

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance Church. Last Sunday, I began a preaching series through the Book of Exodus. If you were away last Sunday, or you're away in the future and would like to get caught up, we post every message on our website, and for those who prefer reading over listening, I always include a full written manuscript that you can download.

This morning we're going to look at two very different Acts that unfold in Moses' story. The **First Act** chronicles Moses' failure and flight out of Egypt, while the **Second Act** reports Moses' encounter with God and the call to return. If you'd like to follow along, I'd encourage you to take your Bible, paper or electronic and turn to Exodus 2:11. Next week I will expand on Act 2, but this morning we are going to cover from Ex. 2:11 until the end of chapter 3. Let's begin by taking a look at Act 1.

Act 1: Moses' Failure and Flight to Midian

2:11, *“One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor.”* In the transition from 2:10 to vs. 11, 35+ years have gone by¹; we last saw Moses as a toddler and now he has reached adulthood.

Vs. 10 left us with great hope—by God's providence, Moses was saved from death and brought to live in the royal palace. At first glance, it sounds like one of our modern fairy tales—a rags to riches

story where everyone lives happily ever after. In truth, Moses' life was no fairy tale. I want you to imagine with me what it was like for Moses to grow up in Pharaoh's house. Moses was a two culture kid. He grew up in between two worlds, and he didn't really fit in either world.

Let's start with the obvious—Moses was adopted, but he wasn't an orphan. It's very likely that Moses lived with his birth family long enough to know them—he had a mother, a father, an older brother and sister, uncles, aunts, and cousins. But he was ripped away from his birth family as a toddler², given to the Princess of Egypt, and raised in the royal household. This is traumatic for any child, and my wife and I have seen something similar firsthand—our adopted daughter left her foster home as a toddler and it was months before she could sleep at night.

I wonder, what did Moses' birth parents tell him before he was sent to Pharaoh's house? Did he hear the story about his rescue on the Nile? Did they hand him over to the Princess whispering, *“Don't forget about us Moses! Please try and help us!”* It seems a very natural thing to do or say.

As Moses grew, as he looked into his expensive, polished, bronze mirror, what did he see? When did he first recognize that his face looked more Hebrew than Egyptian? He had different eyes, different lips and cheekbones; perhaps he was tall and his Egyptian family was short, or the other way around.

¹ Acts 7:20-34 gives us a tiny window into Moses' history.

² Likely some time between 2-5 years of age.

History tells us that Egypt was run on the back of slaves. Slaves in the palace, slaves in the streets, slaves in the market place—these slaves were treated as property more than people. As a member of the royal family, when Moses bumped into a slave carrying food, and the food went flying, was the slave beaten for Moses' mistake? Of course they were. What did that do to Moses? After all, he wasn't born a prince, he was a slave by birth, but by providence he was pampered instead of beaten.

Moses could look at his palace window and see long lines of slaves being driven in their tasks. He saw these people being oppressed—they were hated and haggard, whipped, used, and cast aside like yesterday's trash. "These" people were **his** people.

I wonder, did he ever come across his birth family in the market place? Threadbare clothing, stick-thin-bodies, despair written on their faces—what did he feel? His mother and sister saved him from death, he was living like a prince, meanwhile, every day, they were on death's doorstep. They saved him but he couldn't save them. Did Moses live with a perpetual sense of guilt and helplessness?

He wasn't deaf to the way Egyptians talked about Hebrew slaves—it was no different than the hate-filled-slurs we hear today: *ignorant, filthy, no better than animals*. Moses spent the majority of his life surrounded by such propaganda. When Egyptians mocked these slaves, did Moses join in to save face? Or did all the mocking stop the moment he entered the conversation? He may have been a Prince of Egypt but everyone knew his secret.

Who was Moses really? A Hebrew slave, Egyptian royalty, or something in between? It can't have been easy being Moses—

confusion, insecurity, and guilt would have plagued him; I can imagine Moses would have benefitted from some good therapy!

