Study of Moses - Part 3

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth Stewart

[0:00] The book of Exodus 3 And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.

And he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.
Now last Sunday night we saw how Moses made a significant choice at 40 years of age.
He chose at that time to ally himself with the people of God and to stand out on the Lord's side. And he chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.
And we saw also how almost immediately after he made that choice in Egypt, God moved him to liberate his brethren.
[1:33] And he went out and he saw an Egyptian and a Hebrew fighting. And he saw the Egyptian smiting the Hebrew, probably about to kill him. And Moses took the matter into his hands and he killed the Egyptian.

And the following day he saw two of his own Hebrew brethren fighting together. And he tried to intervene and to bring them to peace. But they turned round angrily and said, who made you a judge over us?
And Moses recognized two things. First of all, he knew that the deed was known. And that word had gone out that he had killed an Egyptian. But I think even more importantly than that, Moses understood, perhaps from the way in which the Hebrews spoke to him, that they were not ready to accept him over them at all.
And that they were not ready to receive him as God's liberator for them. And it was with a heavy heart in that respect that Moses fled Egypt.
And he fled from the face of Pharaoh. And he went east into the wilderness of Midian. And I have no doubt that he left a very confused and a broken man.
[2:39] Because he was quite clear that God had moved him in this direction. But nonetheless, the whole thing had fallen down. And it had come to nothing. He was rejected by his own brethren.

Now, when he came to Midian, he sat down beside a well. And the seven daughters of a man called Jethro, who had another name, Reuel. Well, the seven daughters of that man came to draw water. And the shepherds there began to harass them. And from the way the father speaks when they get back home, it's quite clear that that was a standard occurrence. Because they were very often delayed in coming home with the water.
The shepherds obviously enjoyed a bit of banter with the daughters. And they would sometimes harass them and distress them. Now, when Moses saw this happening, he took matters into his own hands.
And he must have been a man of commanding presence. And he defended those daughters. And when they arrived home earlier than usual, the father said, how come you're back so quickly?
[3:40] And they said, an Egyptian stranger defended us. And he said to them, well, why have you left him? Take him home and we'll give him his food. Now, as matters materialized, Moses stayed there.

And he dwelt there for many, many years. And he became a shepherd for this man, Jethro. And Jethro gave him one of his daughters, Zipporah, to be his wife. And Moses had two sons by this woman, Zipporah.
And next week, I want to look a little more at Zipporah and the sons with you. But today, I want to look at this particularly meaningful incident in Moses' life.

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When he has been in the land of Midian for many, many years. He is a shepherd. And one day, he goes out and he takes the flock to the backside of the desert.
And he comes to the mountain of God in Horeb. Now, it's called the mountain of God here. It isn't yet the mountain of God. This is the mountain at which God will give the Ten Commandments.
[4:44] And so, it's called here the mountain of God. But at this point, it had no particular significance. It was just Mount Sinai. And Moses was there behind Mount Sinai, feeding the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro.

Now, these 40 years that he spent in Midian are passed over largely in silence. But we're quite sure that he cultivated a close walk with God.
And that on many occasions, God would speak to him in a miraculous way in these wilderness journeys. And this was the way Moses was to come a short while later with two million people.
And so, God planned it in such a way that he would familiarize himself with the territory. And he would become used to leading in this part of the world.
And that reminds us, I think, that every experience we go through is given for us to help us with another experience. That's the way that the Lord deals with us.
[5:43] And sometimes we find ourselves in a peculiar situation, and we don't understand why. Moses had no idea that he would be looking after sheep in the middle of nowhere in the land of Midian.

