

What's in a name? What's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear these names?

- General Patton (Old Blood & Guts)
- Paul McCartney
- Cameron Townsend (founded missionary organizations Wycliffe & SIL)
- Joe DiMaggio
- Abraham, Isaac, Jacob
- God – What is your image of God? What defines God?

Moses knew who Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were but he was just becoming acquainted with this God who was speaking to him from a burning bush. The conversation continues from last week. Remember? God was going to send Moses to Pharaoh to bring his children out. READ Exodus 3:13-22

When Moses asked God about God's name, he was asking, "*God, can you make good on your promises?*" It's like reading the fine print when you buy something. What's covered? Does God have name recognition? What's His track record?

So far God's promise #1 was astoundingly fulfilled. When God told Abraham, "I will make you exceedingly numerous," Abraham just laughed, thinking "That's ridiculous!" (Gen 17:1-8, 17). But it happened! His descendants became so numerous Egypt was "swarming" with them. But, now threats have come against them; they had become enslaved. There are always threats that oppose God's promise.

What now? What, exactly, can God do? That's on Moses' mind. That's the question and it's often our question too.

The people I named earlier are known by what they did. Their names became synonymous with their action. God's name also expresses God's character and action. So God's answer was, "I can do amazing things." And God lists some of those things he intended to do.

Moses wasn't so sure. He himself had tried to help his people many years before and failed. When God asked him to go do this job Moses probably thought, *what, are you joking?* Moses certainly had no reputation as a leader.

But God wasn't concerned about that. God said, Tell them my name is "I AM."

That name means several things. First and foremost, it means today when you read this text God is just the same. God is just as present now as God was for Moses at the burning bush. God is just as intent on bringing people out of bondage as He was that day.

God's name is a verb, "to be." It means to be alive; to be here, with us."

Can you think of another name for God which we hear at Christmas time? Jesus' name, "Immanuel – "God with us" (Mt. 1:23)

That verb implies action that continues forever: "I am being" or "the One who always is." It's not abstract or undefined, like "the force" from Star Wars. God is an active personality who is present all the time. God describes it. God says, "I have paid close attention to you."

Surely some of you have experienced it. If you take time seeking God – praying and reading your Bible, you will have those epiphany moments when you know God is there.

It's like a mother who has eyes in the back of her head. Have you ever experienced that? When I was a little girl I sucked my thumb. My mother seemed to know I was sucking my thumb even when she was in the next room. She would put me to bed and after a few minutes I'd hear, "Ginger, stop sucking your thumb."

How did she know that? She wasn't even in the room! The light was out. I sensed my mother's presence! I thought she could see through the wall.

God is like that. God can see through the wall and God pays close attention to you.

Perhaps you think God is watching to keep a record of all that you do wrong. But that's not what the Bible says. Instead, God wants to free you. In this story God wanted to bring the people out of the humiliation of slavery. Do you trust that God sees your circumstance and wants to bring you out of humiliation? If you see that, you are well on the road to experiencing the power of God in your situation.

God's power is central to God's name. God's power was so great he freed Israel.

But how would they know? How could they trust it?

They knew by God's name. When Moses told them the name, it was like saying "God who lives up to promises." God promised Abraham he would make him into a nation and it happened. That promise was evident to them.

Because God's character and purpose are the same, there's more to the promise. God wanted to fulfill promise #2 and move them out of bondage to their own land.

When things happen in your life that create bondage, remember God is always ready to help move you out of the bondage. No matter how impossible it may seem, if you cry out to God, God will faithfully hear you and help you. He heard the cry of Israel, remembered his promise, and freed them.

But it was hard for Moses to hear at first. God had to build credibility with Moses. So God said, "I'm the same one who helped your ancestors Abraham. I'm the God of your fathers."

It's like saying, "I'm the one your grandmother relied on." I can remember my grandmother singing hymns while she fixed dinner. That history draws me toward God.

Last week George Huttar testified in the service that he shared about his faith in God with his cousin. George gave his cousin a Bible. When the cousin reads it, he will remember God's words. Then the Bible stories will mean more; he will think about George. Oh, this is what George believes; this is George's God.

George told his cousin that God had been with him; and, if his cousin believes, the same God will be there for him too. So God said, "I am the God of your Fathers."

- Abraham forever belonged to God
- Isaac was forever God's,
- Jacob and Joseph were forever God's, and
- Moses was forever God's.

You are forever God's. And, God will set you free. Why? Because God always is faithful, always present with you and hears your cry.

I imagine if we went around this room we could all share experiences of painful things. We might even say some things have been miserable. Israel was in misery in Egypt and our pain is no less significant. God cares and is willing to do something about it. He wants to move you out.

Once Jesus was talking to believers and He said, "If you continue in my word, you will know the truth and the truth will make you free." They said, "Hey, we've never been slaves. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?" Jesus replied, "Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; but the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free forever" (Jn 8:31-36).

God's desire is to lovingly free us from the sin that binds us, just like God wanted to take Israel to a land **gushing** with milk and honey. You heard that right. The Hebrew word means "gushing." God takes slaves and makes them free people. God sees them, rescues them, protects them, guides them, provides for them, forgives them, disciplines them, and puts them in an abundant land.

Do you feel loved like that this morning? If you call God your God no matter what you struggle with, God can free you and has a bright future for you.

That's all in God's name. You know it's true because God did just that for Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, King David, Mary Magdalene, Mary and Martha, Paul, Cameron Townsend, and He's doing that for you. God's doing it everywhere. God's doing the same for a woman named Susan.

A woman told this story to her pastor recently. It's a true story. She had gotten divorced, so she left town with her 12-year-old son. She starting driving but had no place to go when she saw the steeple of the church and stopped. As she walked into the church to attend the service, a greeter asked her name and where she lived. She replied, "I'm Susie¹ and we live in my car." The

¹Name has been changed.

woman said, "Then you come home with me." Over the next few weeks the woman introduced her to others in the church. One of them found her a job at a bank. Then, someone else helped her find a townhouse to buy. She could qualify now that she was employed, but she did not have enough money for all the closing costs. Later, another woman came to her and said, "Something really neat happened to my husband at work and we'd like to share it with you." She handed her an envelope. When Susie opened it, it contained 15 one hundred dollar bills. She told her pastor, who stood there astounded at this story, "I just wanted to tell you, Christians really do love one another."

Christians love one another because God is present, God sets people free, and God gives abundantly. God works through you to tell the story. Is your heart open to God's work? God loves you forever, and makes you forever free.

AMEN