

## I AM WHO I AM

Readings: Exodus 3:1-17, John 8:42-58

Belgic Confession Art 1.

Text: Exodus 3:13-17

Theme: God revealed himself to Moses and Israel as the "I AM" eternal and covenant God.

Purpose: To explain the character of God revealed in this name and urge faith and trust in this God.

### Introduction to Belgic Confession:

This is one of our four confessions of the RCNZ. It is the earliest of the four, written in 1561 by Guido de Bres, from the Southern Netherlands, now known as Belgium. He died as a martyr in 1567 along with thousands of others.

These will be textual doctrinal sermons, that is, sermons preached from a biblical passage but following the sequence of the Belgic Confession.

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### Sermon:

A young preacher once asked the Anglican Bishop of Oxford in England for some advice about preaching. The older man thought for a moment and then replied; "Preach about God and preach for about 20 minutes." When we are preaching about God it is hard to keep to 20 minutes; but certainly *God* is the great subject of preaching!

Many famous Reformed theologians has repeated this emphasis - John Calvin, Herman Bavinck, Charles Hodge, Louis Berkhof - all began their theological works with the doctrine of God. This is where the Bible begins in Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God...."

The Belgic Confession also begins with a statement about God. This first Article is about the character of God, who he is. It gives us a description of his "attributes" or his characteristics, or his perfections.

It would be possible to preach on this first article for an entire year. We could go through the Bible looking at many of the passages that explain God's names and his character and his great works. That would be up-building. J I Packer wrote a fine book called "Knowing God". He began by quoting a sermon by Spurgeon who said; "Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity!"

This passage in Exodus 3 is about this "great subject of the deity". One writer says that this is a verse of solid gold and even its dust is riches; it is a sea of vast truth and even the spray sparkles!

1. Let's first consider the **CONTEXT** of this passage. Exodus opens with the people of Israel in Egypt. They had been there for over 400 years. They arrived as a family of about 70 persons when Joseph invited his father Jacob and all his brothers and their families to come down to Egypt. Everything had started smoothly and they were well looked after. But eventually the Israelites became slaves of the Egyptians and were treated harshly.

The Lord heard their cries and raised up a deliverer, Moses, who grew up in Pharaoh's household. At the age of 40 he killed an Egyptian and had to flee for his life. For the next 40 years he lived in the Sinai desert looking after the sheep of his father-in-law, Jethro.

One day he led his flock into the southern tip of the peninsula in the region of Mount Sinai, a lonely and desolate area full of jagged mountain peaks. He was looking for grass in the fertile valleys. Then God spoke to him from a burning bush!  
The previous revelation of God recorded in the Bible was when God spoke to Jacob and told him to go *down* to Egypt. Now, more than 400 years later, God appeared to Moses to tell him to bring his people *out* of Egypt.

This was the first time Moses had heard the Lord or met him. It is difficult to put ourselves back in this situation but we need to realise that Moses knew very little about the Lord – probably only what his mother had told him.

Understandably, he has a few doubts and questions. First he objected, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt.” (v 10) Then he asked; "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" (v 13)

2. God responded with **an EXPLANATION** of his name that is broad and deep in its meaning.

People sometimes ask; "What's in a name?" If you lived in biblical times you would answer, "Everything!" Names were very important. Your name said something about your character, or birth, or task or position. For instance, Moses means “draw out”; Samuel means “heard of God”; Jesus means “God saves”.

a. God responded to Moses, “**I AM WHO I AM**. This is what you are to say to the Israelites, ‘**I AM** has sent me to you.’”

This is one of God’s names, and all his names reveal something about him. This name tells us that he is **a person**; that he exists, that he is. Francis Schaeffer wrote a book about God titled, “He is There and He is not Silent”.

The Bible simply assumes the existence of God - it does not try to prove this or argue it. Genesis 1:1 says; "In the beginning God..."

There are, of course, some who don’t believe there is a God; we call them atheists. And there are others who aren’t sure if there is a God or not, they don’t know and aren’t prepared to commit themselves; we call them agnostics.

Moses, however, did not have any doubts about the existence of God; he knew God was right there! He also knew that God was not dependant on anyone or anything and that he was the source and origin of all life. He accepted God as the “I AM”.

b. Then God said to Moses, “The **LORD**, the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has sent me to you.” (v 15) This describes our **Covenant God**.

LORD, written in capital letters in our English Bibles, translates the Hebrew word Yahweh. "I Am" and “Yahweh” are closely connected because they are both different forms of the verb "to be". When God speak about himself he says, “I AM”; when we speak about God we say “He is”, Yahweh, the LORD.

LORD describes our covenant God in his relationship with us his people. God has promised, "I will be you God and you shall be my people." This is the central covenant promise. This is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He assured Moses and his people Israel that he had not forgotten about them, even 400 years later.

