

Today we continue in “The Story” – our series looking at the big picture of the Bible, following its central theme from creation to redemption. Last week we looked at Abraham’s great-grandson, Joseph, and how God provided for him and worked through him in powerful ways. This morning we’re looking at Moses. This is now several generations after Joseph. The descendants of Joseph and his brothers have remained in Egypt for all this time, as refugees, and they have grown numerically to be a sizeable presence in Egypt. Scholars believe that when the Hebrews fled from Egypt under Moses’ leadership, there were 1 million to 3 million of them. So, by this time, the favorable relations between them and Pharaoh that allowed them to be there peacefully, had deteriorated. A new Pharaoh is on the throne, Joseph has died, and so the connections that existed before are all gone. On top of that, when you compare the Biblical account to other historical documents that tell us of Egyptian rulers, conflicts, and other facets of their history, we know that northern Egypt was partially overtaken for over 100 years by a people group called the Hyskos, at about this time. That situation certainly did not help the Hebrews in their relationship to the Egyptian government. All of this culminated in the Egyptians turning the Hebrews into slave labor to build up their infrastructure. The Hebrews were not well-treated in this time, and the labor was hard, as the opening verses of Exodus tell us.

Moses, as you may know, was born in a Hebrew family, but ended up growing up in the Egyptian royal home. When he was about 17, in an effort to protect a Hebrew man who was being mistreated by an Egyptian man, he committed murder. As a result, he fled to Midian, east of Egypt across the Red Sea, where he lived for 40 years. This brings us to our passage today.

It begins by describing a rather routine, every day activity: **Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God (Exodus 3:1).** So, Moses was not out looking for a spiritual experience. He is simply doing the routine task of watching the sheep of his father-in-law. And he's taken the flock out quite a ways. They're out “beyond the

wilderness.” In other words, they are way out there. They’re not just out around Carnation or Duvall...they’re beyond that, even.

And as Moses is out beyond the wilderness, a strange thing happens: there's a bush that is on fire, but it's not actually burning up. And we're told that this phenomenon is an angel of the Lord appearing to him, and God speaks to him out of the bush. The messenger, the symbol, and God himself are fluidly exchanged in this event, as often happens in the Old Testament. This is not what Moses expected to find out beyond the wilderness as he tended the sheep.

Like Moses, we all get going with the everyday things of life as he is here with the sheep, and we aren't necessarily looking for God's intervention. We're doing regular things like taking our kids to school, watching the grandkids at a soccer game, buying groceries, watering the lawn, taking the dog for a walk, getting the mail, and installing hardwood floors in our house - every day kinds of things. ☺ **But like Moses, God may just be trying to get a hold of you when you're not really looking for Him.** I'm not saying he's going to audibly speak to you out of a burning mailbox, or a boiling pot of water, or the soccer ball as the kids are chasing it around the field. But when you least expect it, God may very well tap you on the shoulder for something important that He's calling you to.

When God comes to Moses in this bush, He lets Moses know that he's on holy ground, as he's in the presence of the Lord. Then he reveals to Moses who this is he's conversing with: The God of his ancestors. The God of the Hebrew people. And immediately, Moses' level of reverence goes up through the roof, as he turns his face away from the bush, afraid to even gaze on God's presence in the symbol of the burning bush.

Things continue with God telling Moses that he's seen the suffering, he's heard the cries of the Hebrew people, and so he's going to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians, and take them into a new land that will be their own. As Moses listened to this, he would have certainly begun to feel a sense of joy that God had come to liberate his own people. Although Moses grew up in Pharaoh's home, and not in a Hebrew household, he knew who really

were his people, his ancestors, his spiritual heritage, and spiritual family. And he had a heart for them. That's certainly a big reason why he came to the defense of a Hebrew slave and ended up killing the Egyptian oppressor many years earlier.

So as God tells Moses that He is going to bring them out of slavery and into a land of plenty and a land of freedom, Moses must certainly have been excited to hear this. We don't know what Moses was thinking at this point, but it must have been something like, "That's awesome God! I can't wait to see you do this. From everything I know about you through my ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you can handle this – no problem! It will be great to be reunited with my real family. Where I should wait for them and meet up with them?"

