

“When God Speaks”
Exodus 3:1-21
Kleefeld Christian Community
January 11, 2026

It’s my pleasure to be invited back to preach here. It’s always an honour to be invited to preach somewhere, but even more so to be invited *back* somewhere. So thanks for having me out again.

Once again, Ed has left the passage for today up to the dealer’s choice. I find this really intimidating sometimes, because not only do I want to choose a *good* passage; I want to choose the *best* passage; the *perfect* passage for Kleefeld Christian Community on this balmy January morning. In times like this, I seem to forget that *all* Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so maybe there is no *perfect* passage. But whether it’s in my attentiveness to the Spirit, or just my personal preference, I’ve ended up in Exodus 3 this week. Now, I’m sure that *all* of you remember that I spoke on Genesis 32 a year ago—you all have perfect recall of every sermon you’ve ever heard, right? Well, if I spoke on Genesis last time, and Exodus this time, I guess that means, if I’m invited back, I’ll be stuck in Leviticus next time. But maybe I shouldn’t get too far ahead of myself.

Exodus 3 is one of those classic stories that we’ve likely heard a number of times. But let me read it again in a new translation, and hopefully that allows us to hear it with fresh ears.

Read Exodus 3

I’m going to break one of my most important rules of preaching in this sermon, and I hope it doesn’t come back to bite me. Often, I like to leave some suspense for the listener, as we move throughout a Scripture passage, waiting until the end to bring it home. But I think that this claim is radical enough that I need to state it from the outset so that we have time to mull it over as we work our way through this passage, exploring the various ideas and movements. My big idea is this: *In Exodus 3, we find the whole of the Gospel on display.*

Now, before anyone gets too far ahead of themselves, no, clearly the person of Jesus Christ is not present in his earthly body in this chapter. And without Jesus, there is clearly no death on the cross present in this chapter. And no cross, no resurrection. But that's my big idea, that all of the Gospel is on display in Exodus 3. Consider it a wager, if you will (not that I would ever condone gambling, of course). But let's see if I can convince you in the next 15 minutes or so of this claim. Questions after, of course.

If you know your Bibles, which I'm assuming most of you do, then you know the story of Exodus quite well. But just to make sure we're all up to speed, let me quickly refresh us. Exodus 1 tells the story of Israel growing in population after settling there under Joseph's leadership, but then quickly a new king comes to power, a king, we read, "who didn't know Joseph." And in his fear of the growing population of this foreign group, the king of Egypt issues an edict to kill all newborn boys. God protects these boys, and the foreign people group continues to grow in number.

This is the world Moses is born into. We likely know the story of Moses' mother setting Moses in a basket and placing him among the reeds in the riverbank, how he's saved by none other than Pharaoh's daughter. In a twist of fate—or maybe providence—Moses' sister is there and says that Moses' mother can take care of the boy. So Moses—whose name means "I pulled him out of the water"—is raised at home, and then taken to live with Pharaoh's daughter "after the child had grown up."

But life isn't peachy for Moses in Pharaoh's house, and as an adult, he kills an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew slave. As a result, Pharaoh tries to kill Moses, but Moses flees and settles in the land of Midian, which is likely somewhere in northern Saudi Arabia, on the other

side of the Red Sea. Moses meets a girl, settles down, and becomes a shepherd, tending the flock for his father-in-law. End of story, right? Not so fast.

At the end of Exodus 2, starting in v. 23, we read the following: “A long time passed (we’re not told how long), and the Egyptian king died. The Israelites were still groaning because of their hard work. They cried out, and their cry to be rescued from the hard work rose up to God. God heard their cry of grief, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked at the Israelites, and God understood.” God *heard*, God *remembered*, God *looked*, and God *understood*. Keep these in mind as we move into Exodus 3.

Exodus 3 starts in the most innocuous, innocent way. Moses is at work. He’s out tending the sheep. He’s a blue-collar employee, what we might in these parts call a *schejkbangel*. We know Moses as a spiritual giant, the one who led people out of Israel. We probably have a picture of Charlton Heston receiving the 10 commandments pop into our minds when we think of Moses. I mean, this is the character whose name is synonymous with the Torah by the time of the New Testament. Moses *is* a big deal. At least he is later on. Not here he isn’t. A *schejkbangel* off at work, this isn’t the conditions you’d imagine for a revelation from God. And on this ordinary day at work, this *schejkbangel* comes to “God’s mountain called Horeb,” sometimes known as Sinai, but literally translated as “wasteland” or “dry place.”

