

**Jesus is the fire that warms us through the cold of unmet expectations.**

**Exodus 3:1-15** “Meanwhile, Moses was shepherding the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.<sup>2</sup> Then the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire within a bush. As Moses looked, he saw that the bush was on fire but was not consumed. <sup>3</sup> So Moses thought, “I must go over and look at this remarkable sight. Why isn’t the bush burning up? ”

<sup>4</sup> When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called out to him from the bush, “Moses, Moses! ” “Here I am,” he answered. <sup>5</sup> “Do not come closer,” he said. “Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” <sup>6</sup> Then he continued, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

<sup>7</sup> Then the Lord said, “I have observed the misery of my people in Egypt, and have heard them crying out because of their oppressors. I know about their sufferings, <sup>8</sup> and I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and to bring them from that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey — the territory of the Canaanites, Hethites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. <sup>9</sup> So because the Israelites’ cry for help has come to me, and I have also seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them, <sup>10</sup> therefore, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh so that you may lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

<sup>11</sup> But Moses asked God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt? ” <sup>12</sup> He answered, “I will certainly be with you, and this will be the sign to you that I am the one who sent you: when you bring the people out of Egypt, you will all worship God at this mountain.”

<sup>13</sup> Then Moses asked God, “If I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what should I tell them? ” <sup>14</sup> God replied to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you

are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.” 15 God also said to Moses, “Say this to the Israelites: The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever; this is how I am to be remembered in every generation.” (CSB)

### **Jesus is the fire that warms us through the cold of unmet expectations.**

A key piece of our patio is our fire pit. A Solo Stove Bonfire - promises to be smokeless - and it is such a satisfying backyard fire experience. The point is, if stoked correctly, and there is a chill in the air, the fire pit keeps us warm. It is not merely a decoration or piece of furniture, it has a purpose to sustain you through these California winters!

A silly illustration, but really this is how the gospel works, it warms us, gets us through the night. Advent for us, is an embrace of the cold night.

“To practice Advent is to lean into an almost cosmic ache: our deep, wordless desire for things to be made right and the incompleteness we find in the meantime. We dwell in a world still racked with conflict, violence, suffering, darkness. Advent holds space for our grief...We need communal rhythms that make deliberate space for both grief and joy. For me, the old saying rings true: Hunger is the best condiment. Abstaining, for a moment, from the clamor of compulsive jollification, and instead leaning into the reality of human tragedy and of my own need and brokenness, allows my experience of glory at Christmastime to feel not only more emotionally sustainable but also more vivid, vital and cherished.” Tish Harrison Warren

Recognizing the cold so that we can seek the warmth. The cold we want to see today is that of unmet expectations.

When life doesn't go as planned. When success hasn't arrived on schedule. When sanctification seems too difficult a thing to ask. When let downs multiply and uncertainty is our steady diet.

And to help us get to the light, we have Moses.

The Hebrew child saved through adoption and raised in the royal house of Egypt. As an adult he becomes aware of the plight of his people and witnessing the abuse at the hands of one Egyptian, he kills the man. And Moses is no hero to his people at this point and the King tried to kill Moses so he ran away.

Into the wilderness he went for the first time. There meeting the Priest of Midian and married one of his daughters and began a family.

This could hardly be what Moses planned. What he dreamt of as he began to stand against the oppressors whose house he had been raised in.

“After a long time, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned because of their difficult labor, and they cried out, and their cry for help because of the difficult labor ascended to God. 24 God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. 25 God saw the Israelites, and God knew.” -- **Exodus 2:23-25** (CSB)

40 years of earning a paycheck from his father-in-law... this is where we see Moses.

“Meanwhile.”

At the right time, God comes - a startling fire on a bush that won't burn up. The “messenger” of the Lord appears in the flames... God calls out to him... Yahweh is here. **V. 6** “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

“I AM WHO I AM.” v. 14.

Now without a doubt, this is Moses' story, it is the unfolding of redemption for Israel out of slavery in Egypt. But you must know, God doesn't waste history. His redemptive story all points to one place, to the ultimate redemption found in Christ. Even Moses wrote of him (John 5:46)...

