

# BELPRES CHURCH

## Unleashed

### Exodus 3

Speaker: Scott Dudley

Disclaimer: *This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.*

---

So Lord, thank you so much that you are here with us. Thank you that you are the God who sets us free. And Lord, we want to hold nothing back from you, we do, but we don't want to. So help us be more and more devoted to you. Pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Good to see you. New Hope Revival, we are worshiping with New Hope Revival, which is awesome. And it is really good to see you guys again. I've been on extended study leave most of this summer. This is something we require of all of our pastors and directors every five years, just some time away to study and research and reflect and all of that, and it's super helpful.

So I'm grateful for it. Although it always concerns my oldest daughter when I do this. She says, Dad, it's not worth it, because then they expect you to come back all holy. So I'm not sure I'm holier, but I sure did miss you a lot. And I got some good studying in that'll find its way into the sermons. And I was very eager to get back, so it's great to see you.

When my wife and I lived in California, we had a dog, and this dog had a ton of energy, and it needed to exercise every day or it would just go crazy. And I run every day, so I thought, well, I'll just take the dog running with me. But every time we'd go running, I'd have the dog on the leash, so that it wouldn't run out into the street, but when we'd go running, it would keep turning around and trying to bite me. So I thought, wow, this dog really hates running, but it still needed to exercise. And then I discovered that the dog liked to jump. So I'd hold a toy up over my head, and the dog would jump and jump and jump.

Here's a picture of my dad jumping the dog. The dog could jump really, really high. And the dog loved it. I mean, it was great for me too, because like I could make phone calls and just stand there with the toy, right? And the dog loved to jump way more than the

running. But after a while, I figured out, oh, it wasn't the running that the dog didn't like. It was the leash. And the reason the dog preferred jumping was because there was no leash.

What makes you feel like you're on a leash? Not to compare you to a dog or anything, but maybe just a little bit. What makes you feel, what holds you back from living the life that deep down you want to live? There are lots of leashes. Fear, worry about career or finances or a relationship or school. Or maybe worry of what you see in the news. Maybe you're leashed to an overpacked, busy schedule. And it's all good stuff. It's all good stuff. But good things can be leashes, too. Golden leashes, but still leashes.

We become leashed to striving for school or career success. Leashed to other people's opinions of us. Leashed to our comfort. Leashed to our own fussiness, having to have everything just the way we want it and getting frustrated when we don't. Lots of leashes.

So this fall, we're going to be doing a sermon series called *Unleashed*. How Jesus sets us free to live the life that deep down we want to live. Be free from all the things that hold us back from that. And to start, we're going to look at a story in Exodus chapter 3. And the background is that the Israelites are slaves in Egypt. And they are very leashed. And God chooses a man named Moses to get them out of slavery in Egypt. And it says this:

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law. And he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire, it did not burn up. So Moses thought, I will go over and see this strange sight, why the bush does not burn up. God called to him from within the bush, "Moses, Moses." And Moses said, "Here I am." God said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

The Bible is one long, continuous story that covers 2,000 years of history in which God gradually reveals himself, first to a man named Abraham, then to his son Isaac, and then to his son Jacob, whose descendants become the nation of Israel from which Jesus emerges to show God to the whole world. God is so big, it takes that long to reveal all of who he is.

And this text comes very, very early in the long story of the Bible—the second book. God has revealed himself to Abraham and his son and his grandson, but they don't really know very much about him yet. And so God shows up in a burning bush and says, I'm going to get you out of slavery.

In other words, one of the very first things we find out about God in the Bible, one of the very first things he wants us to know about him, is that God burns with a passion to set you free, to unleash you and me. That literally fires him up, right? Like he shows up in a burning bush. This passage has sustained so many people over so many centuries, so many oppressed people over so many centuries, including American slaves who found hope in a liberating God. It's true for us as well.

What makes you feel leashed? What is holding you back from the life you want to live? God burns with a passion to take that leash off of you. This text shows some of the ways that he does it.

The back story on Moses is he's an Israelite, but was adopted by the king of Egypt's daughter. So he was raised in the palace, but knew that he was an Israelite. And one day when he was around 40 years old, he saw an Egyptian mistreating one of his fellow Israelites. So Moses killed the Egyptian, which caused him to have to flee to Midian, where he hangs out as a shepherd for 40 years. And then God shows up in a burning bush.