How does Moses end up here? Does he *know* this is the Lord’s mountain? Is he seeking out God? Or is he just wandering aimlessly, tending the sheep, and stumbles across this mountain? The text doesn’t tell us, we just read that Moses “led his flock out to the end of the desert, and he came to God’s mountain called Horeb.”

It doesn’t take long for this ordinary day to turn into something extraordinary. We read that “The Lord’s messenger appeared to [Moses] in a flame of fire in the middle of a bush.” Who

is the Lord's messenger? Other translations read "the Angel of the Lord," but that doesn't really clarify anything for us either. But what we should know is the importance of fire. Fire, all throughout the Old Testament, and even into the New, is a symbol of divine presence. When God cuts a covenant with Abraham, fire appears between the sacrificed animals. When God leads the Israelites through the wilderness, they are led by a pillar of fire by night. When Elijah is duking it out with the prophets of Baal, it is fire from heaven that consumes the sacrifice. And of course, one of the markers of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is tongues of fire. But Moses doesn't know this, at least not yet. But he is curious, and he goes to check out the bush and see why the bush isn't burning up.

All this sets the stage for the action to really start in v. 4: "When the Lord saw that [Moses] was coming to look, God called out to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' Moses said, 'I'm here.'" Gone here is the Lord's messenger, at least from the text itself, and here we see Moses, for the first time, talking directly with the Lord. Not face-to-face, of course, but directly nonetheless. I'm not in the habit of talking to my plants, but while this is an ordinary bush, it is no ordinary situation.

And I think Moses answers perfectly. It's an answer that's echoed by the prophet Samuel in 1 Samuel 3, Isaiah in Isaiah 6, and even Simon Peter in John 6. All these accounts are narrations of chosen people responding simply with their presence before God. When God calls, the first thing God is asking for is our presence, for our presence is always the start of the relationship. Our relationships are predicated on being present. And so, Moses says, "I'm here."

But being in God's presence does *not* mean that Moses is free to do whatever he wants. In fact, it comes with an immediate warning. Despite Moses' perfect response, God warns: "Don't come any closer! Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground." Like all

relationships, there are conditions on life with God. Or maybe a better way of saying that is that when we draw into relationship with God, we are never the ones who set the terms and conditions of the relationship. God is, and we engage with God on God's terms, *always*.

But who is this God who sets the terms and conditions? At this point, we shouldn't assume that Moses actually knows who he is talking to, despite the nature of his response. As far as Moses is concerned, he's still talking to a fiery bush. But this God chooses to reveal a part of his identity, but it might not be what we think. God doesn't reveal himself as Creator, Saviour, Provider, or any of the terms that *we* may commonly use to refer to God. Rather, God's first move is to do some ancestral work. This isn't any God; this is the self-same God that made a covenant with Abraham, who was also his son Isaac's God, as well as grandson Jacob's God. This is the God of Israel who is speaking.

Moses likely would have been familiar with this God. Remember, he did get to grow up in his mother's house. But that was, as the text has already told us, a long time ago. That was the religion of his youth. It's not unlikely that Moses would have participated in Egypt's religion while living in the house of Pharaoh's daughter, and his father-in-law is a Midianite priest, so good luck getting out of serving their god. I don't know why God chooses this as the *first* revelation to Moses, but perhaps by helping Moses to reach back into his own memory, the fog is starting to lift a bit. This isn't *any* God; this is his family's God.

And Moses was afraid. Fair enough. I would be too. Moses is speechless, and hearing this silence, God continues. Remember earlier when I said that God heard, remembered, looked, and understood? God is going to repeat that here. *Re-read 3:7-9*. God has *seen* the oppression; *heard* their cry of injustice. God *knows* their pain. And so, God is going to rescue them. God is going to do what Israel cannot do for themselves and free them from the bonds of slavery and the burden

of their oppressors. And how's he going to do it? Through Moses. "So get going," God says. "'m sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

Moses may have responded perfectly the first time, but his response this time is much less certain. "Who am I to go to Pharaoh and to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" Who am I? Who hasn't asked this question before? Who am I to do this? Who am I to do great things? I have. Or, more accurately, I do. But here, the point isn't Moses. Again, we like to picture Moses as some spiritual giant, but that is precisely to miss the point of this passage. Who am I? Who is Moses? Without God, a *schejkbangel*. Without God, powerless. Without God, certainly unable to free the Israelites from their oppressors.

But the turn here is that Moses *isn't* without God. In fact, the assurance that God gives to Moses isn't like Saul's assurance to David that he would give him great armour, a mighty sword, or even a special superpower to dispense of whenever he sees fit. Moses is not imbued with the "special stuff" a la the 1996 hit movie "Space Jam." Moses, detached from God, is, in fact, powerless.

The promise that God makes, the reason that Moses is able to go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt, isn't because he is a Strong Man. Rather, the promise is simply God's presence. You will do it, Moses, because "I'll be with you." To be clear, Moses is still going to have to do the work. But now he's not working for his father-in-law, but his Heavenly Father. And he's not doing it alone. Moses isn't promised superpowers, but something better: God's presence.

Is this enough of a promise for us? Don't we catch ourselves wanting the superpowers, wanting to be the one who swoops in to save the day? Don't we catch ourselves wanting the glory, the praise, even just for a moment? Like Nacho Libre said, "don't you want a taste of the

glory, just to see what it tastes like??” Moses doesn’t get the superpowers. He gets God’s presence. And that presence is the continued promise that God’s people have throughout Scripture. Is that enough? That’s for you to decide.

The second half of the chapter is largely a repetition of the first half, with Moses asking God for some more assurance, God’s further revelation of who he is—“I AM Who I AM”—and how Moses is supposed to go to his people and, ultimately to Pharaoh. Not for lack of importance but for the sake of time, I won’t walk us as slowly through that section as I did for the first 12 verses, other than to note that the story continues, of course. And we’ll stop here because I do want to get back to the big claim that I made earlier, that Exodus 3 contains all of the Gospel.

Now, I like the New Testament. It’s almost as good as the Old. But I think that sometimes we need to remove ourselves from the New Testament in order to see things more clearly. Not to discard it, but to take a different look. There’s a time for close analysis, but there’s also time to step back and gain perspective of the context of the things we are observing, whether it is something Sacred like Scripture, or something more mundane like a painting or a landscape. And when we zoom back into the Old Testament, we see all of the Gospel themes on display.

We may all articulate the truth of the Gospel in slightly different words—and that’s ok, because none of us are speaking Aramaic anyways—but I would imagine that we believe something along the lines of being bound up in sin and freed by God for new life. Of course, as I mentioned earlier, the work of Jesus on the cross is *not* incidental to this, but the effect it has on our lives is some sort of freeing from bondage. Maybe not from slavery, but at least from sin. And what is the story of Exodus 3 but God’s promise to free God’s own people from their oppression and into a new life, not just any life, but a life with God?

Think about it for a second. One of the things that Exodus 3 forces us to wrestle with is the question “What really is the saving work of God?” If God saves us, what does that salvation look like? What does God do? And what kind of effect does it have on the one being saved?

Well, the most important character in this story isn’t Moses. It’s God. And that must affect how we answer the question of salvation. Salvation—the work of freeing us from our own personal and communal bondages—is *always* the work of God. God will call us to act, of course, but our action is nothing without God.

And what does God do? God hears, remembers, looks, understands, and sees. What do these all mean? It means that God is close enough to God’s people in order to respond to our plight. It means that, even in our darkest moments, when God seems furthest away, that God is never too far away that we are removed from relationship with God. Because what these verbs really denote is relationship. To hear, to look, to see; these are relational terms. We have to be close to someone in order to hear them, to look at them, to see them. So even when God seems furthest away, God is near.

In this hearing, God is concerned with our suffering. God is concerned with our cries of grief and injustice, and God will cast down those who are oppressing us.

And so God acts. God acts: for us, with us. And God acts by giving us God’s presence. God doesn’t give us something we can run off with, removing ourselves from God. Rather, in giving us himself, God gives us all that we need.

We skipped over it a bit earlier, but did you notice v. 12? How will Moses know that God is the one who sends him? Not just because he will bring the people out of Egypt. But that as he brings them out of Egypt, they will return to worship God on God’s mountain. In other words, they will be freed *from* slavery, and freed *for* life with God.

The gift of salvation—the message of the Gospel—is not something that we can wield for our own purposes. It's not an object or a skill that we can dispense at our choosing. Rather, the gift of salvation and the message of the Gospel is that in our bondage, God is near, and God promises his own presence to us.

Is that enough? That's for each of us to decide as we pick up our cross daily to follow him.