But there was a reason for it. And that was going to become clear. And I think many times in our own lives, it's just like that. We wonder, why am I here? And why am I thus? And why is my situation like this?
And maybe months or years later, we discover exactly why it was a preparation for something else.
Now, when Moses sees this great vision, and we'll come to it in a moment, I think it's important for us to understand the state of his mind or the state of his heart.
And I think, in spite of the many blessings which he would have received, there was one great question in Moses' mind. And the question was this.
Why, when you asked me to liberate the people, why did I end up being rejected by them and being sent out into the wilderness?
[6:49] And there's no doubt that Moses was deeply shaken by that. And many of you may have discovered that yourselves. Perhaps you went to do someone a good turn, and perhaps you felt that you were moved to do it by the Lord, and you were trying to do them good.

The very work you were doing was to help the person or to help the people. But suddenly you found yourself rejected by them, and it cast you into perplexity, and perhaps it still has.
And that was the situation Moses was in, in his mind. And I think that that so perplexed him, that God came to him in a particular way, just to encourage him.
After all, Moses has got to go back down to Egypt, and he's got to redeem his own brethren. And before he goes, God will not send him unarmed. God will arm him.
So he arms him with a vision. A vision of himself. And with a promise. And that vision and promise will strengthen and fortify Moses, and enable him to go back down into Egypt, and a second time to try to liberate his brethren.
[7:59] And again, when we are downcast like that, and God has a work for us to do, he will give us a promise, or he'll have an encounter with us, or give us something to encourage us to do the work which he has for us to do.

So then, Moses is behind this mountain, and he is feeding the flock. And in the distance, he suddenly sees a remarkable sight. He sees an acacia thorn bush, which are fairly common in that part of the world.
He sees it burning. And that is an unusual sight. He sees that bush solitary on fire. Nothing else is burning around about him, save this bush alone.
Apparently, sometimes, you can have in these hot parts of the desert what is known as spontaneous combustion. Sometimes you can find that a bush, or a very dry bush like this, will just burst into a flame of fire because of the heat.
But it wasn't so much the burning bush that attracted Moses. It was the fact that however much the bush burned, it just did not consume. It was still there.
[9:14] It was still standing. Now, you would expect in a dry, parched land like this that one or two licks of the intense flame would have turned the whole thing into ashes. But not so. The bush stood

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there.

And there was a flaming, raging fire coming out of the midst of this bush. But the bush just was not burning. It remained the way it was in spite of the fire.
And Moses said, I'll turn aside and see this sight. Moses was going to investigate what it was about the bush, why it was not burning. He was going to look more closely at this phenomenon.
And he had hardly begun to take steps towards the bush when he hears the voice calling him. And it's the double call, Moses, Moses. And the call is from God.
Moses immediately recognizes who is speaking to him. And he says, Here I am. And the Lord says, Don't come any closer. Take your shoes from off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.
[10:21] Now I want to consider with you this bush that burns, what it means, and how it was an encouragement to Moses.

What does the bush, the burning bush, represent? And secondly, how was it an encouragement to Moses? And in looking at that, just how exactly is it an encouragement to ourselves?
Well then, first, the bush that burned. And I want to notice with you, first of all, the fire itself. Now, when you look at the fire, I want you to notice carefully that the presence of God is tied to the fire in a particular way.
God is in the fire in a way in which he's not in the bush. Now look closely at verse 2 and notice what it says. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flaming fire out of the midst of a bush.
Now do you see what it says? The Lord, the angel of the Lord, and that we can understand to be Christ, I don't want to enter into that to sidetrack us at the moment, but let us take it to be the Lord himself.
[11:38] The angel of the Lord here is the Lord, the second person of the Trinity, appeared in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush. In other words, God is in the fire.

God's presence is in the fire. God is the fire. Now, notice how often in the Bible God's presence is signified by this phenomenon of fire.
when God appeared to Abraham, he appeared like a flaming fire, like a torch, a fiery torch, passing one way and the other.
And when Abraham in the night vision saw this torch, he knew that God was present. He knew that that flame spoke of the presence of God. When God came down on Mount Sinai some years later to give the Ten Commandments, again there was fire encircling the top of Mount Sinai.
God rides on a fiery chariot or a chariot of fire. Psalm 97 tells us that fire goes before him and his force it burns up round about.
[12:55] Our God is a consuming fire. So God is very often represented by fire. Why? Well, fire stands really for this attribute of God, his holiness.