God is still our covenant God today; he makes an agreement with us and our children and our grandchildren; he extends his promises to us from one generation to the next. He reaches down to us in our sin, out to us in our need, and draws us to himself in love. He is Yahweh, the LORD, our covenant God.

c. When God described this name, LORD, to Moses he said, “This is my name forever”. (v 15b) This teaches us that God is **eternal**.

He never began to be and he will never cease to be. He does not experience growth or age. He is not a God who is becoming or in process. He is not a God who existed in the past but who has died.

No, he is eternal. He has no beginning and no end. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. He has always been in the past and he will always be in the future. He is our eternal God; Yahweh, the LORD, is his name forever.

d. This name also tells us that he is **faithful**.

The Belgic Confession describes him as "immutable", which means unchanging.

All things on earth change – flowers wither, grass dries off, buildings crumble, steel rusts, wood rots, silver tarnishes - but God the Creator is unchanging.

People also change. Some are very moody - you aren't sure from one day to the next how you will find them - in a good mood or a bad one! God is not moody; he is consistent; he is "the same, yesterday, today and forever."

The Bible expresses this as God's *faithfulness*.

40 years after this revelation from God Moses said to the people of Israel; "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands." (Deut 7:9)

And 1000 years after that God spoke to his people through the prophet Malachi (around 400BC) and said; "I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed." (Mal 3:6). They were not destroyed because God was faithful to his promises and continued to forgive them and show them mercy.

God is the same today in his relationship with us. He will keep his promise to be our God, to be with us, to lead and guide us by his word and Spirit, to give us wisdom, to forgive us, to grant us that peace that transcends all understanding, to grant us an inheritance in heaven, to give us the crown of righteousness on that last day! God is faithful.

"I AM" describes God as a person, he exists, he is.

LORD describes the Covenant God who is eternal and faithful to all his promises.

By these names, and many others, God revealed himself to Israel, and he reveals himself to us. This means we can know who God is. Each of his names reveals another aspect and characteristic of who he is; he is Almighty, our Father, our Shepherd, the Mighty One, the Lord of Hosts, God Most High, our Saviour.

e. God has revealed himself to us in the Bible, through his names; but he has revealed himself even more clearly to us through his Son, the **Lord Jesus Christ**.

The writer of Hebrews wanted the early Christians to realize how much better the New Covenant was than the Old one and he began his letter with these words;

“In the past God spoke to our fore-fathers at many times and in various ways. But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe.” (Hebrews 1:1-2) Jesus was and is the climax and fulness of God’s revelation.

In his gospel the apostle John wrote about Jesus; “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

And the apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians about “Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” (Phil 2:6f)

Jesus came as the promised Messiah and he was the full and complete revelation of God. He came to explain God and make him known. He could do this because he was God himself; he was the Word who had been there from the beginning. This is why he could say to the Jews; "Before Abraham was born, I Am." (John 8:58) With that statement he identified himself completely and full with God himself. This is why the Jews wanted to stone him; they recognized that he had claimed to be God himself!

### 3. APPLICATION

Before we close let's consider how this applies to us.

Today we need a clear view of our triune God because of the many wrong ideas that are around. More and more people have some form of spiritual belief and some belief in God, but it is usually not the God revealed in the Bible; it is a god of their own making, a god in their own image. Think of the gods worshipped in the Eastern religions, and the spiritual forces worshipped in the New Age movement, and the god of materialism in our western world.

The people around us need to know the God who has revealed himself in the Scriptures and in his Son.

But belief in God must begin with us as the people of God. We need to believe in this God, trust in him, depend on him, rely on him. We need the same faith as Guido de Bres when he wrote this Confession and began with this strong statement about God.

He wrote this on behalf of all those who held to the Reformed faith - "**We all believe....**"; this is our statement of faith; in this document he summarized the main teaching of the Scriptures from our reformed and Calvinistic perspective, which we believe to be the biblical perspective.

It is a strong and sincere confession; "We all believe **with the heart...**"

This isn't just an intellectual faith nor merely an assent with our minds; no, this comes from our *hearts*! This is what we believe from deep inside us!

This isn't merely a definition of God but a confident confession of what we believe!

This isn't a cold, lifeless, abstract formulation of truth; rather this is a worshipping expression of praise to our great God!

Not only do we "believe with the heart", but we also "**confess with the mouth**" our faith, trust, and confidence in this God.

We want to declare it to others. We want those around us to believe in this eternal God. We want them to trust in the saving work of the Lord Jesus. We want them to know and worship and praise this faithful God who is this great "I Am". Let's pray that we may see more and more people coming to know this God and joining with us to praise him.

God said to Moses; "I AM WHO I AM... the LORD... This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation."

Amen