

I Am. . . the Resurrection

An Easter Sermon from Exodus

And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."
And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Exodus 3:6

Every Lord's Day Christians gather around the world to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on the first day of the week. Sadly, few people put the resurrection into a position of absolute importance today. **Liberals** have been saying for over a hundred years that it isn't the historical Jesus that matters, but the experience of a subjective Christ-event in your heart that counts. **Evangelicals** are constantly told that if believing in Jesus makes you feel good or helps your be a better you then that's really all that matters. The **world** chimes in, if Christianity works for you, then keep it. If not, then hop on some other religious band-wagon. It's no skin off God's back either way, because there are many ways to god in a pluralistic society. In all this subjectivity, the objective facts of Christ's death and resurrection are trivialized, marginalized, and irrelevant.

Yet, we must insist anew that **the Resurrection is the cardinal doctrine** of the entire Christian faith. Without it, you have a wasted sacrifice. Justification is worthless. And eternal life is mythology. It is so important that Paul said, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins... If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Cor 15:14, 17). The power of preaching lay not in the fancy speech or thousand dollar suits of the preacher, or in the soft lights and quiet music that plays in the background of an altar-call, but in the resurrected life of the Word of God. "The gospel is the power of God" (Rom 1:16); the good news that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. It pleases God to save through an announcement that gives all glory to God alone.

But for Paul, if Christ is not raised, it is even worse. Beginning with the Apostles on down to everyone who claims to believe in the resurrection of Christ today, if Christ is not raised, then we are all “lying about God” (1 Cor 15:15 NLT). We are false witnesses to a holy and now very angry God that this man Jesus is actually God in the flesh, having been crucified for our sins and raised to life for our justification. Can you imagine anything worse than lying about God to other people? To bear false testimony about him before others, dooping them into believing a lie that will keep them in their sins and send them to hell, is the worst possible crime I can imagine.

For, who is this God? He is the one that made Adam and Eve hide in the Garden as he approached them in the Spirit of Judgment (Gen 3:8). He is the one that caused Abram to fall on his face even when he came in peace (Gen 17:3). And he is the one of whom Moses was afraid to look because he was consumed in holy flame, yet was not incinerated (Ex 3:6).

I was remarking to my wife about the timing of God in relation to this Easter. We are traveling through the book of Exodus and we are right in the middle of chapter 3. Last week I ended in vs. 5. Vs. 6 picks up, “And he said, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.” This is a remarkable verse to “coincidentally” come to on Easter Sunday, because it has everything to do with the resurrection of the dead.

Maybe you wonder what in the world I am talking about. Isn’t this simply a verse where God discloses his name to Moses? Isn’t God just telling Moses about something from the past? Isn’t that all? The answer, of course, is no. That isn’t all--at all!

There are a couple of things I want to highlight from the Exodus account. First, most people realize that it is God talking to Moses. “I am the God of...” What often skims over the mind like a kid skipping a rock across the water is that it was the angel of the LORD that spoke to Moses from the bush. “The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame.” The Angel is a main actor in this drama, and I will come back to him at the appropriate time this morning. For now, I want you to see in this story how it says, “God called to him out of the bush.” Who is this Angel of the LORD?

Second, there seems to be a word play going on between Moses self-identification and God's self-identification. In response to God's voice Moses says simply "Here I am"¹ (vs. 4). But God says, "I am"² (vs. 6). Later in the story Moses says, "Who am I³ that I should go to Pharaoh?" But God says in return, "I AM WHO I AM."⁴ I AM has sent [you]." One way of thinking about this is simply, "This isn't about who you are, Moses. This is about who I am," says God.

But it is really much deeper than this. Before us now is one of the most important passages in the entire Bible. Because this is about God's self-identification; it is about exactly what kind of a God this is. In order to explain this, let me take you back to vs. 4. The word LORD (all caps) appears in this verse, "When the LORD saw..."

Now, this is not a new word in the Bible. It appears 165 times in Genesis alone! But it isn't until this passage that the word is explained. In Hebrew, LORD is *y-h-w-h*. Nobody really knows how to pronounce that, since the Jews refused to even speak the word for fear of blasphemy. Of course, you have seen today that God reveals himself with the word "I am." In Hebrew this is 'ehyeh. This is the verb 'to be' in the first person singular. The interesting thing is that *yhwh* is an early form of this same verb in the third person singular!⁵ In other words *yhwh* is basically the same thing as "I am." So, every time you see LORD in your Bible, think about this story with Moses. Think, "I AM."⁶

But let us now think about what this might mean for us this *Easter* morning. "I Am" is not merely a designation of an abstract theological concept. It is a designation of life itself. The name (i.e. verb of being) itself implies life. Only those who are alive "are." But "I Am Who I Am" implies constancy and continuancy in this form of existence. For, *whenever you speak of God, this is his name.*

¹ In Hebrew, "wayyö'mer hinnë'nî" (Lit: and he said, "behold! Me").