holiness. The fire speaks to us of the holiness of God. This is the Holy One of Israel who is of purer eye than to behold iniquity.
This is the God whom Isaiah speaks of as the God of everlasting burnings. This is the God who is clean, pure, undefiled, altogether holy, holy, holy.
This is our God and there is none like him. And when we consider him in his purity and in his holiness, it reminds us of a raging fire that will not dwell with sin.
It will not dwell with uncleanness and impurity. It will lick it up, it will consume it, it will destroy it. God dwells in the holiness that belongs to himself.
[14:00] And so when God is present in fire, he is present in holiness, in holiness. Now, I think we should remind ourselves that that is a non-changing attribute of God.

God does not change in that way. He has not ceased to be fire in the New Testament. The letter to the Hebrews reminds us of that and it reminds us very powerfully of that.
When the writer to the Hebrews is telling us to come to worship God, he says this, let us have grace, he says, whereby we may serve God acceptably, and that means worship him acceptably, with reverence and with godly fear.
Why? Because he says, our God is a consuming fire. Now, it's interesting that that's quoted in the New Testament. Because these words, our God is a consuming fire, comes from Deuteronomy.
And it speaks of the God who gave the commandments. It speaks of the Holy One of Israel. But the writer to the Hebrews tells us, when we come near to God to worship, let us remember also to serve with reverence and with godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire.

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[15:25] And let us not forget that. Let us not forget it. Look, for example, at the effect this had on Moses. God said to him, put off your shoes from your feet, for the place whereon you stand is holy ground.

Take off your shoes from your feet. Now, very often that's understood like this, that God was saying to Moses, in other words, take the posture of a servant, because the servants often went barefoot. Now, I don't think to myself that that is the real force of what it says here when it says take your shoes from off your feet. I think it's a reference to something else.
I think it has something to do with shaking the dust from off your feet. It has to do with reverence and putting away uncleanness. You remember what Christ said to his disciples, if you go to a place and they don't receive you, come away from it, he says, and shake the dust off your feet. Disassociate yourself from their unbelief. And I think that is the meaning here. It has something to do with this Moses put away all worldly thoughts and considerations because you now stand in my presence.
[16:43] And I wonder in that respect if it links with what we're looking at last week. You remember how Christ took the whip last Sunday morning and he just whipped the money changers out of the temple and he said, do not make the house of prayer a house of merchandise.

Is it not the same kind of thing? You are in the temple of God. Come with reverence. Come with godly fear. Put the dust of this world away from you and stand before me like that.
And I think that should remind us that on special occasions when we meet with the Lord, we should endeavor to do that. And I think there is no more special occasion for us than the Lord's day when the people of God gather for the morning sacrifice and for the evening sacrifice when we gather together in God's house to worship.
That is a time when we should take special care to come into God's presence with reverence and with godly fear. I say that because, well I suppose you could say to me, can we not go into God's presence any time?
Well I would say to you, yes of course we can. But so could Moses. So could Moses. But there are times when God reveals himself in a particular way and he still does so.
[17:57] And I think the meeting of God's people on the Lord's day is one of those. And let us ensure that we come with reverence and with godly fear, remembering the holiness of God.

Now then, that's the fire. God holy and God present in his holiness. But then we come to the bush. And you'll notice in verse 2 that God is coming out of the midst of a bush.
Or God is burning in the midst of the bush. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.
So this fire, or God himself, is burning inside the bush. Now what does the bush represent? Well, we have one or two clues in the Old Testament itself.
Let's take this one. When Moses is blessing the tribes of Joseph, he says this, he asks or he prays that these tribes would know the goodwill of him that dwelt in the bush.
[19:15] bush. Now, that's a remarkable statement. He doesn't say the goodwill of the one who burned in the bush, but the one who dwelt in the bush.

