SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Holy Encounter

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Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.

If you have your Bibles, I want to invite you to grab them and turn to Exodus chapter 3. Exodus chapter 3.

Earlier this year, in preparation for our NEXT campaign, about 300 of us went through the workbook Experiencing God. We met down in the FLC and went through this study together on Wednesday nights. It was actually the third time I'd ever been through Experiencing God.

The workbook came out in 1990, if I'm not mistaken, and the first time I went through it was as a seventh grader. My Sunday school teacher, Joyce Shoebridge, had my Sunday school class from sixth grade all the way to 12th grade. She took us through Experiencing God in her living room, and it was just formative in my spiritual growth and development as a teenager.

I picked it up again in 2020. I was living in Dallas, Texas, at the time, and I knew God was stirring something in my heart, but I didn't know what. I knew I just needed to hear from the Lord. So I went on an extended fast and began to seek the Lord at a deeper level and to pray. I was reading all kinds of books during that time and, of course, going through Bible study. I picked up Experiencing God again and went through it for a second time.

I really believe that it prepared me that year when Champion Forest called me to come serve as pastor. It prepared me to say yes.

Then the third time was earlier this spring, as we were getting ready for the NEXT campaign. God's used that Experiencing God workbook to stretch my faith and really prepare me for whatever He is about to do in my life.

If you've done the workbook, you know that it centers on Exodus chapter 3. This is, of course, Moses's call by God. This is when God introduces Himself to Moses as the I Am. We'll get into that momentarily. It's about the holiness of God. It's a beautiful scene in Scripture.

Last week we saw fire fall in the temple. This week we see fire in a burning bush out in the middle of nowhere. I'm calling the message today "Holy Encounter."

I want us to look at our text, Exodus chapter 3, verse 1. The Bible says this:

> *Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.*
>
> — Exodus 3:1

Now, context is important. Don't ever neglect biblical history when you're reading the Scriptures. It helps you understand what's going on in and around a text at a given moment.

You know the story of Moses. If you grew up in the church, it's very familiar to you, but it's worth taking a glance at once again.

Moses was a Hebrew, and during the time when he was growing up, the Bible says that God was blessing the Hebrews so much that they were multiplying like crazy. The Egyptian Pharaoh began to feel a little fearful, a little insecure, if you will. He said, "Listen, if they keep multiplying, they're going to overtake us."

So the Egyptian Pharaoh put the nation of Israel into slavery, bondage, and captivity. Pharaoh said to those caring for the Hebrew women who were giving birth, "If you're helping give birth and a boy comes out, he is to be killed. You throw him in the Nile River."

Moses's parents, of course, were God-fearing, so there was no way they were going to allow this to happen. When Moses was born, they put him in a little wicker basket, if you will. They covered it with pitch and, in order to save his life, strategically put him near the Nile River, where Pharaoh's daughter would go down and bathe.

She went down one day with her servants, and they heard the whimper of a little baby. Lo and behold, they found this little baby, baby Moses. Moses was taken into the home of the Egyptian Pharaoh and became the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

This was his life. He grew up in the home of the Egyptian Pharaoh for 40 years. One day, he came out. He knew that he was a Hebrew, even though he'd been raised in Pharaoh's home, and he saw one of the Hebrews being beaten by an Egyptian slave owner. He got so angry. His rage overtook him, and he beat that person to death and buried him in the sand.

The next day, he came out and saw an argument between two of his fellow Hebrews. He went to break up the argument, and they said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Who do you think you are, Moses? You think you're some deliverer? You think you're our ruler? Who are you to tell us what to do? Are you going to do to us what you did to that guy yesterday - kill us and bury us in the sand?"

Moses knew in that moment that his cover was blown. He knew Pharaoh was going to come after him for killing that Egyptian, so he fled.

He went a few hundred miles southeast to this mountain called Horeb. There he became a shepherd, met his wife, and lived for 40 years in obscurity. He left Egypt at 40, and for 40 years he was just shepherding his father-in-law's flock.

Surely he wondered, "What happened to my fellow people back in Egypt?" But we really know nothing of what went on during those 40 years until Exodus chapter 3.

He's on this mountain called Horeb. Another name for it is Mount Sinai. You can see on the screen an image of this mountain range. We'll look at this mountain again next week, when God speaks from this mountain to the people of Israel after they've been delivered out of slavery.

We pick up in Exodus chapter 3, verse 2:

> *And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.*
>
> — Exodus 3:2

God Gets Our Attention

If you're taking notes, I want to give you principle number one of a holy encounter: God gets our attention.

How many of you know God knows how to get your attention? He certainly does.

Moses was minding his own business. This was his regular routine. For 40 years he'd been tending this flock of sheep. There was nothing special about where Moses was. There was nothing special about what Moses was doing. He was just going about his business, and all of a sudden God showed up.