² In Hebrew, "wayyö'mer 'änökî 'élöhê 'äbî'kâ" (Lit: and he said, 'I am the God of your father').

³ In Hebrew, "wayyö'mer möšë 'el-hä'élöhîm mî 'änö'kî" (Lit: and Moses said to God, "who am I" [*mi anoki*]).

⁴ In Hebrew, "wayyö'mer 'élöhîm 'el-möšë 'elhyè 'äšer 'elhyè" (Lit: and God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM").

⁵ Osborn, N. D., & Hatton, H. (1999). *A handbook on Exodus*. UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (68). New York: United Bible Societies. You can see the similarities by looking at the Hebrew: אהיה (I Am) vs. יהוה (YHWH).

⁶ (I'll have more to tell you about this word next week. For instance, how we get Jehovah from YHWH).

People sometimes ask if everything comes from something else, **where did God come from?** Who made God? The answer is that *not everything* comes from something else. Something has to have life *in itself*, otherwise you end with an infinite regress of created things, which means you can never actually move forward to creating because there is no first cause. God is that something, or better yet, that someone. **God is life!** To be God is to be Life.

The interesting thing about creation in this regard is that God created man in his image. But sin entered the world through the Law and brought *death*. Romans says, “**Once I was alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died**” (**Rom 7:9**). A person could take that figuratively for Adam, because it fits the situation perfectly.

The point is, people often speak about death as if it is the most natural thing in the world. I even see Christians trying to convince themselves that death is not a bad thing if it happens to a Christian, because the person will be in God’s presence. It is actually the opposite. **Death is the most unnatural and horrible thing in all the world.** For death does not originate, ontologically speaking, from Life. It originates from sin, as the Scripture says, “**The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law**” (**1 Cor 15:56**). Amazingly, Paul says this in the midst of his great chapter on the resurrection!

Here is my point then. God is life. Death is the opposite of life. To die is to be apart from God’s life-giving nature. In that sense, it is to be separated from him. When the body dies, it is no longer animated by the soul. It goes into the ground, where it rots away, *seemingly* for all eternity. Thus, by virtue of what our eyes see, death appears to be a permanent situation. **Atheists, naturalists, and scientists** who do not know the origin of life, speak as if it arose accidentally, by happenstance. Life is purely a material phenomena. Thus, when a person dies, life ends, it ceases to exist.

But **religious people** know that it would be a far greater miracle for death to “create” life than for Life to create life. The one is scientifically unverifiable, pure irrational fideism. But the other happens every day, billions of times a second on this planet. It is self-evident. Yet, even religious people are confused on what happens after death. This was the case even within Judaism, that monotheistic seed from which Christianity began to grow.

In Jesus' day, the Jews debated this idea of a resurrection from the dead. Two groups of religious teachers had very different opinions on this. The one, called the Sadducees, say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit. But the other, called the Pharisees, acknowledge them all (Acts 23:8). Based on this, we might call the Sadducees the liberals of the day and the Pharisees the Conservatives. (People often chide the Pharisees for being so different from Jesus, thus making it easy to preach about those terrible Pharisees without ever being confronted on a personal level with them in ourselves. But in reality, they were much closer to his own beliefs than the Sadducees ever were. This makes his constant bombardment of Pharisaical legalism that much more important to internalize for so-called "conservative" Christians. Because far more than not, we look like the Pharisee than the Sadducee).

All three synoptic Gospels report a story where the Sadducees tried to trap Jesus in a question about the resurrection, since he had been talking about his own resurrection for weeks now. Instead of claiming his own authority (which he could have done), he went to the OT Scripture. Now, you might think he would go to something like the story of Elijah spreading himself over the body of a dead boy, raising him to life again (1 Kgs 17:21-22) or of Elisha doing the same (2 Kgs 4:32-37). At least he would have quoted a Psalm about God being there with a person in Sheol (Ps 139:8) or something like that (cf. Job 14:13-14; Prov 15:11). But that would not have convinced the Sadducees of anything, since they only believed that Genesis-Deuteronomy were to be considered the Word of God. They obviously did not think that Moses taught anything about a resurrection.