And the text says, Moses thought I will go over and see this strange sight. And in the original Hebrew, the verbs that are used there, the words that are used there in the original Hebrew mean literally, Moses went off the main path. Moses went off the beaten path. In other words, he did something out of the ordinary. Because to unleash us, God sometimes has to disrupt our lives.

When the text says Moses was tending the sheep of his father-in-law, the Hebrew verb means ongoing action. So a better translation would be, Moses was tending and tending and tending and tending those stupid sheep day in and day out. And sheep are stupid, by the way. I grew up in Eastern Washington. I know what I'm talking about.

Ever feel like that? Like get up, go to school or work, come home, eat, go to bed, get up next day, do it all over again, rinse, repeat. And that can dull us to the fact that we're leashed. We're leashed to our routines.

Back when I had my old lousy car, one time the brake lights got stuck on and I couldn't turn them off. And my wife said, well, there's a button somewhere. Just go find it and push it. And I looked everywhere. I could not find a button. So we took it into the mechanic and I explained the problem. He didn't write anything down. He just walked out to my car, opened the door and slicked a button on the steering column and the brake lights went off.

Apparently, it's a feature. I mean, like, what a stupid feature. Like who puts a button on the steering column? But the worst part was, my wife was there. And I knew, right, I knew it was a button all along. I knew she was right. She didn't even have to say, I told you so. But she did. We had had that car for decades. But apparently, the routine of driving it every day and all that routine, I missed that button. Sometimes our routines cause us to miss the ways we're leashed.

Moses' deepest desire is to free his people. He wanted it so badly, he killed an Egyptian for it. At one point, Moses wanted an adventure, but that's kind of risky. And maybe watching the sheep, maybe it's a little bit boring, but you know, he's at least helping his father-in-law, which is a good thing. He's comfortable, he's financially secure, all good things, but he's leashed to that lifestyle. It's a golden leash, but it's still a leash.

So to unleash us, God will disrupt our plans sometimes, or use disruptions that he doesn't cause to set us free. So for instance, maybe you lose a job, but then God leads you to one that's more fulfilling. God didn't cause that, but he used it. But sometimes, God deliberately, on purpose, disrupts our lives. And one of the ways he does that is God, to unleash us, God sometimes tells us to do something we don't want to do to unleash us to live the life we actually want to live, even if we don't know it yet.

There's this sort of humorous moment in the text, where God says to Moses, I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians. And you can kind of see Moses going, Yeah, right on, you go God, you go rescue us. Way to go God, you go.

So now God says, so now go, I am sending you to—whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. What? Whoa, whoa, what? Who said anything about me being part of this? You're the rescuer, right God? I can't, no, I can't do this. I got sheep to tend, I got a job to do, I got kids to raise, I got bills to pay. Besides, I'm 80 years old and I'm not looking for a new career.

And then Moses spends the next two chapters telling God why he can't possibly do what God is telling him to do. But God is calling him to something he doesn't want at first in order to unleash him. Because see, deep inside Moses, there is a life that wants to be lived. Deep inside you and deep inside me, there is a life that wants to be lived.

For Moses, it was that passion to free his people that at one point burned like a fire, but that passion has grown dull and cold through all the routines of life. And God is rekindling that flame to set his people free. And it starts with an invitation to do something he doesn't want to do, only to discover that God knows what we want even more than we do.

When I did college ministry, I had a student who had a pretty hard life, was really shy, really depressed. But in prayer one day, the Holy Spirit kind of gave him a thought that wasn't his own that said, feed hungry people in my city. So he brought that to me and said, I think this means we're supposed to get a group of students together to go to San Francisco late at night and give people on the streets food.

And my heart sank. I did not want to do that. It sounded hard. It sounded like a lot of work late at night. I wouldn't get much sleep. I didn't want to do it. But I was his pastor and pastors aren't supposed to crush people's dreams. So I said, praise the Lord that he's revealed this to you. Let's do it.

So we got some students together, and we went into one of the worst neighborhoods in San Francisco between midnight and 3 a.m. to hand out sandwiches to people on the streets. But more than that, to treat them with dignity by getting to know them and talking to them and all of that.

And at the end of the night, we were walking back to the cars, and I turned around and I saw all the other students right with me, but I could not find this one guy. I'm like, great, I've lost him, right? I'm going to get sued. And so we looked for a while, and finally I found him in this alley with a group of men, a group of men who were all smoking and drinking and cussing. And then I don't know how it started, but they started to sing all these old 60s songs. You know, *My Girl*, *Up on the Roof*, stuff like that.

And this shy, depressed student would sing out a line, you know, "I got sunshine on a cloudy day." And then these guys would echo him, "cloudy day." They were like his backup singers, right? And they sang every song they could think of. And when they were finally done, one of these homeless men asked the student, what are you doing on this street at this time of night?

And the student said, we just figured Jesus wanted us to sing with y'all. And on the way back, this student could not stop talking because he was so excited. And when I finally got home, I could not sleep because I was so excited. And we started to do that about once a quarter, partnering with an organization that helped people get out of homelessness. And it was always such a meaningful experience for everyone involved.

I was invited into something I did not want to do and found it really fulfilling. I was unleashed for something bigger than just comfort and security. And then this shy, depressed student was unleashed from his depression and joy broke out on a mean street in San Francisco.

And it doesn't have to be that elaborate. Maybe it's to volunteer with our Sunday School or our youth programs or be a greeter or any of the things you saw in that funny video earlier. And if you didn't see that funny video, go home and watch it online because it's super funny. Or maybe come to church on time because if you don't, you miss good stuff, right? Maybe it's to do that.

Maybe for you, it's to cut out some things out of your schedule so that you can have time for Christian community, maybe reduce your schedule a little bit. Maybe it could be as simple as today, going up to the party after this, just to be with some folks. These students that I would take into the city, they'd have to give up a night of studying, which for a Stanford student, that's a big sacrifice, right? Sort of maybe similar to us missing an important meeting or a kids' soccer game or something like that, but it was so fulfilling.

Moses is leashed by comfort, security, shame over his past. His deepest desire is to free his people, but all that passion, that bigger life has been tamed, leashed by the same old, same old routine for the last 40 years. And by calling him to do what he does not want to

do, God gives him what he really wants deep down. And he gets to be part of the adventure of setting his people free from slavery.

Only a God who tells us what we don't want to hear can unleash us because sometimes it was by following what we think we want that got us leashed in the first place. Let me say that again. Only a God who tells us what we don't want to hear can unleash us because sometimes it was by following what we think we want that got us leashed in the first place.

To unleash us, God disrupts us, calls us to something we may not want at first, and then finally, to be unleashed you have to meet God. Moses believed in God his whole life, but he doesn't meet God until this moment. And we Western Christians—especially African Christians, you're way better on this—but we Western Christians, we're really good at turning God into an intellectual concept, but we don't have a real relationship with him.

Believing in God will not set you free. Believing in God will not set you free, but a relationship with him will, which is where the image of fire matters. Because fire isn't something that you believe in. Fire is something you experience—the heat, the smell of the smoke. And God wants to be known. That's why he came himself in the person of Jesus and gives us his Holy Spirit to live inside of us so that we can know him.

And we cannot unleash ourselves. Only the Holy Spirit can set us free. We can't do it ourselves. And one of the places we encounter the Holy Spirit, along with prayer and scripture and community, is in worship. And when I was on study leave this summer, praying about us and praying about us as a church, I kept hearing Jesus say, I set people free in worship. This battle is won or lost in worship.

So, one action step that we can make right here at the beginning of the year, of the new year, one action step we can make is to commit to make worship a priority this fall. Because in worship, the music opens us up emotionally, the word read and preached instructs us and the community around us to see others around us encourages us, which means worship is way more powerful in community.

So, if you can come in person, because it's just better in person, make worship a priority this fall. Do what you have to do. Record the Seahawks' names. Whatever it is, just do what you have to do and be here, because it's in worship that Jesus sets us free.

I recently heard a woman talk about how a couple of years ago she started going to church, believed in God, but she had a lot of leashes on her. She carried a ton of shame from some things she had done in her past, but also from things her parents had said to her over the years that made her feel like she could never measure up. She had an out of control temper, and she had an unhealthy relationship with alcohol. So a bunch of leashes.

