

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last week we heard about how Joseph, the son of Jacob, or Israel, had forgiven his brothers.

They feared revenge for selling him into slavery, even after he had brought them down to Egypt and provided them with land and provisions. But Joseph harbored no animosity toward them.

Long after Joseph and his brothers were dead, their descendants remained in Egypt.

Other Pharaoh's arose who did not know Joseph and they feared Israel's great growth.

They saw it as a threat to their national security and identity, and so they enslaved the Israelites, forcing them into hard service, making bricks and building up cities.

One Pharaoh even sanctioned genocide, the murder of any infant sons born to Israelite women.

Moses was to have been one such casualty, except he was rescued by Pharaoh's own daughter and raised in Pharaoh's own home as an Egyptian prince with royal education and freedom.

Upon seeing his people's hardships and one specific case of slave abuse, Moses killed an Egyptian.

He was then a fugitive with a death sentence placed upon him, so he ran to the desert.

There he was taken in by Jethro, married his daughter, and tended his sheep for 40 years.

This is where the Lord came to him in the burning bush.

This is where the Lord revealed Himself, by giving His personal name to Moses.

This is where the Lord revealed His actions and plan of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian slavery.

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

...Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land...."

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers 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." And He said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (ESV)

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen.* (John 17:17)

Many of us have grown up always knowing the name of the Lord.

Perhaps, like it did to me, it seems odd that Moses would ask for God's name to take to the people.

But this is logical, since to know God's name is to begin to know God.

And so we have the Angel of the Lord, standing amid the burning bush, give His name: I AM.

HE IS. There never was a time when God did not exist. He is in a permanent state of being.

This alone blows our mental capacities because we can't understand something that doesn't have a beginning, an origin, whether in time or in matter.

Yet I AM is both timeless (eternal, without beginning or end) and matterless (a spirit).

But this personal God doesn't just exist. He speaks... and He acts.

He spoke to Moses, His now-called prophet, and gave Him the words to speak to the elders & Pharaoh.

From the burning bush, He revealed to Moses His active concern for His people:

**Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people ...**

**have heard their cry... . I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them ...**

**and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land...."**

While the Israelites' prayers seemed to have gone unnoticed, the Lord was not deaf to them.

Nor was He blind or ignorant to their suffering.

The Lord's time to act and to redeem had come. His servant was now ready,  
and the people needed God's plan of redemption revealed to them,  
and Pharaoh needed to be humbled and to learn who the one, true God truly is.

As Moses went to the elders of Israel, they listened to him, just as God said they would.

We hear Moses report: **And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.**

They believed God's Word sent to them through Moses, His minister.

They were comforted in their afflictions and hopeful for the promises given,  
trusting that the Lord would do this.

The seed had been sown in their hearts. They received it with joy... at least for a time.

But Pharaoh was also to receive the Word of God,

to be requested that he let Israel go to worship Him as a nation 3-day's journey in the wilderness.  
And just as the Lord said, Pharaoh would not let them go unless he was compelled.

He heard the Word of God by the same minister, Moses.

He was like the trampled path so that the devil came and took away God's Word.

It was the same message, God granting freedom for His people, but received very differently.

Moses also was a recipient of God's Word. He was hesitant to proceed as directed,

to speak to Pharaoh, the king of the people who had a death sentence hanging over his head.

But the Lord sought to comfort Moses by assuring him that God Himself was calling him  
to do this and that He would be with him.

Moses, in the next chapter, gave God all the excuses he could muster as to why he shouldn't go,  
but the Lord refuted them all, finally, even in righteous anger, plainly telling him to go.

In these three groups and individuals, we see the parable of the sower and the seed unfold.

We have the hard hearted ground in Pharaoh, who against better knowledge, rejected God.

He would not humble himself except he was compelled to by the 10 disastrous plagues.

We see in this the truth that simply knowing that God exists does not save us.

He even saw God's powerful acts of redemption to save God's people.

But he would not submit his will to God's.

In fact, upon hearing God's demands through Moses, he made life more difficult for Israel,  
commanding them to make the same number of bricks, but without supplying the straw.

We have the Children of Israel, who immediately received the Word of God with joy.

They believed it and looked for its fulfillment. They worshiped God.

They sprang up quickly, but as soon as they had any adversity, their joy dried up.

The cares of this world, the extra burdens & beatings given by Pharaoh, choked out their hope.

These did not bear fruit, but rather complained against Moses and the Lord.

They forgot the initial miracles and Words, and focused on their temporary discomfort.

Even Moses was not a perfect example of the good soil.

He didn't desire to bend his will to the Lord's either.

He wanted to stay out of it, to let someone else do that hard task of leading God's people.

We see here what appears to be humility, except it is really a selfish apathy cloaked as humility.

Moses did not want to heed God's Word. He didn't want to do what God had sent him to do.

But this is where last week's lesson on God's grace comes to bear.

The Lord, though meeting resistance in all three groups and individuals, continued to show mercy upon those whom He called His own and to plow and clear their hearts. He led Moses to accept his calling as the Lord's minister, and to trust in God's presence with him. He led Israel out of Egypt, out of slavery, to a good and broad place, to the Promised Land. And He led Pharaoh, by means of the plagues, to acknowledge that He was indeed true God, though it did not profit him for eternity.

People loved by God, these people are us.

We suffer under affliction. We afflict others with sin. We fight against God's will. We get choked by worldly cares. We harden our hearts. We try to hide our hypocrisy. You want to be the good soil, but find God's Word tedious. You want to bear fruit, but find only chaff and straw.

Then listen to this Word of God again and hear Jesus,

For the burning bush is your transfigured Savior that we saw two weeks ago; His divine nature burning eternal light yet miraculously not consuming His human nature.

This Jesus speaks out of the burning bush:

**"I have surely seen the affliction of, you, My people ... have heard your cry... .**

**I know your sufferings, and I have come down to deliver you ...**

**and to bring you up out of that land to a good and broad land....**

This is what Jesus did, the picture of perfect good soil, listening to, obeying His Father's will.

Consider: He also received the Word of His Father, and of anyone, that Word was much harsher:

"Go down from Your heavenly home, take on human flesh and blood, take on man's sins, bear his afflictions, his hardness of heart, his disobedience, his rejection of You. Suffer and die for these who struggle to listen to You, or have even rejected You, so that You may deliver them and bring them up to live with Us in paradise."

The eternal Son of God sprang up from the dry ground of our humanity.

He bore abundant fruit in His preaching, leading many to hear the gracious Words of the Father. And when the time for God's deliverance had come, He willingly sacrificed Himself on God's altar for you, so that He might passover you in His judgment, and bring you up to Himself in a good and broad land for all eternity.

Like Moses, you are standing in His presence now. Take off the dirty, dusty sandals of sin.

You who have been washed in Holy Baptism are already clean.

You need only confess your sins before Your Father, and so let Jesus wash your feet of the sins that plague you.

Do not fear Him or be shamed in His presence.

When you struggle to hear His words with joy, when the cares of this life are choking you out, when you recognize that you have hardened your heart toward Him or toward your neighbor, when your will fights His own and wants to offer Him excuses, then listen all the more intently.

Listen to His words to you, hear that they are gracious: **"I AM with you, even to the end of the age."**

The I AM who always was, is, and will be, is with you with His gracious presence.

...The Lord is not far off, caring about His own existence, deaf or blind to, or ignorant of you.

He is a God of action. Jesus has acted and delivered you from sin, death, and the tyranny of the devil. And He still acts; hearing and answering your prayers according to His gracious will and in His time, and He will bring you up out of this land of affliction to Himself in paradise.

The Lord be with you. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria*