that he could deliver the people of Israel but God says it's not who you are it's who I am that counts all of Moses inadequacy all of his inability is met by God's adequacy by God's ability he's the God who will be present with his prophet and that is what will guarantee the future and he tells him that it's so certain that he will look back on it one day when all the people are worshipping on this mountain and he will know the power of what it meant that God would be with him don't you think that was a wonderful comfort from Moses but you know it's a wonderful encouragement isn't it for every one of God's people when God gives you a task to do when God says to you you are to go and do this and you think to yourself immediately who am I that I could do anything like that

I'm sure every one of our serving missionaries that was mentioned tonight overseas feels exactly that I'm sure every one of those we've heard from who's about to go out and serve God in a new capacity find themselves saying that all the time who on earth are we to do such a thing but you see God says it doesn't depend on you and your ability it depends on me and I will be with you I'm the God who is with you that's my very nature now God calls Moses to trust him of course he does he has to trust God's promise but the promise of God's presence is enough it's enough to guarantee that God will be with him and it's enough for you and I as well when God calls us to do hard things like well just what Moses had to do speak up for God in a hostile culture go and be the one who speaks the words of truth from the one true God when all around will disagree and will be against you and maybe beat you for it

[10:30] God says I am with you remember in the New Testament the Apostle Paul when he was in that very hostile situation in Corinth and Corinth was a very hostile city indeed to the gospel it was a very sexually immoral city it was a very free society and Paul met great hostility you just read about it in Acts chapter 18 he must have been perhaps feeling very weak and very despairing and very very inadequate for the task and do you remember what happened God appeared to him in a dream didn't he the Lord Jesus spoke to him and said to Paul don't be afraid go on speaking don't be silent for I am with you and I have many people in this city said the Lord many people who are yet to be saved and on the strength of that promise of God's presence we read that Paul stayed there for a year and a half preaching daily the message of the Lord Jesus and of course the church in Corinth was born well God is present with his prophets he was present with Moses he was present with Paul he's present with all his prophets today with everybody that he calls to speak a word for him in a hostile culture

I will be with you says the unchanging God but not just with Moses and if you like the special people this God is present with all his people look at verses 13 to 15 you see Moses says well what am I going to tell them when they ask me what your name is we don't really know why he thought they would ask him maybe maybe they were wanting to test if he was a true Israelite only a true Israelite would know the special covenant name of God maybe they were just scornful and saying well who is this God who is supposed to be interested in us look at us we've been slaves for generations who is this God you're telling us about well God's answer is wonderful look at verse 14 what shall we say to them tell them I am or I will be what I will be and tell them that I will be with them just as I promised to be with you he'll be with them and he will be to them and for them everything that they need him to be despite the plight of their situation see he's the God who is present for his people

Israel keeps repeating that again and again doesn't he say to the people of Israel say to the people of Israel speak to the people of Israel he's the God who is present with his people and I am he says sufficient for everything and I will be everything that they need me to be that that Hebrew word I am that verb to be doesn't just mean to exist well that's obvious it's presupposed but it means something much more than that it means to be present and God is saying I am actively present I am powerfully present with my people tell my people I am with them and I will be with them to be whatever they need me to be in fact that whole essence of who

God is that he is the present one with his people is actually included and expressed in his very name you see verse 15 that word the Lord you'll see the footnote tells us Yahweh well it's related to the very verb to be so you see when he says I am or I will be it's Hayah in the Hebrew and when he says his name it's Yahweh the words are related it's as though he's saying everything that's in his very essence his presence as a God is squeezed into that word into that name and it's the special name for God that speaks of his intimate presence with his people that tells us that he is always with us his essence if you like is his presence he will be with us and that's the hallmark of the God of the Old Testament right back to the beginning the promise to Abraham he'll give them a land he'll give them people he'll have a program for world redemption through him but he will be with them present to bless him blessing all those who bless him cursing those who curse him and that's the

God that we're talking about the God who is not a cruel tyrant he's not an ogre he's not distant and unknowable but a God who's present who's with his people and who will always be present with his people and all of that all of that is just squeezed into that word that one word Yahweh Lord he's the sufficient God he's the sovereign one he's the saving God who is near to his people to be everything that they'll ever need him to be and all of that is simply what it means to know the name of the Lord and that's that's why all the way through the Bible so much is made of the name the name of the Lord that is a strong tire a defense for his people the temple is the place where the name of God dwelt among his people because his very name means that he's the one who's present who draws near and you see that's why when we come to the climax of the whole story of the Old Testament

