

**An Encounter with God**  
**Exodus 2:16 – 4:17**

Brothers and sisters, I have a confession to make. Sometimes, I can't remember what it was that preached on a week ago... it happens. So, I'll go easy on you this morning if you don't immediately recall the Transitions sermon series we did back in September from Deuteronomy 31, where Moses, at 120 years old, is giving his final exhortation to the people of Israel before they cross over into the Promised Land.

Remember that? Seems like a long time now doesn't it – but it was only a month and a half ago. But that's usually how we remember Moses, as the leader of God's people who led them through the desert to the Promised Land.

We see Moses as the larger-than-life legendary leader, that spiritual giant of the Old Testament. The man who spoke with God face to face, who received the 10 Commandments on the tablets of stone, who parted the Red Sea, who led the people of Israel out of Egypt. That's how we remember Moses. But we forget Moses' had a life before all that.

And scene 2 in our Breakfast Theatre drama this morning story reminds us that after fleeing from Egypt, Moses became a shepherd and spent forty years tending to the flock of his father-in-law. And its easy to miss that this is a rather drastic and ironic career change for Moses.

The scripture does not say much about Moses' life in between his adoption by Pharaoh's daughter and his killing of an Egyptian slave master, but the truth is that he was raised as a crown prince of Egypt. Now I don't know if that meant he was an heir to the throne, but it did mean that he became a powerful and influential person in a strategic position.

And its not wild speculation to suggest that Moses had learned about another Hebrew who had risen to power and saved all of Egypt, and that Joseph's family was the reason why there were so many Hebrews throughout the land.

It's reasonable to think Moses believed God was raising him to power like Joseph, and that he would save his people as well.

All of his life circumstances certainly seemed to point in that direction. This is what Acts 7:22,25 reveals to us. It says *“Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action... and, Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.”*

It is very probable that Moses went to visit his own people in the hopes they would recognize his position and power and acknowledge him as their leader. Killing the Egyptian slave driver was probably an effort to show that in spite of being raised as an Egyptian, he was on their side. He was one of them, he could unite them and lead them to rise up against their oppressors.

But as Moses quickly found out, they did not see him this way – they rejected him and I think there’s good reason to believe they were the ones who reported him to the Pharaoh!

So – Moses learned the hard way that if you want to be a leader but no one is following you... then you are probably just

talking a walk. Without the support of his people, Moses’ plan and his life purpose quickly falls apart and his life is now in danger and he must flee the country – and take a long walk - all the way to another country, the land of Midian.

Perhaps he would find some consolation in the fact that his princely display of bravery and strength which scared off a group of bullying shepherds at the well resulted in becoming part of another family through marriage and having a family of his own. However, this wasn’t the plan, the plan had failed and he sees himself as a failed man.

He has become a foreigner in a foreign land, from a prince of Egypt to a shepherd... A drastic change, and an ironic one as well since Egyptians despised shepherds.

And perhaps there is some part of Moses’ backstory that you might connect with? Maybe you had privilege and power and influence and you had hoped to make a difference but all your efforts came to nothing...

Maybe you had to leave your home country and now you are a foreigner in a foreign land, working below your training and potential...

Maybe you were rejected, maybe you have failed, maybe your life has become that which you have always despised...

Or maybe you are just going through the motions of life, feeling trapped by work and paying the bills, wondering if this is all there is to life? Is there anything more, a greater sense of purpose?

Or perhaps you are just starting out, with all your dreams and plans that you want to accomplish and the desire to make a difference in this world... along with the fear of what happens if it doesn't work out that way? Just as we've seen happen in the life of Moses – the part of his life that we usually don't remember...

The part of his life which is overshadowed by what we typically remember about him.

Brothers and sisters, the man that Moses becomes in the last forty years of his life is so far removed from the man he was in the first eighty years, that we don't even bother taking note of the contrast – not like we do for the transformations of Peter, or Saul who became Paul.

But it certainly jumps out at us this morning as we fill in some of the details in his backstory, and hopefully as we see the stark contrast... it prompts us to ask “what happened!”

Because this is where the good news comes from brothers and sisters! What happened to Moses... is that he had an encounter with God. God in his sovereign timing, determines it is time to reveal Himself to Moses, and there's a lot we can learn from how God sets up this encounter and what occurs in it. So first, let's take look at what God doesn't do.

God doesn't overwhelm Moses in this encounter. He doesn't burst onto the scene, catching Moses off guard, flexing an intimidating display of His glory and divine power and might, accompanied by thousands of angels... He's not thundering at

Moses when He speaks, there's no lighting flashing, He doesn't threaten Moses or attempt to coerce obedience.

And God doesn't blame or berate or accuse Moses. There's no mention of the murder Moses committed, no disappointment expressed in Moses squandering all the privilege and power and influence God gave him, no belittling Moses for his inadequacies, or scolding him for attempting to liberate the Israelites ahead of God's timing and blessing.

And neither does God lie to Moses. There are no sentimental, well intentioned but ultimately false assurances about Moses' abilities. God doesn't talk Moses up, telling him to be confident and just believe in himself. And God doesn't say the task will be easy, that it won't be difficult or that Moses will just walk in – perform some signs and Pharaoh will roll over and cooperate.