(No need to figure out Christophony or not...)

This is exactly who Jesus claimed to be.

“Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.” -- **John 8:58** (CSB)

“Yahweh is Jesus. Elohim is Jesus. Adonai is Jesus. He is the Wisdom who created the world. He is Adonai who redeemed Israel from Egypt... In brief, we know no God apart from Jesus the Christ. And in Jesus Christ, we know everything we need to know about God. As the Messiah himself says, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). “In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,” Paul affirms (Col. 2:9).” Chad Bird

What we see here of God, is true of Jesus - and we can find hope in it.

While this is the declaration of relief for Israel, there is something of a re-writing of the script for Moses, his life is going to change, and it gives us clues to get through the cold of our seasons. Of when things go differently than planned, when it seems like we have been praying for it forever...

### **Jesus is Present**

In Moses' situation, in ours, God is not aloof and clueless. Jesus is present.

“Then the Lord said, “I have observed the misery of my people in Egypt, and have heard them crying out because of their oppressors. I know about their sufferings,” -- **Exodus 3:7** (CSB)

We can have a tendency to slog through life unaware of the continued presence of God. We live as if God is around when we gather at church, or in Bible Study, or when we actually pray. But the rest of the time we live and at times feel, unseen, unheard, unknown.

But the declaration of Scripture is that God is involved, aware, and around.

He sees. Answering the question of “God, are you seeing this?” He has observed the misery of his people. There is no surprise. When things unravel (for us), God is not quickly trying to script another story. He sees. Jesus sees us, he is aware of the trauma you have experienced, he witnesses the anxiety you face, he recognizes the unmet expectations, the things that come up before us.

And there is relief in that... to be seen. Validating our experience. That the creator of the universe takes the time to see. He is present.

He hears. Yahweh has heard the cries of his people, the pleas for relief, for something different.

Among the most frustrating things relationally is when the other person doesn't hear you. Have you even asked someone you love to repeat back what you just said because you were sure their attention was elsewhere? We take that experience into prayer, crying out to God, and wonder if he is listening.

He is. He hears. Jesus is not deaf to your pleas.

“This is the confidence we have before him: If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked of him.” -- **1 John 5:14-15** (CSB)

There is much we could say about prayer and how it works, how it is answered, but what we get from our text is that he hears. Jesus sees and hears us.

He also knows. He knows about their suffering... we might on the face of it wonder how that is different from seeing or even hearing, but it represents and understanding. He isn't left to wonder about what he has seen and heard, he knows the context, he knows the motivations, he knows the participants, he understands our longings and ache over the cold of life.

“I am he who searches mind and heart” (Rev. 2:23). In this world, so much is unfairly judged, and so much remains hidden or obscured. Comforting to remember all is seen plainly by Jesus.” Gavin Ortlund

The I AM sees, hears, and knows. It is a comfort for us. We are not alone, he is present. And in Christ this reality is made all the more true for us.

**John Jefferson Davis** “Christ is in fact present to the believer and to the church in a threefold way, despite the fact that Christ's glorified, molecular body is not present on earth but is now invisible in heaven.

“Christ is really within the believer by the Holy Spirit, who extends Christ’s self and presence into the believer’s heart (“Christ in you, the hope of glory” [Col 1:27]);

“Christ is really among the believing assembly gathered as a church in worship, by virtue of his name and Spirit (1 Cor 5:4; the name and Spirit as extensions of Christ’s self);

“and the believer is really present to the heavenly, ascended Christ, being seated with Christ in heavenly realms (Eph 2:6)—the Spirit connecting the believer with Christ and extending the believer’s spirit and self to Christ’s self (1 Cor 6:17).

“The Holy Spirit connects us with Christ and lifts us into the presence of the ascended Lord, with whom we are in union from the time of our conversion, being incorporated into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13), who continues to abide in us as an ontological reality.” *Meditation and Communion with God: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction* (IVP, 2012), 114.

When it comes to the unscripted parts of life, the unmet expectations, you are not alone. What a comfort that is. You are not left stranded but known. And while his plans don’t always seem clear to us, we can trust him because he is present with us.