But God isn't done speaking. And so as Moses is trying to decide how to greet everyone when they show up – handshake, fist-bump, hugs, high-fives, chest-bumps, kiss on the cheek? – here's what God says to Moses in the next verse: **"So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10).** Now Moses is thinking, "Crud!! I fell for the old 'burning bush' trick. I knew I should have just walked away!" Moses just got tapped on the shoulder by God. And as the Motown group Martha and the Vandellas sang in 1965, there "ain't no where to run, ain't no where to hide." But Moses hadn't heard that song yet, so immediately, he starts trying to hide behind objections, when he then responds: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11). Moses wants to know what it is about himself that qualifies him for this job. In fact, he doesn't feel qualified. "Who am I?" he says. God answers Moses' question, sort of. He responds, **"I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain" (Exodus 3:12).**

You see, Moses wants to put up objections based on who he is; he doesn't think he's qualified for the job. But who Moses is, isn't as important as who God is. God sees something in Moses that Moses himself doesn't see, and God knows that this really isn't about what Moses will do, but what God will

do through him. God qualifies the unqualified to do what He calls them to do. God's Upper Story perspective is different than ours from the Lower Story. So "I will be with you" is the answer to Moses' question. Moses, however, isn't done with the objections. Verse 13 says: **But Moses said to God, 'If I come 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 shall I say to them?' (Genesis 3:13).** Given the fact that Moses grew up in an Egyptian home, this makes sense. They had a multiplicity of gods: the god of sun, the god of rain, the god of land, the god of disease, and so forth. Now, even though his father-in-law was a Jewish priest, Moses still had 17 years of Egyptian religious experience when he grew up in Pharaoh's home (and Egyptian Pharaohs were considered gods!), so asking which god this is makes sense. So Moses' first question was, "Who am I?" and God responds by saying, "Doesn't matter; I'll be with you," and now Moses basically asks, "Well, if who *I* am doesn't matter so much, then...who are *you*?...What do I say to the Hebrews when they ask who sent me?"

And here's what the next verse tells us, **God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me [Moses] to you'" (Exodus 3:14).** In answering Moses' question about who He is, God responds with a name that is also a claim to his being. The Hebrew words here are a play on the verb "to be." It says, "Yahweh asher Yahweh." Which basically means, "I am what I am" or "I will always be what I will always be." This name of God occurs some 6,000 times in the Old Testament, and most of our English Bibles represent it with the word "LORD" in all capital letters.

So this name that God gives is also a description of who he is: **He is a constant state of being. He always is. He's uncreated. He's before, beyond, and above any other deity.** It's clearly not written in the past tense - "I was who I was" - and it's not future tense, "I will be who I will be." It's like God is saying, "I am the God who always is." "I am eternally 'ising'." Can you imagine if you asked someone, "Who are you" or perhaps more commonly, we ask, "how are you" and they said, "I am..." and that's it? Not "I am Brian" or "I am a dad" (in response to "who...") or "I am fine" or "I am happy" or "I am hungry" or "I am bored"...just "I am..." That's God's

answer to this question of, “who are you?”: “I am that I am”...tell them that “I am” (Yahweh) sent you.

Well, that’s not really completely convincing for Moses as far as his own involvement goes, and he puts up some objections. Moses is easy to identify with here. He has more excuses than a 7 year old for not eating their broccoli. If I ever preach a sermon focused on Moses’ excuses, I’m going to title it, “Moses And All His Buts” because he keeps responding, “But God...I can’t because of this. But God...I can’t because of that. But God what about this...” And then God keeps responding with his own “but,” and essentially says over and over: “But I will be with you.” Eventually Moses realizes that God’s butts are bigger than Moses’ butts, and that this conversation is predestined to go a certain way, and Moses can’t do much about it.

And what we see here is that: **God works through the unlikeliest of people – at least, as we see them.** In our Lower Story view of things, we see the limitations and the obstacles. But in God’s Upper Story view of things, He sees the possibilities; He sees the complete picture. And in the end, because God oftentimes works through unlikely people, it’s clear that God is the one making things happen.