How wrong they were. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell us that Jesus went to Exodus 3:6 to prove the resurrection. In Mark it says, "And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong" (Mark 12:26-27). In Matthew it says, "As for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching" (Matt 22:31-33). Luke adds, "For all live to him." And when he had finished the scribes (the Pharisees) answered, "Teacher, you have spoken well" (Luke 20:38-19). Apparently, they agreed with his interpretation, and the crowds were amazed because of what Jesus saw in Exodus.

Sadly, modern Bible scholars question the legitimacy of Jesus' interpretation of this passage. Some think he is completely distorting the original meaning of the text. Others think he is stretching the legitimacy of a single verb way beyond anything it is normally able to bear. One scholar says,

In none of [Jesus' other uses of the Torah do] we sense so 'strained' an interpretation of an OT passage, apparently turning on the tense of a single verb ('I am'), as we do here. From our modern perspective, 'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob' need mean nothing more than 'I am the same God as the God who disclosed himself to the patriarchs'—that is, even though the patriarchs are now dead. It does not seem to imply anything about the existence or nonexistence of resurrection life.⁷

But this kind of reasoning fails to do justice to the Divine Name itself. And, it fails to justice to the one speaking to Moses from the Burning Bush. I believe very strongly that Jesus is saying that this passage *does* speak of the resurrection from the dead, and that he is not making this up.

Of course, the most obvious point that Jesus makes is here is that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not dead at all. They are alive, because the LORD "is" their God, not "was" their God. I don't understand why this should be viewed as a strained interpretation. Abraham himself believed in the resurrection. This is why he took Isaac to the altar to be sacrificed, because he believed that God could raise him from the dead. Hebrews says as much, and gets the idea from Abraham's own words which say that after the two go over to worship, they will *both* return (i.e. "come again to you;" Gen 22:5; Heb 11:19).

Furthermore, why in the world is God identifying himself as "I AM WHO I AM?" If you think that Jesus is making the tense of the verb bear too much, imagine substituting it with another tense, and then see what this does to God. "Moses, I was who I was." "I will be who I will be." That might make a Mormon or a Process theologian or a panentheist or anyone who believes that God is constantly changing happy, but it introduces heresy into the very DNA of God.

⁷ Craig Blomberg, 'Matthew', in *CONTUOT*, p. 79. Blomberg thinks that Jesus is resorting to an ad hoc or ad hominem argument "designed simply to apply the logic of a person or group with which the inspired author disagrees in order to make a point that is convincing by that very logic, even though the logic itself may be flawed." This is astonishing, because if true, then Exodus 3:6 does not in fact teach the resurrection at all, and Jesus is not trying to prove that it does!

But surely, this can't even mean that 'I am the same God as the God who disclosed himself to the patriarchs'—that is, even though the patriarchs are now dead. As if all God is saying is, "Yo, Mo. I'm Abe's God." After all, **what would that have proven to Moses? So what?** Wouldn't he be thinking, "My people have been in slavery for 400 years and you haven't done a thing about it, even though you say you are the God of Abraham."

Do you see my point? Really, other than the miracle birth of Isaac, the record of the Patriarchs is almost entirely taken up with their wickedness which ends up getting them down in this hell-hole in the first place. God has sworn lots of promises to them, but he hasn't really done anything... **yet!** (That's what Exodus is about). Yes, he orchestrated that they would get down here. But for what? So they could be slaves to the Egyptians for a few thousand years? Just revealing that you are Abraham's God is supposed to be an encouragement to Moses?

Doesn't this explain Moses' reaction to the whole plan that God reveals to him on the mountain (**which I will tell you about next week**)? God tells Moses that he has seen their affliction, that he has come to deliver them, and that he is sending Moses to the Pharaoh. Moses' response isn't "Well, I can do all things through God who strengthens me. I'm glad I have the God of Abraham on my side." His response is, "**who am I [Moses]?**" He thinks about how *he* is going to get the people out, not God. His response is, "**Who am I supposed to tell Pharaoh that you are.**"

This is the point of the Divine Name! I AM! **It is the very name of life**, and because of it, the power to create life, the power to restore life, the power to raise life from the dead. God's name alone is powerful, because it never changes. It is God, and not Moses, who will deliver Israel.

Now, finally, I want to return to that mysterious figure in the burning bush: **The Angel of the LORD**. As I mentioned, it says that **God** called to him out of the bush. And the voice said, "**I am the God of your father.**" In **vs. 4** he appears to be called "the **LORD**." The Angel of the LORD *is* the LORD. This is where things are going to get very interesting for us this morning.