He showed up in pretty spectacular fashion. The Bible says the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire. It is holy fire. He saw this bush burning, and yet the bush wasn't consumed.

There are just a couple of things here to note. First, the angel of the Lord. We see angels showing up many times in the Old Testament and the New Testament, but this angel is different. He's referred to as the angel of the Lord.

Most scholars, when they study this passage of Scripture, call this what is known in theology as a Christophany. A Christophany is a pre-incarnate view of Christ. That's who this angel of the Lord is. It's the second person of the Trinity. It's Jesus Himself. Notice that the angel of the Lord speaks as God.

One commentator noted that Moses meets Jesus here at the burning bush, but it won't be the last time they meet. They'll meet again at the Mount of Transfiguration. That's pretty cool to think about.

Moses looked and noticed that this desert bush was on fire, but it wasn't being consumed.

This week my family went to see our two oldest, who are in school at Baylor. It was homecoming week for Baylor, and they have a huge bonfire on Friday night. We went out to this bonfire. I'd never been before, and there were thousands of people there. I was shocked at how many people could get into Waco. They were there at Baylor celebrating homecoming.

They have this big bonfire, and it's roped off. It's kind of like what we talked about last week. Fire draws you in, but it's also dangerous. You've got to keep your distance.

Any fire you make or create has to have fuel to get going and sustain itself. Once that fuel is gone, whatever it may be, that fire dies out. But this fire in the bush was different. It didn't need the bush to keep going. Like God, this fire was dependent on nothing.

Moses saw this bush on fire, but the bush wasn't being consumed. Look at what he did in verses 3 and 4:

> *And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned."*

> *When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!"*
>
> *And he said, "Here I am."*
>
> — Exodus 3:3-4

God got Moses's attention, and he turned aside to see what this was all about. I want you to notice that God didn't call Moses's name until Moses turned aside to see what was going on. The bush got Moses's attention, but God didn't speak to Moses until He saw that Moses turned aside.

Just a point of application here: God knows how to get our attention, and He uses all sorts of circumstances, situations, and events to do it. He could be using this sermon right now as a burning bush to get your attention.

The question is, will you turn aside and really pay attention? Will you discern, "God, what is it You're trying to speak to me out of?"

You've got to turn aside.

He can use a wreck. He can use an illness. We dedicated these babies up here today. He can use the birth of a child to get a parent's attention. How many of us know young people who were raised in the church and then went off and left the church, but when they started having families, they started coming back?

He can use the birth of a baby. He can use the death of a loved one. He can use a verse of Scripture that keeps coming up over and over again. He can use a person He keeps crossing your path with. God can use anything to get our attention.

The question is, when He gets our attention, will we turn aside to discern what it is that God wants to say to us? It was when Moses turned aside that God called out his name and spoke to him.

Look at verses 5 and 6:

> *Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."*
>
> *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 3:5-6

Last week the temple was considered holy. This word means "set apart." This week this obscure mountain is considered holy.

Why is it considered holy? It's not the location. It's the fact that God is there. That's why it's considered holy. God is present. Wherever God is, that's holy ground.

I don't find it interesting that God got Moses's attention. He's God. He can get our attention. What I find interesting is when He chose to get Moses's attention.

Again, it was in the normal, everyday routine of his life. It was during the mundane that God showed up. Moses was just doing his thing, and all of a sudden there was this holy encounter. He was just going about his

business.

I tell you, that's been true in my life.

When I trusted Christ on August 3, 1989, I was at a preteen camp. I was just doing my thing. I was a little kid. My parents sent me to camp. I was having a good time and hanging out with my friends. I was just doing my thing. Then the pastor started preaching, and all of a sudden there was a holy encounter. God spoke to my heart.

During my senior year in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, as I was getting ready to graduate, I was just doing my thing. I was working at Southwest Sporting Goods, putting together trophies and putting numbers on the backs of jerseys. That was my job. I'd go home every day. I had my English bulldog, Pork Chop, there with me, and we'd just talk about the day.

It was just my regular routine, and all of a sudden I got a phone call from Joe Perry. He said, "Jarrett, what are you doing? We've got some internships open. I want you to come interview." In the middle of a regular routine, God showed up.

When Champion Forest called me, around this time of year six years ago, I was talking to the search committee. I was just doing my thing. I was out on the soccer field coaching my twins' soccer team. We were the Kicking Chickens. We were just doing our thing. We were good, too!

Then I got a phone call, and I knew the number and the name. I knew exactly what it was about. In the regular routine and rhythm of life, God showed up.

I think sometimes we believe that if God's going to show up, it's going to have all the feels with it, right? We're going to get chills. We're going to get goosebumps. There are going to be flashing lights. But more often than not, God shows up in the regular routine of our lives.

It could be that way today. You come to church because it's just what you do on Sunday. Or maybe there's a trial, a trouble, or something bigger than you that's come into your life, and you came to church today because you knew you needed answers.

