

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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God's Revelation to Moses

Exodus 3:1-6, 13-15

Key verse: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6).

"During Sunday School, our pastor, who was teaching the adult class, selected a middle-aged couple to act out the burning bush scene from Exodus 3. The husband was asked to supply the voice for God and his wife would read Moses' lines. All went well until they got to verse 15. The wife, as Moses, mistook her husband's lines for her own, and she read: 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "The God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to—

"The pastor interrupted her. 'Wait a minute. You're not God.'

Without missing a beat, her husband deadpanned, 'I've been trying to tell her that for 18 years'" (Laura Allen in *Christian Reader*).

Hopefully, we all understand that we are not God. But an important question remains, *Who is God?* The Book of Exodus lays for us a foundation of truth about the nature and the attributes of the one true God. Here in Exodus 3, God reveals significant truths about God's nature and attributes, including the following:

1. God can be named. "But Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors 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'" (vv. 13-14a).

To the Hebrew, "name" is shorthand for "character." When Moses asks God what's His name, by His enigmatic answer God is essentially saying: No one but God can explain what God is like. And Moses' question will be answered as God reveals the meaning of His "name" *by what God says and does*.

In short, we can know what God is like, but only as God reveals himself to us. That revelation is given through God's *words* and by God's *actions*. The Bible is the divinely inspired record of this revelation of God to humanity.

God's "name"—His nature and attributes—takes on richer and fuller meaning as Biblical history unfolds. This revelation reaches its height when Jesus reveals both God's greatest *word* to humanity and God's greatest *act* for humanity: God's greatest word? "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

God's greatest act? "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16).

2. God is personal. The fact that God has a name means that God is a *person*, not an impersonal force or theoretical principle. This God revealed to Moses is clearly a God who wants to establish a relationship with God's people. God, according to Genesis 3, cares about His people so much that He has a plan to rescue and deliver them from the slavery of Egypt (Exodus 3:7-10).

This personal God who initiates a loving relationship with humanity is revealed in the Old Testament as God works to establish His covenant with Israel. In the New Testament, this revelation of a God who wants to be in relationship with us reaches its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, God's Son.

In Christ's sinless life and sacrificial death, God made a way for the divine-human relationship to be mended and restored. In the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, following Jesus' resurrection and ascension, God provided a way that we can live in daily, personal fellowship with almighty God.

3. God is faithful. The God revealed to Moses is a God who keeps His promises! At the burning bush, God says to Moses: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob...." (v. 6a).

God had revealed His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. During the difficult years of Egyptian slavery, the Israelites must have wondered if God had forgotten His promises to them. But at the burning bush, God reveals His plan to keep His promises to Israel by freeing Israel from Egyptian bondage and moving her toward the Promised Land. In the Book of Exodus, as seen in Exodus 3 and elsewhere, God reveals Himself as a God who is faithful to His people and who keeps His promises to them.

4. God is holy and to be "feared." At the burning bush God tells Moses: "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (v. 5). The ground was holy because God was present in that place.

The essential meaning of "holy" is *set apart*. God, then, is set apart from common things. This holiness also has a distinctly moral nature. That is, God is set apart from anything that is sinful or evil. So, for that which is common or sinful to come into the immediate presence of God is an awesome thing.

Moses, in fact, "hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God...." (v. 6b). In Moses' day, many people believed that to see God's face would result in death. In the immediate presence of this holy God, Moses removes his shoes (v. 5) and hides his face (v. 6).

So, what are we to make of this seeming contradiction? God is *personal* and wants a close relationship with us. Yet, God is *holy and to be "feared."*

In his book, *The Joy of Fearing God*, Jerry Bridges describes the spiritually healthy tension between loving God and fearing God:

“In the physical realm there are two opposing forces called ‘centrifugal’ and ‘centripetal.’ Centrifugal force tends to pull away from a center of rotation, while centripetal force pulls toward the center. A stone whirled about on the end of a string exerts centrifugal force on the string, while the string exerts centripetal force on the stone. Take away one and the other immediately disappears.

“The two opposing forces can help us understand something of the fear of God. The centrifugal force represents the attributes of God such as his holiness...that cause us to bow in awe and self-abasement before Him. They hold us reverently distant from the One who, by the simple power of his word, created the universe out of nothing. The centripetal force represents the love of God. It surrounds us with grace and mercy and draws us with cords of love into the Father’s warm embrace. To exercise a proper fear of God we must understand and respond to both these forces.”

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