This Angel appears in Genesis several times. From these episodes, we can understand his identity all the more clearly. The first time he appears by name is to **Hagar** of all

people! He says to Hagar, “I will surely multiply your offspring” (Gen 16:10). This is the exact same thing that the Angel tells Abraham, “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD... I will surely bless you, and I will multiply your offspring” (Gen 22:14-17). When Hagar hears the announcement she says, “‘You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees,’ for she said, ‘Have I also here seen Him who sees me?’” (Gen 16:13). Who has the power to multiply descendants except the LORD himself?

It is the Angel of the LORD who appeared to Abraham and his family under the oaks of Mamre with two other angels (who themselves went ahead to Sodom to save Lot). It says that Abraham saw three “men” (Gen 18:1), yet later, in what is clearly a face-to-face conversation, it says that *the LORD* said “I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son” (Gen 18:10). It says that “The men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way” (Gen 18:16). And *the LORD* began to speak and haggle with Abraham over the number of righteous people that he would save in the city. This is interesting, because I think most of us have this idea that Abraham was sort of talking in some mystical manner to the Father in heaven, somehow hearing his disembodied voice. But it says he was talking to the Angel.

It is the Angel of the LORD who chooses a wife for Isaac, as Abraham had said that the Angel would go before the servant to pick out a wife for the boy (Gen 24:7). It was the Angel of the God that spoke to Jacob in a dream about Laban (Gen 31:11), and later, who wrestled with Jacob and caused him to say, “I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered” (Gen 32:30). He is the one who “redeemed Jacob from all evil” (Gen 48:16).

The angel appears to men and women later in the OT too. When he appeared Balaam, the pagan “bowed down and fell on his face” (Num 22:31). Likewise, when he came to Joshua as the captain of the LORD’s army (Josh 5:13-15), he “bowed down on his face and worshipped,” and he said the same thing to Joshua that he said to Moses, “Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy” (vs. 15).

He appeared to the whole nation of Israel in Judges and said, “I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you’” (Jdg 2:1). It is God that makes the covenant with the people! He appeared to

Gideon who responded like Hagar and Jacob, “Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face” (Jd 6:22).

Finally (though this is not the end of his appearances in the Scripture), he appears in Judges 13 to a man named Manoah (Samson’s father) who asked the almost identical question as Moses, “What is your name?” (Jdg 13:17). The Angel responded, “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful [pl’]” (vs. 18).

With all of this information at our disposal, I am now in a position to tell you something that the Sadducees and Pharisees could not hardly imagine. And if you will believe it, then it will be credited to you as righteousness. Because Jesus was God clothed in human flesh, these instigators of a debate did not have the foggiest idea who they were talking to.

But *who were they talking to?* In the OT, he was the Angel of the LORD. (Angel is also the word for a messenger, so perhaps that is a better way to describe him: The Messenger, the Proclaimer, the Word of the LORD).

How do I know? *First*, it is because this Messenger is able to produce living offspring at will. *Second*, he bears the very name of the LORD. *Third*, he is called “The-God-Who-Sees.” *Fourth*, those that see him swear that they have seen God face to face. *Fifth*, he is the captain of the LORD’s army. *Sixth*, he redeems people from evil and exile. *Seventh*, he makes the very ground upon which he walks holy. *Eighth*, he makes a covenant that he will never break. *Ninth*, he is worshipped and accepts worship. *Tenth*, his name is wonderful!

But don’t you know that one born of flesh was prophesied who name would be wonderful (pl’). Isaiah said, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6). The Son bears all of the marks of the Angel of the LORD, except that he is clothed in human flesh. Like unto you and me. This is the utter mystery of the incarnation.

Yet, in light of all that we have heard today, listen to a few other things that Jesus went around saying to people. One time he was confronted by the Jews, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” And it reads, “So they picked up stones to throw at him” (John 8:58-59). When Jesus says, “I am,” he not only speaks

the words of God, he speaks the words of the *Angel* of the LORD! Jesus is the LORD who always is, uncreated, unchanging, ever living.