It's just the regular routine and rhythm of your life, and God's showing up.

The question is, will you turn aside? Will you look deeper at what God's trying to do? Because I'm telling you, when God shows up, it's not just a casual encounter.

Did you notice what He said to Moses? "Take off your sandals. Don't come a step closer." There's a holy reverence, a holy fear. He introduced Himself. He said, "I am the God of your forefathers."

In other words, Moses, God ain't your homeboy. He ain't the man upstairs.

No, I'm telling you, when God's present, if He's speaking to your heart, don't put that off. Don't just shake that off as something casual. Don't grow apathetic and complacent and write it off as coincidence. No, the holy God is trying to get your attention.

So turn aside. When God speaks, it demands extreme caution.

God Gives Us a Mission

God gets Moses's attention. Principle number two of a holy encounter is that He gives us a mission. That's what the Scriptures say next.

Look at verses 7 through 10:

> *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, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.*
>
> *And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.*
>
> *Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."*
>
> — Exodus 3:7-10

The Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, the Jebusites, the electrolytes, and the cellulites. I could go on and on. All right, here we go.

Before we get into the calling of Moses here, I just want to testify - come on - to the goodness and grace of God.

Did you notice in this Scripture? God is spirit, but in order for us to understand who He is, human language is used to describe Him. He sees. He hears. He knows. He remembers.

In fact, go back in your Bibles to Exodus 2 and just asterisk verses 23 through 25. It'll be on the screen. Look at this:

> *During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God.*
>
> *And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.*
>
> *God saw the people of Israel - and God knew.*
>
> — Exodus 2:23-25

Look at that: "They cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God." And God heard. Do you see that? He heard their groaning.

Listen to me: God hears our prayers. Even when you don't think He does, He hears your prayers.

God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Scripture teaches that God's not like us. He

doesn't forget. Nothing ever slips His mind or slips past Him. He doesn't sleep. He doesn't slumber. He doesn't take naps. That's who our God is.

God saw the people of Israel. God still sees. Nothing gets past Him. The Bible says He sees our secret sins. He sees everything.

And God knew. He knows your situation. That word "know" there is intimacy. He intimately knows you and the situation you're in.

Do you need some confidence today? Do you need some hope today? God hears. God sees. God remembers. God knows your situation. He hasn't forgotten you.

That's the God we serve. It's the goodness of God.

Speaking of goodness, did you see the gospel in chapter 3, verse 8?

> *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, a land flowing with milk and honey.*
>
> — Exodus 3:8

Do you see Jesus in that? He came down. He came down to earth, was born in a manger, and went to a cross.

He came down to do what? To bring us up out of slavery to sin, put us in a new family, and make us a new creation, where one day we will live with Him forever and ever. It's a land flowing with milk and honey.

It's the gospel in verse 8. I love this passage of Scripture.

God informed Moses that He saw it all, but then came the mission. Then came the sending.

God's answer - look at this and don't miss it - God's answer to the suffering He saw, and God's answer to the cries and groans of the people He heard, was to raise up a person to do something about it.

That's amazing. God could have sent angels. They're His ministering servants. They go at His beck and call whenever He wants them to go. He could have done it Himself. He didn't need to use people to accomplish His purposes.

But instead, in the grace of God, He raised up a person to help lead a movement and be the answer to somebody's prayers.

I wonder if there's some pain and suffering going on right now that God sees. He hears their cry, and He's raising up somebody today to be the answer to those prayers.

I think about our 6:24 ministry. I don't even have that in my notes, but I think about it. Maybe He hears the cry of a kid who wants a home, and today, just through this message and this challenge, He's raising somebody up to say, "I'll foster that child. I'll adopt that child."

This is how God works. He's calling you to mission so you can bring His hope and His light.

Bob Pierce was preaching for Youth for Christ in China. Near the end of his trip, he went by a home to say goodbye to the leader of that home, which took in children. When the leader met him at the door, she was carrying a child. She placed that child in his arms.

This child had been beaten and abandoned because she had become a believer. The home he was visiting already had so many kids they were taking care of, so many mouths to feed. As she placed this child in his hands, she asked point-blank, "What are you going to do about this?"

He held that child in his hands, reached into his pocket, gave the last five-dollar bill he had, and promised that when he got back home, he would send more.

Years later, he had a similar experience in Korea. He saw so much need, and he wrote in the flyleaf of his Bible, "Let my heart be broken with the things that break the heart of God."

He went to work, and he founded World Vision, which now serves children in nearly 100 countries.

What happened? God saw the need. He heard the cry. And He raised up a man to do something about it.

That's what He did with Moses. He raised Moses up.

In several weeks, we'll see another holy fire moment. There'll be an encounter with the prophet Isaiah, and it ends the same way. God gives him a mission.

