

Text: Exod. 3:11-17

Title: "Answers for two questions of the fearful deliverer"

Time: 2/16/20 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: The primary vote in our state happened last week, and Maureen's mother was interested in the results on the Democratic side, so she asked me to look them up. I did a quick Google search, and it was surprising to see the results of 33 candidates listed. There were more than this, because after the 33 a category called "other candidates" had earned something north of 4000 votes. I remember that the Republican ballot had a lot of people on it too, even though that party has the advantage of a sitting president seeking reelection.

All of that desire to have our vote to become the next president contrasts sharply Moses's response to God's choosing him to be the one sent to lead the people of Israel. Moses hesitates when God calls him. In our passage this morning, two questions come immediately to his mind that need to be answered before this fearful human instrument is willing to move forward. The answers to these two initial questions are foundational truths that must be understood by every human instrument of deliverance God desires to use, local church members included. We will take them one at a time this morning, noting the wonderful answers that God gives this trembling servant He plans to use in a great way.

I. Who am I? (vv. 11-12).

Application: I want us to begin by noting that Moses's hesitation not only contrasts the attitude of our presidential candidates, it also contrasts the attitude he had forty years earlier when he murdered and hid the body of an abusive

Egyptian in defense of a fellow Israelite. Back then, this mighty prince of Egypt “supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them” (Acts 7:25). Now, after 40 years on the back side of the desert herding sheep, Moses was no longer a great Egyptian prince, and he no longer thought that God would use him as the human instrument of His deliverance.

It is interesting that Moses needed to land somewhere in the middle of these two extremes to be used of God. On one extreme Moses was ready to do the delivering by himself and in his own way. Now on the other extreme Moses cannot imagine having any part in the deliverance God had planned. His change was caused by his previous failure to deliver and his years of obscurity and seeming obsolescence. In order to be used of God, Moses had to be between these extremes with a balanced understanding of how God uses a human instrument of deliverance.

God’s answer to Moses’s question was designed to provide this balanced understanding for this imperfect, thoroughly human instrument. When Moses asked, “Who am I?”, God’s answer was simply, “You are the one I have promised to be with” (v. 12). The emphasis in that answer is on the pronoun *I*. God is telling Moses that it does not matter who he is when it comes to God’s work of deliverance. What matters is that it is God who is with him.

And then God gives Moses what our KJV calls a “token” of reassurance that it would indeed be he whom God uses to deliver His people. The word translated *token* is often translated *sign*, and it refers to a supernatural miracle that carries an important meaning or message. Note also that the words *shall be* are in italics in our KJV, meaning they are not in the original. I think the force of the phrase is more present tense

than it is future. God is saying, "Right now I am going to give you a supernatural miracle that contains meaning and provides proof that you are the one whom I shall use to deliver." What is the supernatural miracle of meaning that God gives to Moses? Very simply, it is God's promise to return him to the very same place with those people.

That is God's answer to our question as well. As we see the need for so many around us for the deliverance of God's redemption from bondage, and we remember that the Lord Jesus has sent us to make disciples of the nations, the question comes to mind, does it not, "Who am I?" The answer is "I am the one whom God has promised to be with." I am the one who has the supernatural miracle of His promise revealed in His Word.

He has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:5-6). After sending us out to deliver, He promised, "And lo, I am with you, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). He has even said, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Ps. 126:6). Some seed will fall on good ground. He promises. He has also promised, "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:11). Even when the seed hits bad ground its purpose has been accomplished. This is God's promise.

So will we trust His promise and willingly see that it does not matter who we are? What matters is that God has promised to be with us, and He has sent us. We must be

willing under so great a sign to readily follow Him and let Him make us fishers of men.

II. What is your name? (vv. 13-17).

Illustration: When I emerged from the school after voting, a young lady was conducting an exit poll. She did not explain what organization she was with, but her questionnaire asked some pointed questions about who I voted for and what I thought of the job our current president was doing. I got through the first page, but then I stopped when I saw the second page. One of the reasons I stopped was that I had no real idea who was asking the questions. Who really wanted to know this about me and my vote, and why?

Application: With this second question, "What is your name?", Moses suggests that it is the people who would really want to know this, but I am struck in my understanding of these events that they never do ask that question. Who really is asking this question, and why really does he want to know? Well, I think in reality it is Moses who needs the answer to the question, "What is your name?", and the reason he needs to know the answer is related to his response to God's answer of his first question. God's answer was emphatically, "It is I will be with you," and now Moses needed to understand who this *I* was—what His name is.