This is confirmed in a most amazing way by the Apostle Paul. Before you see it, you must be reminded of some things in Exodus about the Angel of the LORD. **Exodus 14** says, “Then the angel of God who was *going before* the host of Israel moved and *went behind them*, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them... and in the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of *fire and of cloud* looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic.” This was to confirm the words of God, “My angel shall go before you” (**Gen 24:7; Ex 23:23; 32:34**). “Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him” (**23:21**). **But what does Paul say?** The Rock that followed them (I had never caught that before. The Rock that *followed them*. **Where?** In the cloud and in the sea and in the food and in the water (**1 Cor 10:2-4**). The Rock that followed them *was Christ!* Since it was the Angel of the LORD that followed them, the Angel of the LORD is Christ!⁸

But now, the Angel of the LORD who is the God of the living and not the dead, the messenger of the Father that told Moses of these things, has come in the flesh. You may recognize him because you were told about these days over and over in the Scripture. Isaiah predicted, “My people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; *here am I*” (**Isa 52:6**). Isaiah uses the form of “I am” to speak of the Servant of the LORD. He uses the very same word that Moses used (אֲנִי), which I have told you is a word play on “I am” in our passage today. **And what does Jesus say in fulfillment of these things?** “My sheep hear my voice, and I

⁸ **Jonathan Edwards** has some interesting things to say about this. “This was by Jesus Christ, for it was wrought by him who appeared to Moses in the bush; the person that sent Moses to redeem that people. But that was Christ, as is evident, because he is called *the angel of the Lord*, Exod. 3:2, 3. The bush represented the human nature of Christ, who is called the *branch*. This bush grew on mount Sinai or Horeb, a word that signifies a dry place, as the human nature of Christ was a root out of a dry ground. The bush burning with fire, represented the sufferings of Christ, in the fire of God’s wrath. It burned, and was not consumed; so Christ, though he suffered extremely, yet perished not; but overcame at last, and rose from his sufferings. Because this great mystery of the incarnation and sufferings of Christ was here represented, therefore Moses says, *I will turn aside, and behold this great sight*. A great sight he might well call it, when there was represented, *God manifest in the flesh*, suffering a dreadful death, and rising from the dead” (Jonathan Edwards (2008). “A History of the Work of Redemption,” in *The works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 1*, (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., p. 546. See also Linda Munk, *The Devil’s Mousetrap*, p. 24ff). In the early church **Irenaeus**, **Clement**, **Justin Martyr**, **Eusebius**, and **Tertullian** all refer to the Angel as Jesus. <http://www.aloha.net/~mikesch/michael.htm>

know them, and they follow me. *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand*” (Jn 10:27-28).

How would Jesus know that God is the God of the living and not the dead in this passage in Exodus 3:6? Because he is the one that spoke to Moses out of the fiery bush! And we have images of him that are similar to this in the future. John sees a day when he will be clothed in garments, “arrayed with a cloud, and a rainbow upon the head, and his face as the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire” (Rev 10:1). Here is Jesus clothed in the cloud (and image of the Holy Spirit), yet himself burning like the fire in the bush.

This Jesus predicted his own death and resurrection many times while he walked the world of men. *But no one believed him. . . until* that morning on the first day of the week, when the women went to the tomb and found it empty. But for some, they had to see it to believe it. They had to touch the marks in his hands and feet and side. They had to talk to him and have their hearts burn within them as the word of fire spoke (Jer 5:14) life into their dry bones.

You now stand in a long unbroken line of those who have received this word and passed it onto their children’s children. Christianity has dominated the world like no other force for 2,000 years, not because false witnesses lied about God, but because Christians know that the cardinal doctrine of our faith happened in real history in a real place to a real man that predicted and then accomplished his own resurrection by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Beloved, if you will believe this truth, then you will have life. For Jesus said to Martha (who herself understood that resurrection and not reincarnation or annihilation is the only true story of life after death; cf. John 11:24) words that recall the Divine name of the LORD and the fact that he is the God of a living Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: “*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live*” (John 11:25). This is a different, yet the same interpretation of the Divine name in Exodus 3 that he gave to the Sadducees!

Therefore, awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city, for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake yourself from the dust and arise; be seated, O Jerusalem; loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion (Isa 52:1-2). Come to life in the name of Jesus Christ and feast upon his life until he returns with

the command and voice of the archangel, when the dead in Christ shall rise first (1 Thess 4:16).⁹ This is the meaning of life and the reason for gathering together today: to worship God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in the beauty of his unchanging ever-present life; and to enjoy his benefits forever. He came that you might have life, and have it more abundantly. What more could we ask on a Resurrection Day such as this?

⁹ I did not have time this morning to tease out the relationship between the Angel of the LORD and Michael (the proper name of the Angel). I hope to do that in a future article.