> *And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."*
>
> — Isaiah 6:8

By the way, when God speaks, chances are you're not going to get a literal burning bush. If you do, take your phone out and capture it, all right? Because nobody's going to believe you if you do.

It's probably not going to be as spectacular as a burning bush that's not consumed. But do you know how God speaks today? Through His Word, by His Spirit, and through the community of faith. In many ways, it's just as spectacular.

God can take this Book right here, and it's no ordinary book. It's like a double-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. This is how He speaks.

That's why it's so important that when you wake up, you spend time alone with the Lord. Every time you open up His Word, this is a burning bush. You can feel the flame coming off it.

That's why it's so important that you get in a life group and have people who can know you inside and out, speak truth to you, celebrate life's victories, go through life's defeats, and call you back when you're wayward.

That's how God speaks to us today: through His Word, His Spirit, and the community of faith.

He speaks in Exodus 3:10:

> *Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.*
>
> — Exodus 3:10

Moses had been on the run for 40 years. He was 80 years old at the time.

I met a lady here today. She volunteered her age. She said, "I'm 91." I said, "Well, I've got a message for you today. If you're not dead, you're not done, all right?"

God called Moses at 80.

Don't you know Moses thought he was a failure? He didn't even have his own flock to look after. He was looking after his father-in-law's flock of sheep. For 40 years, we have nothing. We have not one word from God to Moses recorded in Scripture during those 40 years.

It's a great lesson for us that whatever failure we may have had, it's not final. It's a great lesson for us. I don't care how old you are in here. God's got a plan for you. You never know when He's going to speak into your heart and into your life. You never know when He's going to show up.

God Guarantees Us His Presence

God gets our attention. He gives us a mission. This leads to principle number three of a holy encounter: He guarantees us His presence.

Look at verses 11 and 12:

> *But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"*
>
> *He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."*
>
> — Exodus 3:11-12

Moses was a nobody. Go to Pharaoh? Maybe when he was in the home of the Egyptian Pharaoh, young and 40 years old and strong, he was somebody. Maybe that's when God could have used him.

But now? At 80? He had no army. He was on the backside of nowhere. He'd already been rejected by his people, so to speak.

He said, "God, who am I?"

God answered, "Who are you? It ain't about you. It's about Me. I'm going to be with you."

Before God even gave Moses His name, He guaranteed His presence. It's two verses later when Moses said, "Who do I tell them is sending me?" God said, "The I Am Who I Am. Yahweh. That's who's sending you, Moses."

When God calls you to something, it's on Him to see you through. You understand that, right? When God calls

us to something, it's not on us. It's on Him to see us through.

And get this: Notice when the sign that God had sent Moses would come. This is huge. It would come after the obedience.

The second part of verse 12 says, "You want to see a sign? The sign is going to be that you'll worship on this very mountain once the people are out of slavery."

Most of the time, when God calls us to something that's bigger than ourselves, we want the sign first. "Give me the sign, and then I'll do it."

That's not how it works.

God says, "You act. You obey. And I'll show you the sign. You get to leading. When you bring them out by My mighty hand, you'll have your sign."

D.L. Moody said Moses spent 40 years thinking he was somebody, 40 years learning he was nobody, and 40 more years discovering what God can do with a nobody.

That's who we are. Champion Forest, we're a bunch of nobodies. But you know what? With God in us and God with us, look out.

Major Ian Thomas wrote a book called The Saving Life of Christ. Save your money. The book's not that great. But there's one chapter that's worth the book. I think it's chapter four. It's called "Any Old Bush Will Do."

Thomas says, "What made that bush in the wilderness special?" It wasn't that bush. God could have used any bush. What made it special was that God was in the bush.

That's what makes us special: God in us.

I told you about the three times I went through the workbook Experiencing God. That first time was with Joyce Shoebridge, my Sunday school teacher from sixth grade to 12th grade.

I went and did her funeral in 2017. She was a prayer warrior for me. I miss her every day.

Those little kids who were in her Sunday school class - she showed up for us every single week from sixth grade to 12th grade. Out of the 10 to 12 of us who were in her class, four of us are in full-time Christian ministry.

Nobody's written any articles about Joyce Shoebridge. Nobody even knows who she is. She was just an ordinary bush, but God was burning in her. That fire in her caught fire in my heart.

She had a holy encounter with God that put her on a mission. Again, it doesn't have to be anything massive. Her mission was to be a Sunday school teacher, and she said yes.

Because of her own holy encounter, because she said, "Here I am, Lord," and because she said yes, it led to multiple holy encounters that I've had with God in my own life.

I'm telling you today, God wants to have an encounter with you. If you're here, it's no accident. God's using this message today to get your attention. It's a holy encounter.

The question is, will you, like Moses, turn aside and say, "Here I am"?

Holy fire. Holy encounter.