Each of us who desires to be God's human instrument under the Great Commission to make disciples in our day needs the answer to this question as well. We know Jesus said, "I will be with you." But what is His name? What is He like? What can we count on Him to want to do? Those are the next questions that come to our hearts and minds.

God provides four clear answers to Moses's question.

1. His name is "I am that I am" (v. 14). When we read that we immediately think to ourselves, "What does that mean?" What does God say about Himself to Moses by saying that His name is "I am that I am"? Some implications come immediately to mind – self-existence, immutability, eternality. The best thing I have read on the significance of this name directed me to similar grammar in another verse, another passage in which God is explaining His name to Moses (Exod. 33:19). There He explains His name in these terms: "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will show mercy."

Do you see the grammatical parallel here to "I am who I am"? When God says "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious," He is saying that when it comes to His grace, He is sovereign. He chooses for Himself how to give out His grace. The same holds for His mercy. He is sovereign over the distribution of His mercy. No one dictates to Him who gets His grace or His mercy. That decision is His alone.

This is what God is telling Moses about all the attributes of His nature. When He says, "I am who I am," He is saying that He is sovereign over His own attributes and nature. He is saying that only He has the right to identify who He is. He is the One who chooses what His name is. Moses might wish He were someone else, but that is not Moses's prerogative. Whenever sinful man thinks God is someone He is not, he is forgetting this very first name – "I am that I am." For this reason we must know who He is only by listening very carefully to all that He has said about Himself. We have no sovereignty to imagine that He is something that He is not. Those imaginations are the essence of idolatry.

As human instruments of God's deliverance, we have to let God be sovereign over who He is. We must resist the temptation to make Him into something more acceptable to the

ones we are seeking to deliver. When we do that, we are in danger of introducing them to a false God, not the great “I am that I am,” who is the only One who can deliver them.

Understanding this about God’s name helps us to understand why the leaders of first century Judaism became so upset at Jesus when He told them things like, “Before Abraham was, I am.” They thought He was merely a 30-year-old man. He was that, but He was far more. He was Abraham’s sovereign, Abraham’s God, the One whom Abraham could only know by believing His self-revelation.

As we read our New Testament, this name of God is unpacked in a wonderful way in the person and work of Jesus Christ, which is another reason for our identifying Him with the God of the bush of Exodus 3 – *I am the bread of life, I am the light of the world, I am the good Shepherd, I am the resurrection and the life, I am the way, the truth, and the life, I am the true vine, I am Alpha and Omega, I am the bright and morning star.*

In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Jews looked for the One whom they would crucify. Jesus told them, “I am” (John 18:5). The next verse tells us, “As soon then as he had said unto them, I am . . ., they went backward, and fell to the ground.” Earlier, Jesus had explained to them, “If ye believe not that I am . . ., ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). Do you believe that the Crucified One is the I am who died for you? If not, you too will die in your sins.

2. His name is “God of your fathers” (v. 15-16a). The sons of the faithful have a precious treasure – the memorial of God’s name, which includes the truth that He is the same God our fathers had. The promise He made to them is being fulfilled in us. We need not change our religion to

match our age, because the God we profess to worship in our religion has not changed. He is the God of our fathers.

3. His name is "Visitor" (v. 16b). Our text emphasizes this part of God's name (KJV: *surely*). "Does Jesus Care?" "Oh yes, He cares; I know He cares. His heart is touched with my grief." It is important to emphasize this part of God's name, that He cares, in word and deed, when we seek to be His human instruments of deliverance. We bear His name, "the Visitor who cares," when we visit with care those in bondage and need.

4. His name is "Savior" (v. 17). He brings those in bondage up out of affliction and into the land flowing with milk and honey. Psalm 40:1-3, "I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord." Has the Savior brought you up. Have you seen His extended hand? That is His name - *Jesus - Jehovah saves* - for He shall save His people from their sins.

Conclusion: Who am I? I am the one God has promised to be with. Who is He? What is His name? He is "I am"; "God of your fathers"; "Visitor"; and "Savior." With these two answers, we have all we need to be the Lord's human instruments of deliverance this week. Let's hear and trust these answers, and faithfully go as sent out by Him.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*