I have no doubt that Moses did what all of us do—he developed coping mechanisms to manage the internal and external pressure he faced. One such coping mechanism was to bottle up his emotions. When the feelings of pain, guilt, or helplessness overwhelmed him, he shoved all of that emotion down as deep as it would go and then slammed the lid shut.

You may know firsthand that slamming the lid on your emotions is a good short-term strategy, it works really well, but not for long. Repressed pain, guilt, and anger will not lie buried forever; what's inside will come out, often at the worst possible time and in the worst possible way. *What lies beneath the surface of your life? What will you do when it appears?*

Let's get back to the text. Vs. 11, "*One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where **his own people** were and watched them at their hard labor.*" There's been a shift in Moses—he went to "where **his own people** were"—he was considered royalty, they were slaves, but at some point the "me" and "them" morphed into "we;" "*these are my people.*"

The text continues, vs. 11b-14, "*He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, **one of his own people**. Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. 13 The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, 'Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?' 14 The man said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking*

of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?’ Then Moses was afraid and thought, ‘What I did must have become known.’”

One day Moses decided that he could no longer stand on the sidelines and do nothing. Throughout history, many great reformers came to the same conclusion—to stand by and say nothing, to do nothing, is to be complicit in the act. It was this conviction that led William Wilberforce to protest the slave trade in England. It was this conviction that led Elizabeth Cady Stanton to fight for the basic rights of women—including the right to vote.

At some point, to stand by and do nothing in the face of atrocity is to be complicit in the atrocity itself—it was this conviction that led Dietrich Bonhoeffer (pastor and theologian) to join the German resistance movement against Hitler; in standing against Hitler, Bonhoeffer was caught, imprisoned, and executed. In every generation God raises up reformers—activists if you like—who will stand with Him against evil, against atrocity in our world. *Is God asking you to take a stand? A stand with whom? A stand against what?*

One day Moses decided that he could no longer stand on the sidelines and do nothing. But in that moment, what Moses had bottled up for years—pain, guilt, and repressed anger—erupted; what was inside came out. Moses looked left and right, and seeing no one around, he killed the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand.

The next day Moses went out to where his people were, and this time he saw two Hebrews fighting one another. Moses stepped in, and in the words of Acts 7:25, he *“thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.”*

Instead of welcoming his leadership, Moses was openly despised. *“Who do **you** think you are Moses? You may be wearing royal clothes, but that doesn’t make you our judge or ruler—you’re no better than us. What are you going to do—kill us like you killed that Egyptian?”* In that moment, Moses panicked—*what had he done?*

Vs. 15, *“When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh”*. Surely Moses wasn’t the first prince to get caught on the wrong side of the law; we may wonder why Pharaoh didn’t use his power make Moses’ crime disappear? This wasn’t just any death, and Moses wasn’t just any Prince. A Hebrew Prince, killing an Egyptian, to protect a Hebrew slave? Pharaoh was a shrewd ruler—tens of thousands of slaves needed only a spark to set a rebellion ablaze. Can you see the headline? *Hebrew “Prince” Leads Slave Revolt—city on fire, thousands dead”*.

And so Moses fled, out of Egypt and into the desert region of Midian. Moses’ heroic journey was over and his good intentions dashed—the rescue he envisioned for his people was over before it even started. Moses fled to Midian and found himself without family or friends—he was utterly alone.

But as we’ve already seen in this Exodus story, God is always at work. Though we may not perceive it, God is at work in every situation—in our family, in our school, in our work, in our unrealized dreams, in our pain and loss.

Once again we see God’s providential care—God provided Moses with a new family, a home, and a calling. Moses sat down by a well, exhausted, but soon enough he met seven sisters who had come to find water for their sheep. When other shepherds tried to drive these

women away, Moses came to their rescue. When the sisters returned home, singing Moses' praises, Moses was welcomed by their father to a meal, and some time later, he was welcomed as a son-in-law—Moses married Zipporah and joined the family.

Exodus 2:22 says, “*Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, saying, ‘I have become a foreigner in a foreign land.’*” Over time, Moses came to terms with what he now was. His attempt to rescue Israel was a complete failure; he had learned his lesson and had settled into obscurity. Here in Midian he was just Moses—not Moses the Murderer, not Moses the Hebrew, not Moses the Prince of Egypt—just Moses, married to Zipporah, father to Gershom, shepherd of sheep.

