

Exodus 3:1-8, 10-15

I have two pieces of **paper** here. They are the same **size**, the same **shape**, and the same **color**. What makes this one worth **twenty dollars** - and this one worth **nothing** at all? It's the **name**, isn't it? The only reason this one has **value** is because it is **backed** by the **United States of America**. Apart from that **name**, it's just another piece of **paper**. Now let's talk about **people**. When someone asks the question, "Who **are** you?" how do you **answer**? Most people generally respond by giving their **name** - "I'm Fred Smith." A **few** might answer by giving their **profession** - "I'm a **doctor**." But, I can't think of **anybody** who would answer, "I am who I am, and that's **all** that I am" - except Popeye the Sailor! Yet, in a sense that response, which also serves as the theme for today's sermon, is true for **each** of us. **I Am Who I Am**. I know it's true for **me**. Whether I like it or not, I **can't** be anyone else. I have strengths and weaknesses - I have joys and sorrows - I have achievements and disappointments. I will probably procrastinate until the day I die, unless I can put it off until **later**. But that's the way **I am**. It wouldn't do me any good to try and be someone **else** because I'd only come across as a **phony**. And we can **all** say the same thing - we **are** who we **are**. Some are scholars, some are not - some are athletes, some are not - some are musical, others aren't - some have a sense of humor, others don't. But all of us here today have the same **name** - **Christian**. We are **all** God's children, and He expects us to **be** what He has **made** us to be, and to **do** the things He has given us the **abilities** to do. He expects us to **back up** the name that has been stamped on our lives. That's what God Himself does. He says, "**I Am Who I Am**," and in our text He shows us what it **means** to be the God who is named "I Am." Today we'll look at **three** characteristics of the great I Am - He is a burning **fire** - He is an **approachable** God - and He is the God of our **fathers**.

Perhaps a little history is in order. At the time of our text, Moses was **80** years old, and working as a **shepherd** for his father-in-law, **Jethro**. Moses was a **good** shepherd. When he saw that the flocks needed a different grazing area, he did what he **had** to do, even if it meant taking them all the way to the far side of the desert to Mt. Horeb. Actually, Mt. Horeb (or as it is **later** called, Mt. **Sinai**) is a whole **series** of mountains and hills - and for the **most** part, it's a pretty **desolate** place. There are miles of emptiness and unbroken stillness. However, there are also some **oases** in the area, and Moses had sought them out for his flocks.

When Moses had reached his destination, he saw an **unusual** sight. A bush was on **fire**, but it was not **burning up**. This bush had stirred up Moses' **curiosity**.

He hadn't seen any lightning, and there didn't appear to be any **reason** for the burning bush. But, as we heard in our text, the **LORD** was the reason. The LORD is a **burning fire**. God warns us that **wickedness** will be met with fiery **judgment**. In the Old Testament He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone because of their wickedness, and in His parable of the **wheat** and **weeds**, Jesus told us that the wheat (the **believers**) would be separated and **saved**, while the weeds (the **ungodly**) who **remained** would be bundled up and thrown into the **fire** for **destruction**.

However, fire also has **another** side. It has the ability to **purify** and **cleanse**. Our text offers a good illustration of this, and that's the burning bush **itself** - it **burned**, and yet it was not **consumed**. This bush is a beautiful picture of the Israelites in Egypt. There they had been **burning** in the persecutions and tribulations of Egypt during their 400 years of slavery, and yet they were not **consumed**, because **God** was in their midst. In fact, they actually **grew** immensely - both in **numbers**, as well as in **strength**.

The burning bush also offers us a fine picture of **Moses**. Forty years earlier, Moses had been forced to flee from Egypt when it became known that he had killed an Egyptian. Moses had been trying to convince the Israelites that **he** could lead them out of Egypt right then and there. But **God** knew that Moses wasn't quite **ready**. He needed to be **purified**. So, for the next 40 years, Moses learned humility, common sense, patience, endurance, and leadership - by taking care of **sheep** and **goats**. He could have become **discouraged** - but he **didn't**, because **God** was with him. God had been preparing this **leader** for His people, and now after 40 years of fiery training, Moses was finally **ready**.

God is also a fire in **our** lives. The question is, what **kind** of a fire is He? Have you **thought** about that lately? What does the name "Christian" **mean** for us? There was a time in our country - a time not so long ago - when a person's **name** meant a lot **more** than it does today. A person's **name** was as good as his **word** - and his **word** was as good as his **name**. When somebody made a **promise** he **kept** it - because his **name** was at stake, and so was the reputation of **everyone else** who had the **same** name. Being a "**Rosenow**" was either **good** or **bad** depending on how each member of the Rosenow family **conducted** themselves. Now **transfer** that same thought to the fact that we are **all** members of the **Christian** family. Are we **preserving** the good name of **Christian**, or are we giving Christians a **bad name** through our words and actions? Are we **showing** how much we really **love** Jesus by living as **He** wants us to live - or do we just **say**

that we love Him, and **live** the way **we** want to live? Are we **on fire** for Jesus, or are we a church **on ice**? Are we **burning** with desire and love and gratitude for all of God's gracious gifts - or are we **skidding** toward a cliff, in danger of losing our **faith** and our **salvation**?

I can say with all **certainty**, that our lives have **not** been what God would **like** them to be. Nevertheless, we can turn right back to God again for **help**, just as Moses did when he saw himself coming up **short** for the great task of **leading** God's people. Moses found that God is an **approachable** God. He had told Moses that **now** was the time to return to Egypt and lead the people out of their bondage. But as ironic as it may seem, **now** Moses didn't think he could **do** it! Forty years ago he couldn't **wait** to get started, but **now** he felt he lacked both the **courage** and the **skill** which would be necessary to carry out this responsibility. Forty years ago he had trusted in his **own** knowledge and strength, but **now** Moses approached **God** for some answers. Moses asked, "*Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?*" And God as much as told him, "It doesn't **matter** who **you** are. What matters is who **I** am. **I** will be with you - and that's all you'll need."

Moses was still uncertain, so he asked, "*But what shall I tell them when they ask **who sent me?***" And God answered, "***I Am Who I Am.** This is what you are to say to the Israelites, **I Am** has sent me to you.*" The Israelites would immediately recognize "*I Am*" as the **covenant** name of God - the name which shows that He is self-existent, self-sufficient, eternal, and unchangeable - that He is the God of free and faithful **grace**.

This is the God whom we find in **Jesus Christ**. He Himself said, "*Before Abraham was, **I Am.***" That statement **infuriated** the Pharisees because Jesus was using the covenant name of God - **I Am** - and was claiming it for **Himself**. But what does that **mean**? That covenant name and the boundless love of God become crystal **clear** for us when we hear Jesus use statements like these, "***I Am** the Door ... **I Am** the Light of the World ... **I Am** the Good Shepherd ... **I Am** the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*" These are some of the **characteristics** of the God to whom we turn in all our troubles. **I Am** is His name forever, and for all generations.

It's also a good thing to note that our God is the God of our **fathers**. He told Moses, "*Say to the Israelites, 'The **LORD**, the God of your **fathers**, the God of **Abraham**, the God of **Isaac**, and the God of **Jacob**, has sent me to you.'*" This name distinguishes Him from all the **false** gods. It is the name which Elijah used

for the LORD to distinguish Him from **Baal**. It also happens to be a name which brings us great **assurance** - the assurance that we will rise from the dead to inherit eternal life. Jesus told the Sadducees, who say that there is **no** resurrection, “*Now about the dead rising - have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the **dead**, but of the **living**. You are badly **mistaken!***” The dead in Christ will **rise**, and live with God **forever** in **heaven**. God rules the **living** - He rules **Abraham**, and **Isaac**, and **Jacob** - and He will continue to rule **us too** after we **die**, for the Bible assures us that “*Whoever lives and believes in **Jesus** will **never die**.*”

Moses found this marvelous God in the middle of miles and miles of emptiness and desolation. Does your life ever feel that way - **empty** and **desolate**? Sometimes God will use emptiness to draw us **closer** to Him, so we can talk to **Him**, and He can talk to **us** apart from all the **distractions**. So, don't let the **empty** times get you **down**, but rather search diligently to find the **LORD** in them. He'll **be** there and He will **help** us - because He says, “***I Am Who I Am**,*” - namely, a righteous, loving, and compassionate God - one who **loved** us enough to **die** for us - one who cannot **deny** Himself. Thank Him that in this ever-changing world **Jesus, Our Savior, Is Who He Is** - and He will **always** be the **same**. Amen.