So, it’s not going to be Moses’ eloquence that sways Pharaoh to let the people go, because Moses is not eloquent – in fact, most scholars interpret his excuse that he’s slow of speech to mean that he struggles with stuttering. It’s not going to be Moses’ royal family connections that sway Pharaoh to let the people go because he’s a fugitive who was wanted for murder, and enough time has gone by that it’s a different royal family, anyway. It’s not Moses’ great standing with the Hebrews that’s going to help him lead them away from Egypt, because he has never really even been part of them, and hasn’t lived in Egypt with them for some 40 years at this point. That’s how long it’s been since he fled and so he has no standing. So: **Moses is a total underdog for this position. But God is for the underdog, and works through the underdog, to accomplish his purposes.**

And this is good news, because we’re all underdogs in some facet of life or multiple facets of life, or maybe even a lot of life...and we don’t feel up for

the tasks before us that God has put in our lap. For instance, some of us don't feel up to the task of parenting or grand-parenting. It's hard. We feel ill-equipped and unprepared to do the job – we're too old, or too young, don't know enough, and lost the instruction manual that came with the kids. Some of us feel like underdogs in our places of work – there are challenges to take on or new skills to learn, and they feel like an insurmountable mountain before us. As Christians, we feel like underdogs in a world that thinks following Jesus is backwards, whimsical, and even delusional. We might feel like underdogs in regards to our health, in our families, or in regards to some sin that has us in its grip. **As God says to Moses, He still says to you and me: I am with you.** It's repeated throughout Scripture; Jesus says that he will send the Holy Spirit to be with us – to lead us, convict us, comfort us, and so forth. And in the end, it is God who is given the glory by a bunch of underdogs who step out in faith.

So, Moses eventually takes this step of faith and heads back to Egypt. On the way there, he meets up with his brother Aaron who's going to help him communicate to Pharaoh. So with Aaron, he goes to Pharaoh as God called him to, and asks him to let God's people go, so that they may go out into the desert to worship God. And Pharaoh says, "Awesome! Go ahead. We'll continue making bricks with out you as our slave labor. And: may the Lord bless you and keep you and make his face shine upon you." Uh...No, that doesn't happen. Instead, he resists.

And so God brings different plagues upon Egypt as a sign of his power and in an effort to convince Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go. And Pharaoh's heels are so dug in, and he keeps resisting until the final plague: the plague of death, with the firstborn male in every household breathing their last breath on a designated night – except in the households of the Hebrews, where they followed God's command to sacrifice a lamb and paint their door frames with the blood of the lamb. Each household was to do this. And the Spirit of God would pass over those homes, sparing them the judgment that was coming, and that would lead to their escape from Egypt, through the Red Sea. And this event is what the Jewish Passover meal celebrates.

**And some 1500 years later, Jesus does the same thing with his death on the cross.** Scripture tells us that Jesus is the perfect, unblemished, sacrificial lamb who takes away the sins of the world. He's the perfect lamb whose blood was shed on the cross, as our protection, as our covering. The Passover is why Jesus is called the Lamb of God. It wasn't something that John the Baptist or others just randomly said about Jesus. There's deep historical and theological meaning behind it, as Jesus becomes the sacrifice that covers us today.

And just as the Hebrews stood under the roof of their homes with the doorposts painted with the blood of their sacrificial lambs and were then delivered out of bondage to the Egyptians...in just the same way, whoever stands under that blood-stained cross and clings to the name of Jesus is passed over, and delivered from the bondage and slavery to sin and its consequences that they find themselves in: From alcoholism to pornography to lying to selfishness and pride to unkind thoughts about others. The cross of Jesus Christ, where his body was broken and his blood was shed, is where we find freedom, protection, and deliverance in this life, and in the life to come.

And as we come to the communion table today, to celebrate this augmented Passover meal, this simple meal which Jesus says He himself fulfills...that it represents him - not just the Passover and their ancestors' escape from Egypt...as we come to partake in this meal, **I pray that you would know the deliverance power of the cross of Christ in your life.** And if you haven't known the power of Jesus to deliver you from the stuff in your life that has you enslaved and in bondage, then I pray that like Moses, you'd take that step of faith, and trust that God will be with you and that He will do what he says He will. Let the cross of Jesus deliver you from "slavery to sin" into freedom that starts in this life, and extends into eternity, into the hands of your Heavenly Father. Let's Pray...Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Today's sermon correlates to Chapter 4 in "The Story." We took orders for copies of the book, "The Story" at church, but now you can get a copy of the book on your own online through many websites (Amazon.com, cbd.com, etc.). In fact, cbd.com (Christian Book Distributors) has them for \$5, hardback. Just search for "NIV The Story Bible" at their website.