Exodus 2 concludes with a word about Egypt. Forty years passed with Moses in Midian—the King of Egypt died, but the suffering of the Israelites continued. Vs. 24-25 says that God **heard** their groaning, **remembered** His covenant (promises), and **looked** with concern on their plight.

It's not that God had been deaf to Israel's cry, or, that he had forgotten His former promises, or, that He suddenly cared when He didn't before. Hearing, remembering, seeing—this is relational language; it communicates both God's compassionate care, and, His sovereignty in choosing this moment to intervene. Let's take a look at Act 2, beginning in Ex. 3:1.

Act 2: An Encounter With God and the Call To Return

“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness

and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 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. 3 So Moses thought, ‘I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.’ 4 When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, ‘Moses! Moses!’ And Moses said, ‘Here I am.’ 5 “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” 6 Then he said, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.’ At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.”

Let me offer three observations. **First**, before Moses saw the bush, God saw Moses. God always takes the first step; He initiates, He calls, He makes a way. Moses turned his face towards God because God first turned His face toward Moses. God moves towards us so that we can move towards Him. *Moses, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—I want to be your father too.*

And through Jesus Christ, God has taken a giant first step towards us; He has taken the initiative, He calls our name, Jesus has made a way. Ephesians 1:4-5 says, “*For [God] chose us in [Christ] before the creation of the world...In love [God] predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ*”. Jesus moved towards us, so that we can move towards Him; **there is a place for you in God's family.**

God saw Moses in Midian, He knew about his failure, and He looked with concern on Moses' pain. Before God sent Moses to Egypt, Moses was in need of rescue—from his failure, his shame, and his insecurities. My dear people, *God sees you, He knows your pain, He is concerned for you.* Before Moses saw the bush, God saw Moses.

Second, as Ruth Barton notes, there appears to be “a cause-and-effect relationship between Moses’ willingness to pay attention and God’s willingness to speak.”³ Vs. 3 “*Moses thought, ‘I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.’*” **4 When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush**.⁴

Elizabeth Dreyer writes, “intentionality is a key ingredient determining whether we notice God everywhere or only in church or only in our suffering or nowhere.”⁴ The self-absorbed man is too fixated on the mirror to see that God is present. The over-scheduled woman barrels through life wearing blinders, missing one opportunity after another. The Lord speaks to those who are listening; He reveals Himself to those who are looking. The question is, *Do we take time to listen and look for God? Do you want to live in an awareness of His presence?*

Third, God’s action is primary in the Exodus story, not Moses’. Take a look at vs. 7 and following:

- vs. 7, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people...I have heard them crying...I am concerned about their suffering”.
- vs. 8, “I have come down to rescue them”.
- vs. 10, “I am sending you to Pharaoh”.
- vs. 12, “I will be with you”
- vs. 14, “I will give you my Name”
- vs. 17, “I have promised to bring you out of Egypt”
- vs. 20, “I will perform wonders in Egypt”

- vs. 21, “I will make the Egyptians look upon you favourably”

God sends Moses to Egypt but as you can see, the burden of work is heavily weighted in God’s direction. The call of Moses—at the most basic level—is a call to trust and follow. God doesn’t ask Moses to persuade Israel or Pharaoh—that’s God’s work. God doesn’t ask Moses to perform miracles, or out maneuver Pharaoh’s army—that’s God’s work. Instead, God calls Moses to trust Him and step out in faith.

God’s action is primary in the Exodus story, and the same is true in our own lives. God is always at work. Though we may not perceive it, God is at work in every situation—in our family, in our school, in our work, in our unrealized dreams, in our pain and loss. God doesn’t ask us to do the impossible, that’s His work, He asks us to trust and follow Him. When God calls us to step into the unknown or the impossible, we can be sure that He will lead the way and He will do the work.

Application/Conclusion: As I draw my sermon to a close, I want to direct your attention to Exodus 3:13-14 and the revealing of God’s Personal Name.