And lastly, I think it's worth noting that God doesn't bargain with Moses. There's no cajoling or pleading or trying to convince Moses to accept what God is sending him to do.

So, that's what God doesn't do in this encounter – let's look at what He does do.

God initiates the encounter by engaging Moses' curiosity. Moses sees a bush that appears to be on fire but is not burning up and he's curious, and he wonders what's going on – he's going to go and check it out. But once God has Moses' curiosity – He needs to bring Moses to attention.

An encounter with God Almighty is far more than a curious thing, so Moses' is commanded to keep his distance and take off his sandals in respect for the presence of the Holy Almighty God.

So, God draws Moses in with "signs and wonders" to reveal who is really is. The burning bush is a "wonder." It's unusual, not normal, it's evidence that someone greater than normal is present. But it's also a "sign" - a symbol for something.

First the fire itself is a sign of God's self sufficiency as it does not consume the bush. We know fire needs fuel in order to

burn, and once it has consumed the fuel it burns out, normal fire can't burn without fuel. But God's holy fire can, because God is self-sufficient, He the source.

Second, I see the bush as sign of God's people, though they are suffering the flames of affliction and oppression they will not be consumed by them. God's presence is with them in their suffering and His sufficiency sustains them and keeps them from being consumed.

So, God draws Moses in, and initiates this encounter with signs and wonders which point to the reality of His divine essence.

Then God establishes common ground with Moses. He reveals Himself to be the God of Moses' father, and family ancestors – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and then He describes His concern for the people of Israel and that He is going to respond to their cries of suffering, something Moses was passionate about as well... in a previous life.

Which is why Moses is afraid to hear this is the God of his ancestors. This is the God who had set him up with privilege, power and influence to help the Hebrews and that hadn't worked out like he thought it would. So, you can imagine it was quite a shock for Moses to hear God say that he was being sent back to do what he had failed in his previous attempt.

But that's what God does, He reveals His plans for Moses to go and confront Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses protests of course, he doesn't think he should be the one, what if the Israelite leaders don't listen to him, again... he's not a good speaker, he's not up for the job – please God send someone else! What does God do? God promises His presence to Moses, God says *"I will be with you."* (3:12)

And then God makes a series of "I" statements that reveal God will be the one acting to accomplish what He is sending Moses to do. God says *"I AM who I AM"* (3:14), I have watched over you, I have promised to bring you out of misery, I know the King will not let you go, I will stretch out my hand,

I will perform wonders – I, I, I, this is all about God, what God will do.

And even at the point when God is angry with Moses, God provides help through Moses' brother Aaron and continues to promise His presence. *"I will help both of you speak and teach you what to say!"* (4:15)

And just as He revealed himself to Moses through signs and wonders, in addition to promising His presence, God equips Moses to reveal himself as Yahweh's agent with signs and wonders.

First, Moses' staff will turn into a snake, and then by grasping the snake by the tail – it turns back into a staff. Obviously, this is a "wonder" because this doesn't happen unless some supernatural power is at work, and thus it would confirm God's power and presence are with Moses.

But its also a sign to Moses that God presence and power will enable him to take on and subdue the all power of the

Pharaoh (which is symbolized in the snake on the Pharaoh's crown) if even the means of doing so by confronting Pharaoh verbally, seems about as foolish as grabbing a snake by the tail!

The second sign is a bit more personal; Moses is to put his hand inside his cloak and when he takes it out, his hand is afflicted with the deadly and incurable skin disease of leprosy. Repeating the same gesture, his hand is restored to normal. It's miraculous – evidence God is at work, only divine power is able to curse and heals like this.

But as a sign, its very powerful statement about how God's presence and power overcome Moses' inadequacies. That hand that reaches in and touches, as the old English translation reads – his bosom, that hand comes back out unclean, unfit, diseased, infecting and making whatever else it touches unclean. The divine diagnosis of Moses as a man, confirms he is unfit for God's calling upon him.

However, once that is out in the open God instructs him to touch his bosom again and when His hand comes out, its not just that things are back to normal – we need to see, is that that what was unclean, unfit and diseased has been taken away. Through his encounter with God, and the promise of God’s presence and power Moses has been made fit for service to Yahweh.

And God also give Moses a third option as well. Taking water from the Nile River and turning into blood. Just in case the first two signs do not elicit belief from the Elders of Israel – but we’re going to skip that because we need to stay focused on how Moses’ encounter with God makes him fit for service to Yahweh – that’s the answer to the earlier question we asked about what it was that caused such a transformation in Moses...

In the encounter with God, Moses is blessed with the promise of God’s presence and power and that makes him fit for the task ahead and starts the transformation to become the Moses that we all know and love.

So I’m sure we would agree, this was an amazing encounter! And it may leave us thinking how awesome it would be if we could experience God in such a physical and tangible way...

But the good news brothers and sisters, and it might be hard to believe... the good news is that because of Jesus Christ, we can actually encounter God and experience His presence and power far more personally, intimately, and effectively than Moses ever did at the burning bush!