[16 : 20] God when we come to the Gospels in the New Testament we find that above all he's the God who is present and now present most wonderfully and personally in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ God the Son he's the God who is at last present with us forever and ever remember how Matthew's Gospel begins when the angel comes and speaks to Moses it's all about a name isn't it you shall call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins Matthew says all of this took place to fulfill the words of the prophet behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and you shall call his name Emmanuel which means God with us he's a God who's present with his people and for his people and will be so forever he's God with us in the person of his son the Lord Jesus

Christ you see in Jesus we're reading the final chapter of this great book of the revelation of who God is and what he's like that began there about the burning bush with Moses remember what Jesus said to his disciples in his upper room before he was taken to trial and crucified John 17:6 I have manifested my name to the people you gave me out of this world he says in prayer to his father I have made known to them your name and I will continue to make it known John ends his gospel doesn't he in John chapter 20 by telling us that everything that he's written is so that we might believe in the evidence that he's presented for us and that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of God and that by believing we might have what?

life in his name and that's the mission that Jesus handed on to his followers in the great commission that we were looking at this morning isn't it?

to go and make disciples baptizing them into the name of the father and the son and the holy spirit remember the very last words of Jesus? we were reminded of them this morning weren't we?

and behold I am with you always he's the God who is present see he's the unchanging God from the beginning of the old testament right through the new testament right through to today and he has an unchanging mission and he's the God who will always be going with his people as they tell others about the one true God and call others to belong to the God who has himself come to be near us so that we can know him and his presence his name in which we go well that's the thing that makes all the difference whether you're Moses or whether you're Paul or whether you're one of our missionaries serving in another part of the world that we're praying for tonight or whether you're one of those who's about to go abroad and about to start their mission full of anxieties know that I'm often saying who am I who am I to do something for God well the answer you see is still the same

[19:51] God is unchanging he's the answer he's the God that we know he's the God who is with us the God who is abundantly promising to be with us forever so let me ask you tonight as we come to a close has God called you to be a prophet to be a missionary to speak for him is he calling you to do that I'm going to tell you the answer the answer is yes he has I've got that in an authoritative revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ from every one of you here tonight because it tells me in the Bible it's what Jesus said as he ascended all of you go into all the world and make disciples to call to know God is a call to go and make him known and that may mean going ourselves overseas as some of our brothers and sisters are doing it may mean for some of us Bible college training but it certainly does mean for every one of us

Bible training and mission training and discipleship and obedience it certainly does mean together for all of us prayer for mission and especially committed prayer that the Lord would indeed send out more laborers to the harvest field certainly means for all of us a committed program to prepare and equip others for mission certainly means being committed to funding and supporting mission it means all of these things but above everything else it all begins with one thing and that's simply this knowing the one who is the unchanging God the God who is present see you can't do that you can't know this God without truly knowing his heart and therefore you will share his joys and his mission of redemption you can't know this God truly without sharing his desire for this world because he's the unchanging

God and his mission is unchanging and you get involved with him like Moses did or like Paul did or like anybody else does you get involved with his mission that's what it means to know his name so does mission and does preparing for mission yourself and helping to prepare others for mission and financially supporting mission and being part of a church that makes mission happen does that excite you?

does it fire you up? is that what makes you alive? is that what makes you sparkle? well if it does that's because you know the name of the Lord the one who's present with you and whose heart has rubbed off on you those things don't sparkle you if they don't light you up well maybe you just need to ask the Lord to make himself and his name known to you make it known to you for the first time or maybe make it known to you afresh read Exodus chapter 3 read Matthew's gospel read any part of the Bible you'll find he's the same he's the unchanging God he hasn't changed his mission hasn't changed his presence hasn't changed he's with us let's make sure that our desire doesn't ever change either to have him with us to know his name and therefore to make his name known to others is the God who is near and can be known that's what mission's all about whether it's here in Glasgow whether it's in Nigeria or Kenya or Timbuktu that's what it means to know the name of the Lord well we're going to sing as we come to now admit our new members to the fellowship here number 495 and it reminds us to rejoice that this same

God is our God the Lord is King and we adore him and we lift up our hearts and our voices to rejoice and to tell one another again to say rejoice 495 verse 5