And there's a clue. There's a clue. God is not just burning temporarily in the midst of this bush. It's not as though he's coming into it to burn and then he's passing out of it.
God is actually living in this bush. He is resident there. He is dwelling there. He is there permanently. He is there habitually.
Let's take it a step further. When Moses says, may you know the goodwill of the one who dwelt in the bush, that word dwelling is an interesting word.
In Hebrew, it is the word shakan. shakan. And that word is known to many of us because of this shekinah. Some of you will have heard of that word, shekinah, or the shekinah glory.
[20:21] What was the shekinah? Well, the shekinah was the fiery cloud of God that dwelt in the tabernacle, right in the holy of holies.

That was called the shekinah cloud. Why? Because God dwelt there. God dwelt in the tabernacle. God dwelt in the midst of his people, Israel.
God was with them, and God was with them to bless them, to lead them, to guide them. God was present. The shekinah glory dwelt. That's what the word means.
God dwells in hearts, their souls, their lives, individually, and as a corporate community. And God is dwelling in that community, and he dwells in his holiness in the midst of that community.

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He stays there. He lives in the hearts of all his own people. God dwells in the midst of the people of God.
[21:22] And he rests there. And I don't know, my friend, if there is any thought more wonderful than this in the entire universe, that the God of holiness, without blemish and pure, is actually pleased to dwell in your heart and in mine.

My brittle, desert, wooden heart, that would be consumed in a moment for some strange reason, God is pleased to take residence in your heart.
In your heart. He's pleased to take residence there. He dwells there. And this is the wonderful thing that Paul prays for the Ephesian Christians.
He prays that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith. Ah, the dry wooden unbelief of my heart, but still God dwells there.
In his burning holiness, he lives there. And where would God live? Only in a place that he would like. This is my rest, here I stay, for I do like it well.
[22:25] God will only live where he is pleased to live, and he is pleased to live in your heart, if you believe in himself. Now, we need a little more understanding of that.

How can these things be? Well, we have another key here, in the name which God uses. You'll notice in this chapter that God reveals his personal name.
Now, God has many names in the Bible. It would be a worthwhile exercise for you just to look through the many names which God has in the Bible. that this is his actual personal name, and he reveals it here to Moses.
And I think it's right for us to understand that this name is somehow connected to the vision, that the burning bush and the name of God are closely connected together.
Turn to verse 14 here. Sorry, verse 13. Look at verse 13. And Moses said to God, Behold, when I come to the children of Israel and shall say to them, The God of your fathers hath sent me to you, and they shall say to me, What is his name?
[23:44] What shall I say to them? Now, what does that mean itself? Well, I think it means this. Moses is fearful of going back to the people who rejected him, and he says, If I come to them and I say, The God of your fathers hath sent me, they're going to turn around and say, Who are you?

Who are you and where have you come from and what is your commission? You claim to be sent by our God, the God of our fathers. Well, what is his name? Or in other words, give us an indication that you really know him.
Or give us an indication that he has sent you. Give us an authoritative sign. Demonstrate to us your knowledge of this God. And Moses is saying, What credentials will I show?
What will I say to them to convince them that God is with me? And God says this in verse 14, God said to Moses, I am that I am.
And he said, This shalt thou say to the children of Israel, I am hath sent me to you. And then at the end of verse 15, look at what he says, the very last section of verse 15, This is my name forever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.
[25:05] Now what a wonderful name this is. This is the name Jehovah. This is what Jehovah means, I am that I am. And what does that name tell us?

Well, it tells us that God is from everlasting to everlasting, that he is without change, he is without variableness or shadow of turning.
He is the alpha, he is the omega, he is the beginning, he is the end. This is the same God yesterday, today, and forever.
You ask who I am, I am, and that is it. It's not a wonderful thing to say. Who am I? He says, I am, let it rest there. I am, as much as to say without me nothing has meaning, nothing has substance.
I just am, I always have been and always shall be. I am, and I am without change. But my friends, that relates to the burning bush.
[26:11] How? Well, it relates to the burning bush like this. The fire that dwells in the midst of our heart and the fiery God who lives with us is one who says to us, I am without change in your heart.