Moses saw a bush on fire that wasn’t burning up, but we see Jesus – his life, his ministry, his death, his resurrection and ascension all vividly described for us by eyewitnesses in great detail in the pages of the gospels in scripture!

Brothers and sisters, signs and wonders are supernaturally sensational, which seems amazing to our materialistic mindset – but right out in the ordinary everyday God has given us something even more effective and less obtuse than signs and wonders, right in the bible! So that we may encounter Him in Jesus Christ. As John 20:31 says *“But these are written that*

*you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*

Get curious and open the gospels and read about Jesus – you will encounter God, as we are encountering God this morning from this story in scripture. A God, who reveals Himself in Jesus as ultimately gracious, patient, and merciful. In Jesus we experience a God who does not intimidate us, blame us or accuse us or scold us – but a God who came to seek and save the lost, who came to heal the sick, and set the captives free...

So He calls us, in firm and unyielding terms to follow Him, put our faith and trust in Him, to believe on Him for the forgiveness of our sins and obey Him as Lord. We can know God so much more intimately, far more personally than was ever revealed to Moses, brothers and sisters...

Moses was promised that God’s presence and power would go with Him, but because of Jesus’ ascension to the right hand of God... now we have the Holy Spirit poured out upon us, now

God himself dwells in us. As God promised in Ezekiel 36:27 that He would put His Spirit IN us.

And while God equipped Moses with two specific signs and wonders to encourage and assist him in his task, with an optional third if the first two didn’t work – the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as it says in Eph 3:8 provides us with “the boundless riches of Christ.”

And while Moses reached inside his cloak and found only disease and uncleanness, with the Spirit living in us as it says in Gal 5:22-23 we are filled with His fruit “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*” and as it says in Eph 4:12 He gives us spiritual gifts, grace gifts “*to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*”

So while Moses was equipped with a few signs and wonders for one particular task, as Phil 4:13 says we can do ALL things through Christ who strengthens us... and even more than that!



In John 14:12 our Lord Jesus described the effect of the Holy Spirit's indwelling as enabling those who believed in Him to do the works that He had been doing, but then to *"do even greater works than these!"*

And I believe brothers and sisters, that the Holy Spirit wants to enable a greater work to take place this morning among us. Because Phil 1:6 tells us that Jesus will continue the saving and sanctifying transforming work that He started in you – working at it until it is completed on the day He returns.

So, you see... the greater work we do, is co-operating with Holy Spirit who continues the work that Jesus started in us, who wants to continue to bring healing and wholeness into our lives this morning.

Because the truth is, that in spite of all the amazing ways that we can encounter and experience the power and the presence of God in our lives, far beyond what Moses experienced... too much of our experience is like that of what we saw in Moses this morning when he encounters God; afraid, a failure,

broken and inadequate, no sense of purpose, and very reluctant to trust and obey God.

I asked you earlier if there was anything that you could relate to in Moses' backstory brothers and sisters, so whatever it was that resonated with you – just as God asked Moses to reach inside his cloak brothers and sisters, I want to ask you to put your hand on your heart – where that sense of failure, brokenness, inadequacy, or fear resides...

And maybe just as Moses was enabled to see his sin as a disease on his hand, the Holy Spirit is convicting you of other sins that have a foothold in your heart as well. Hatred, anger, lust, pride, unbelief, rebellion, greed, lies, unforgiveness...

All those things that make us unfit and unclean, things which Jesus died to forgive and works to bring healing for...

Brothers and sisters, I'd invite you to bow your heads and close your eyes – because what the Holy Spirit wants to do is between you and Him, He is setting up and encounter with

you, He calls you by your name and says take your hand – and whatever brokenness and sin it has touched in your heart – and lift it up, get it out in the open with Him. Quietly confess it – say its name to Jesus, and in doing so give it to Him...

Then turn your hand to receive, the Lord Jesus wants to pour out more of His Holy Spirit upon you this morning – it is promised to us brothers and sisters, the sign of Baptism is this promise the Spirit is and will be poured out on us.

So believe and receive the healing work the Lord Jesus Christ through His Holy Spirit – and claim it for yourself by putting your hand back on your heart. This is a gesture of faith, a sign that you believe God's promise in Ezekiel 36:26. God says to you this morning *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you"*

And brothers and sisters this new heart, this new spirit – this brings healing and wholeness to where you are broken, it brings freedom to where you are held captive to the power of sin, it opens the eyes of your heart so you can see God's truth

about yourself and this world, and... it will help you keep your eyes and your focus upon Jesus, upon God!

So, go ahead and open your eyes brothers and sisters.

Trust and believe that this encounter with the Living God this morning, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who has become the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, will bring about the kind of drastic transformation in your life – that we have seen in the life of Moses...

That those who know you 10, 20, 40, or 50 years from now won't believe the contrast between who you have become and who you are now.

Brothers and sisters, you have encountered God in Jesus Christ, so be confident this, Phil 1:6, *"that He who began a good work in you is faithful, and will carry it on to completion on the day of Jesus Christ."*

Amen.