“Moses said to God, ‘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? God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am.’ This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent

³ Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening The Soul Of Your Leadership*, 61.

⁴ Elizabeth Dreyer, *Earth Crammed With Heaven*, as quoted by Barton, 62.

me to you.”

In the Old Testament Scriptures, God has many titles, but here He reveals His Personal Name to Moses—Yahweh. In the Hebrew way of thinking, a name is the extension of one’s being or character. In the Old Testament, **Rebecca’s** name meant “**captivating**,” and she was, **Boaz’s** name meant “**strong**,” and he was, the name “**Israel**” means “**wrestles with God**,” and throughout their history, they wrestled with God. Names are tied to being and character.

Moses’ wasn’t asking for God’s name—as we understand it—he was asking for a revelation of God’s character. “*If I go to the Israelites and they ask who sent me, what should I tell them about who You really are?*” In response God said, “Tell them my name is Yahweh—in other words, I AM Who I AM; I Will Be Who I Will Be.”

God’s Personal Name stems from the Hebrew verb “**to be**”—the most basic thing we know about God is that He exists, He has always existed, and He is fountain of everything that exists. John 1:3-4, in speaking about God the Son, says, “*Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.*” God was, God is, and God will always be—He is Eternal

When Moses heard God’s call to return to Egypt (vs. 10), his failure, insecurity, and fear immediately surfaced; Moses responded saying, “*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?*” God’s response anticipates the revealing of His Personal Name—*I will be with you. I am Who I am. I am ever present and ever active, don’t be afraid, I will go with you.*

But there is more to God and His character—I AM Who I AM; I Will Be Who I Will Be—God is the One Utterly Free being in the universe. In other words, He is Sovereign—He is free to pursue His good purposes, no one can restrict him, stop Him, or impose their will on Him. We’ve all made promises we want to keep but cannot; God’s sovereign freedom means that He can do what He has promised—nothing stands in His way.

Let me offer one last thought on God’s character—a God who is Eternal, Ever-Present, Ever-Active, and Utterly Free, is One who is sufficient for our lives. Our failures, our insecurities, and fears pale in comparison to His all-sufficiency. There is nothing we will ever face that is too much for Him to handle.

In the Book of Exodus we see first Moses, then Israel, and finally, reluctantly, even Egypt comes to take God at His word. We can trust in God’s trustworthiness; until we learn to trust God, there is very little progress in the spiritual life. But entrusting your life to God does not make for a comfortable, predictable life. Entrusting your life to God will mean choosing His way over your way, humility over pride, dependence over independence.

When God called Moses, his failure, insecurity, and fear came flooding back. God called Moses, but Moses resisted God’s call. At the end of chapter 3, we are left to wonder: *will Moses surrender to his fears, or will he surrender his fears to God?*

Moses was standing in front of a miracle—a bush was on fire without burning up—but when God called Moses, he was temporarily blinded by his own limitations. Moses, like many of us, was so fixated on the “how” question that he forgot to ask the “who”

question. *How can God use me? I'm a complete failure; I've already been run out of Egypt. How can I rescue Israel? How can I convince Pharaoh to let Israel go?* All of Moses' "how" questions put the full weight of the problem—and the solution—upon his own shoulders; it's no wonder he buckled under the weight.

What is true in theology, is equally true in life—the "who" question must take precedence over the "how". Not, "*how do I solve this problem?*," but "*who is God for me?*" Not, "*how do I recover from failure?*," but "*who is the God who stands with me?*".

Exodus offers us an answer to the "who" question. His Name is Yahweh—I AM Who I AM; I Will Be Who I Will Be. He is the Eternal, Ever-Present, Ever-Active, Utterly Free, All-Sufficient God. Exodus 34:6 describes Him saying, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."

My dear people, this morning, put your trust in His trustworthiness. Put your confidence in Christ, our Faithful and Merciful High Priest. Jesus is standing in for us, He is interceding for us, and because Jesus has full access to the Father—and we through Him—God's throne is a place of mercy and grace; we can **confidently** ask for the help we need.

Prayer