I once loved you, I bought you, I purchased you, I have dwelt with you in eternity, I have covenanted in eternity to save you, I will never leave you and I will never forsake you.
That is what he's saying. I burn in your heart in order to live with you and to live with you forever and I am the God who will never never change in that way.

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And that is even true in heaven itself. When believers pass into glory, we're told in Revelation that God tabernacles in the midst of them.
He's present there in their midst as a people and he's burning in every one of their hearts and he burns there as the Holy One of Israel forevermore. And I think this comes through remarkably in words Christ uses when he's speaking to the Sadducees.
[27:27] I don't know if you remember when the Sadducees came to Christ and they presented him with, well, it was a problem to them, it wasn't a problem to the Lord. The man who had seven wives and they were saying whose wife shall she be in the resurrection?

And of course the Lord says you do err, he says, you are wrong, because in the resurrection there is no marriage, you are not given in marriage. He says, you are forgetting what God said to Moses in the bush.
He said, I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, he is the God of the living.
Now, that is an interesting expression. The Lord Jesus Christ is focusing on this short word, am. God said to Moses here, I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
He didn't say, I was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but I still am. God is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. And what Jesus Christ is saying to the Sadducees is this, today in glory, he says, God is still a God to Abraham, and God is still a God to Isaac, and God is still a God to Jacob.
[28:43] That was not a temporary history in this world, as though God was with these men and then somehow left them. No, God burnt within their hearts, and God is still within their hearts today.

God dwells with his people. And he will never cease to dwell with his people. God is in their midst.
Now, I suppose you could ask, how is it possible for God in holiness to dwell in my heart?
And I think that's an interesting question, because when we think of it, here's a bush, and it's like our hearts, it's in the desert, it's dry, ready to be consumed, and the last thing you think it could bear would be the holiness of God to come into conduct with it.
That's my heart. And if the holiness of God would touch it, you would think, surely it will be burnt.
But no, God comes into the hearts of sinful men, women, and children, and they are not destroyed.
How? How? Oh, well, because of a great mystery. It's because of someone who's in the bush with us. someone who's in the bush with us.
[29:58] And who is that? The Lord Jesus Christ. He came into the bush. He came into the place where he took our nature, and he became frail, he became weak, he was tempted in all points like as we are, he took bone of our bone, he took flesh of our flesh, he became a part of this bush.

Emmanuel, God with us. God with us. Now, this is the interesting thing. This bush here is an acacia thorn bush.
Now, notice, the thorn. What does the thorn mean in the Bible? Well, you take it from Genesis right through to Revelation, and a thorn means one thing, it means a curse.
The thorn is a curse. And that reminds us really that what God came into was a cursed thing. You remember when Abraham was sacrificing his son, and the angel said, stop, just when his hand was above his son.
And Abraham looked, and there was a ram caught in the thorns. It was caught there by its head in the thorns. This was the sacrifice, caught in the thorns.
[31:17] It was a cursed ram. It was a cursed sacrifice that was going to take the place of Abraham's son. Where is that fulfilled? Oh, it's fulfilled when Christ is being abused by the Roman soldiers, and when they take the crown of thorns and they press it upon his head.

They do that to mock him, they do that to make him suffer, and to put him to shame. Ah, but that shame is our glory. Why? Because it tells us that Christ came into the bush.
It tells us that Christ came in amongst the thorns. He came into the place of the curse, and he identified with us in that respect. He bore the curse, and he became part of the bush, so that when the fire of God comes down upon the bush, it comes upon Christ.
Is Christ consumed? No. Christ meets the full force of God's holiness, and he bears it. He withstands it. He drinks the cup to the dregs, and he arises in resurrection glory, because there is something there that the wrath of God could not touch.
It is his own beloved son. He is pure, and he is holy, though he carried the curse. He takes the curse away, and that is why his people can dwell with the everlasting fire of God.