And that is something. The One with all authority in heaven and on earth... “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” -- **Matthew 28:20** (CSB)

But he is also for you...

### **Jesus is Working**

“and I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and to bring them from that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey — the territory of the Canaanites, Hethites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.” -- **Exodus 3:8** (CSB)

Not only does God see, hear, and know, he is on the move. He has come down to rescue. The oppressed will be free and brought into a spacious land. Those kept in slavery will have their freedom because God acts on their behalf.

And we know how the story goes, we see the deliverance and the building crescendo over generations waiting for a final King, a spotless lamb. Jesus came to work the same kind of rescue.

“The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him, and unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written:

18 The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

20 He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 He began by saying to them, “Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled.” -- **Luke 4:17-21** (CSB)

Salvation for us is freedom from the oppression of unmet expectations. Of sin and ultimately death. Freedom from all the things that attempt to keep us under their thumb, the obsessions, the habits, the darkness.

Freedom finished for us on the cross - through his life and death. But his resurrection continues to unleash new life in us. We experience it through his word.

The recounting of his grace, the model of living in light of redemption. All of it was breathed out by God for our good. The flicker of flames that thaw frozen hearts, and warm us for the journey home.

We experience his ongoing work by the Spirit. The helper who witnesses of Jesus and empowers his people for the life he has set before us.

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you.” -- **John 14:26** (CSB)

The source of our transformation, or our peace.

And we experience the work of Jesus in his prayers for us. Not only does he hear us and answer when we pray, he petitions the Father on our behalf.

“Who can bring an accusation against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies. 34 Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who died, but even more, has been raised; he also is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us.” -- **Romans 8:33-34** (CSB)

Our high priest living forever... “Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, since he always lives to intercede for them.” -- **Hebrews 7:25** (CSB)

When the chill of life comes, when the cold invades with the darkness of night, we are warmed by Jesus... by his presence and his work. When we bend under the weight of unmet expectations, we are fueled to keep going by the One who gave himself for us. Who revealed that God’s plan was best.

And the promise is still for deliverance.

“Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say, The salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have now come, because the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been thrown down. 11 They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony;” -- **Revelation 12:10-11a** (CSB)

I don’t know what unmet expectations you are facing... job; kids; sin; relationship; situation...

But I know there is a fire that brightens the night, that feels like home and carries us through. Run to him, run to Jesus.



Because he is present with us, and working on our behalf, we can keep going. We can choose to see the light in the midst of darkness. To trust in uncertainty. To follow into his plan for us.

**Jesus is the fire that warms us through the cold of unmet expectations.**

This life may not look as we imagined, but in Christ it is headed toward beauty, toward glory. We live in the shadow of the old Palomar hospital which is being demolished, making way for new development and 800 homes. Many neighbors have complained that it looks like a war zone and long demolitions are just so ugly. But all of it is progress toward something better.

Still, among the destruction and skeletal remains of the building, someone has determined to leave the Christmas tree shaped light atop the building on. From the wreckage shines light of hope, the arrival of Christ.

This may be our lives, and what a glimpse of progress this is, a phoenix like hope arising over the broken and unexpected life... The fire of the promise of Christ shining into the night declaring our hope.

“What we need is for Adonai to look for us. “Come with an outstretched arm and redeem us.” With his arm, the Lord redeemed Israel from the death grip of Pharaoh (Exod. 6:6). He stretched out that strong arm to cast down plague after plague, to slay the firstborn of their enemy, to split the Red Sea, to transform rocks into rivers, and to guide his people to the land flowing with milk and honey.

“Stretch out that same hand, O Adonai, to redeem us. And he will. He will stretch out his infant arm to touch his mother’s face. He will stretch out his hand to heal a leper. He will stretch out his hand—both hands—to have them nailed to the bloody wood, on which we are redeemed.

O Adonai, our Lord Jesus, Messenger of the Father, Bearer of the Spirit, Ruler of the house of Israel and Head of the Church, wrap us in your strong, redeeming arms of mercy.” Chad Bird