And a friend invited her to go to a Christian conference, and she did not want to go to this conference, but then she found out a guy she was kind of interested in was going to

be the drummer at this conference, so she said, well, I'll go check it out, which really meant I'll go check him out, but God uses everything. So she went, and on the first day of the conference, during worship, she suddenly felt Jesus' presence right with her in a way that she had never felt it before.

And then after worship was over, they said, if you want prayer, come to the front, just like we do here every Sunday. So she went to the front, and this woman started to pray for her. And again, this woman felt Jesus' presence with her in a way she never had before. And she started to remember all the ways she had rejected God and run away from God, been, in her words, God's enemy. And all the really unhealthy and flat out sinful things she had done.

And she heard Jesus say, I loved you then, and I love you now. And she thought, no, no, no, I don't believe that. Surely you love me more now that I'm getting better and going to church and all of that. And then she heard Jesus say, while you were still a sinner, I died for you. And she realized that because she didn't believe that God loved her not just in her good moments, but even in her bad moments, she felt all this pressure to perform, succeed, achieve, always get an A, you know, things that we Eastsiders just can't relate to, you know, stuff like that.

She'd always compare herself to other people. And all of that was a part of why, a part of the shame that she carried, the anger she felt at trying so hard and feeling like she never made a measure up, and then the alcohol she used to cope with all that. And then she heard Jesus say, You are loved all the way. Always have been, always will be. And she said, for the last several years, she's been unpacking that experience, and it's been taking the leashes of shame and anger and alcohol off of her.

She said, it rewrote me, it realigned me, because it redefined me. God unleashed her by disrupting her routine, inviting her to do something she didn't want to do at first, go to that conference where she met Jesus personally.

And you may be thinking right now, you know, it has been a really long time since I've had an experience like that with Jesus. Or you may even be thinking, you know what, I have never had an experience like that with Jesus. Mm-hmm, yeah, we're gonna fix that this fall. We're gonna fix that this fall. The whole time I was on study leave this summer, praying for us as a church, I just prayed, Jesus, unleash me, unleash us to the life you came to give us. And I believe he's gonna do it.

Three times in this one chapter, three times in just this one chapter, God says to Moses, I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Jacob, three times in just one chapter. You know what God is actually saying there? You know what he's really saying? He's saying, I am the God of really screwed up people. I am the God of that coward and compromiser Abraham. I am the God of that massively dysfunctional father Isaac. I am the God of that manipulative lying, cheating Jacob. I do my best work with screwed up people. So if you're screwed up people, like me, good news. Jesus is gonna set us free.

Moses' passion was to free his people, but now he's 80 years old, his physical strength is gone, his social capital is gone, his financial capital is gone, he's a failed, forgotten old man eking out a living in a nowhere part of the world, having lost everything that we think of as being necessary to do anything significant. And then God says, now, finally, finally, finally, I can use you. Because when we come to the end of ourselves, that's when we discover what God can do. Which means it's never too late, and we're never too far away.

He is the God of the disappointed, the disillusioned, the discouraged, the disheartened, as well as the God of the successful and the happy, belonging for more, the down and out, as well as the up and in. All of us leashed by something, all of us made for more. And if Jesus is burning in the center of your life, then you are courageous, you are powerful, you have been unleashed to change the world. Because as the old hymn says, Jesus breaks every chain, he breaks every chain. Jesus breaks every single chain, amen?

So Jesus, that is what you do. And we cannot set ourselves free. So Lord, over the course of these next few months, as individuals and as a community, set us free. Take those leashes off of us, the leashes we've put around our own necks, the leashes that have been put around us by other people and by our culture and by our society. Lord, set us free from those things. So that we can live the life you came to give us. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

---

### **Discussion Questions:**

*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Opening Question:** Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions:** Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Why do you think God chose to reveal himself in a burning bush that was not consumed?

- God calls Moses to participate with him in freeing the Israelites from slavery. How might God also be setting Moses free? Free from what? Free for what?
- Do you have any "burning bush" moments in your life? What were they? In what ways did they help to set you free?

**Closing Question and Application:** Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing group prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.