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[32:45] God can dwell in your hearts, because your sin is dealt with. It is as simple as that. Your sin is dealt with. You say, how can God possibly continue to live with me?

And God is saying, I am that I am. I will not change. I will stay with you, and I will be with you, because that sin is dealt with. It is on my son.
It is involved in the crown of thorns that was put on his head, or the ram that was caught in the thicket of thorns. It is there, it is dealt with, and because of that, I will live with you, and I will dwell with you forevermore, and therefore, we are not consumed.
We are not consumed. The righteousness of Christ is my shield against that fire of God destroying me. And far from that fire destroying me, what does that fire do for you, my friend?
It just cleans you, that is all. It cleans you, it does not destroy, and you can have fellowship with Jehovah, the God who is without change, and that is a remarkable thing.
[33:56] You can have fellowship with God through your Lord Jesus Christ. God God is saying to Moses, I know that my people hurt you, and that they rejected you in Egypt, and maybe sometimes you feel in your heart that God just cannot be with that people at all, but Moses, I am still dwelling in the midst of that people.

I am still burning in the midst of the covenant people of God. And that is why he says here in verse 16, he says, go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, the Lord God of your fathers appeared to me saying, I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt.
Notice that in spite of the way Israel had been in Egypt, God has visited them. And God speaks here as though he's visited them already. As much as to say, it's done horses.
You haven't come down yet and I haven't sent you, but as far as I am concerned, it is done. I have visited you. I am that I am what God purposes he will bring to pass.
And I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to a land flowing with milk and with honey. I am still with my people.
[35:29] Now you all know that the symbol of the Presbyterian church is the burning bush. Very often you see a burning bush perhaps on the pulpit sometimes hanging down or perhaps on the back there or on the cover of church newspapers or things like that.

The burning bush has always been the symbol of the Presbyterian church. Now it is a beautiful symbol in this respect that it reminds us of this the continuity of God's church and the way that God sometimes puts his church into a fiery trial and in that fiery trial it looks as though the bush is finished but the bush is not finished the burning fire of God will never destroy that bush it will only cleanse and purify it it just will never destroy it and that is true of your heart if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and if you just cleave to himself then that fire will never destroy you you may have a very fiery trial today perhaps known only to yourself but if you are still gasping towards the Lord and if you are still looking for him and if you are saying Lord help me that is never going to destroy you it will never do that he looked and it was not consumed
I am still with you and I do not change and perhaps God is speaking to Moses here too in this respect not only is he saying I am with Israel in Egypt but perhaps he is saying Moses I am still with yourself I promised you something 40 years ago I promised you something when you came to myself and your mother had that promise and she gave it to you and that promise was that I would cause you to bring my people out of Egypt and it seemed to go wrong and it seemed to go very far wrong but I don't forget my promises and although you're here in the midst of a desert and you're wondering if you're in a desert yourself spiritually you are not I am still with you and I have been burning in your heart for 40 years and I'm still burning and I'll burn forever more and when I send you back to Pharaoh you'll stand there and you'll do precisely the work that
I have given you to do and of course Moses comes out with the objections and we'll see that another time he says who am I I can't do it I can't manage it there's no way I can go back to in there I can't go back with these people I am that I am and his purposes do not change well my friend Christian friend will you not wonder at the one who is content more than content the one who is pleased to dwell in your sinful heart and will you not be glad and who took the thorns who took the sting away that you could dwell with God and you who are outside of Christ how will you dwell with everlasting burnings when the time comes when the holiness of God's presence on the day of judgment shall search through everybody if you are not in Christ how will you stand how will you stand may the
Lord bless these thoughts in this word let O Lord our God we pray that thou would impress upon us that thou art dwelling in our hearts by faith and enable us to draw near to thee in thankful

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acknowledgement of thy mercy we ask thee to remind us that thou wilt never leave nor forsake thine own and never leave uncompleted the work which thou hast begun we praise thee that thou art without change the same yesterday today and forever I am God I change not therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed have mercy upon us for the Redeemer sake Amen

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