

Introduction

Exodus 2:11: *“One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, ‘Why do you strike your companion?’ He answered, ‘Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?’ Then Moses was afraid, and thought, ‘Surely the thing is known.’ When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. And he sat down by a well.*

“Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock. The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and saved them, and watered their flock. When they came home to their father Reuel, he said, ‘How is it that you have come home so soon today?’ They said, ‘An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds and even drew water for us and watered the flock.’ He said to his daughters, ‘Then where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread.’ And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah. She gave birth to a son, and he called his name Gershom, for he said, ‘I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.’

“During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.”

I want to read just a couple of verses to you from chapter 3: *“Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning yet it was not consumed.”*

I want you to hear this from verse 11... skip down to verse 11: *“But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?’ He said, ‘But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.’”*

1. The Power of Our Sinfulness. (2:12)

We talked about the fact that the Exodus is all about God making a people through His power. What would you say is redemption? You know, whenever we start talking about redemption, a lot of times, particularly in our own culture, it’s about perseverance and success... Particularly like in the athletic realm or in the business realm. People say things like, “He totally redeemed himself”...or... “She totally redeemed herself.” We use this sort of phrasing all the time. What does it really mean? What we’re getting at is this athlete really blew it before and they didn’t come through, but then in the moment, in the big game, in the crunch time, they came through. They performed at peak performance level, and then they did what they wanted to do all along. They redeemed themselves. OR... We’ll say, “Well they lost a lot of money in their early business ventures, but then they figured out a way and they stuck with it, they met their goals, and eventually they succeeded. Now, they totally redeemed themselves. But, you see, redemption in the Bible isn’t anything like that because that definition of redemption really simply says this: “I worked harder and

got what I wanted." That's not redemption in Scripture. Redemption in Scripture is when God takes someone who is completely worthless and then gives them infinite value. That is redemption.

You see, the Papa John's coupon that comes in the mail on Thursdays... If you take that over to Walmart, they have nothing to do with that, but if you cut that coupon out and you take it to Papa John's, they will give you the pizza at the price advertised on the coupon. Why? ...Because at the very bottom of the coupon it says, "Redeem at any participating Papa John's locations." What does that mean? Apart from the correct person, this coupon is worthless. It's just a piece of paper. It has no value. But, in the right hands, it suddenly has more value.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ... and really it is reflected here in Exodus chapters 2 and 3, and it speaks to us across the ages... is this. It is that we essentially are worthless but, in the hands of a right, good, and glorious God, we then become someone who has infinite value... infinite worth. This is what happens in Moses' situation. You see, Moses first falls prey and sins. Just like you and just like me, Moses finds himself in a situation where he gives in to some desires that are in his heart. What the Bible says is that he goes out and he looks on his people. Even though Moses was being raised essentially as a grandson to Pharaoh... raised there in the palace... somehow he knew that he was not an Egyptian. Did Pharaoh's daughter tell him that? Maybe. Maybe the other kids said that he looked different. We're not really sure how that worked out, but he knew that they were not his people. So he is being raised as an Egyptian, he is being educated, becoming well-polished, becoming someone who is very able to think and to lead. He is far away from menial tasks, but yet he knows that his people are suffering. So he goes out and he walks one day and sees one of his people, as chapter 2 tells us, being beaten by an Egyptian taskmaster. Apparently Moses has a great need for justice. If you noticed in chapter 2, there are three incidents that are recorded back to back: This incident with the slave and then two Hebrews that are fighting and then the women at the well. In each case, Moses intercedes. He's kind of that guy who's got the "hero" thing inside him. He's got justice inside of him. He sees people struggling; he wants to run up and he wants to set the situation right. That's a good desire to have in your heart, to want to make something right. That's the way that he feels in this particular situation. But something clicks inside of Moses, and that desire for justice morphs suddenly into a searing anger that controls him and takes him over. So he runs up to the Egyptian and the Bible says, "He looks this way and that, and seeing no one, struck down the Egyptian and buried the body in the sand."

Feels kind of familiar doesn't it? I mean, you probably haven't murdered anyone, but I bet you've done this before. "Anybody looking? Can I do what I want to do right now? Is that going to be okay if I do that?" And then, he buried the body in the sand. We're good at that aren't we? Just cover up our tracks. Clear the history off the computer. Make sure that nobody can tell where I've been or what I've done. We wipe away the emotional and spiritual fingerprints, and we think, (whispering) "I got away with it. Nobody knows." You see... here's the funny thing about the sin that creeps up in Moses' life. It's that the sin that creeps up in Moses' life actually is borne from a very good place. It's a desire to see justice enacted. He was right. The Egyptian should not have been beating the slave. He was right to want to justify and rectify that particular situation, but he went about it in a really wrong way. Here's the crazy thing about that. It's that a lot of sin works that way. The devil, the enemy, Satan... takes that good desire within us and he perverts it, and that's the way that sin takes hold. Right? You may think, "Are you sure about that? Isn't sin just evil from the beginning?"

I was thinking about some of the stuff in my own life and the stuff that I've observed, and I've thought of a lot of good desires that get twisted. For instance, I know so many people that say, "You know, I just want to

be emotionally available for people," and they become an enabler for addiction in the lives of other people. I know so many people that say, "You know, I just wanted to have that righteous desire to comfort them and to minister to them." So many people who have been in a position similar to mine that have that desire to comfort, it starts in a good place and before you know it, they've crossed the line into an inappropriate relationship. So many people that have this righteous desire to provide for their family and then the next thing you know, they've created an idol out of their job, or they say, "I just need to earn just a little bit more money and if I do that then I'll be able to make ends meet." But then before you know it, they begin to say, "Really, the place where I find my significance in my worth is in money itself." What about the righteous desire that we see in so many public officials where they begin in this good place... they want to serve, they want to make the world a better place... and then somewhere along the way things twist and turn and change, and it becomes an intoxicating power trip. Or what about that righteous desire to raise up our children and to teach them to do the things that they are supposed to do, but then somewhere along the way, we begin living vicariously through the dreams and the achievements of our children, and we forget about the fact that God doesn't want us to make even our children into an idol. What about so many people I've seen that are pastors that begin in this righteous desire to serve the Lord, and somewhere along the way it becomes about other people knowing our names instead of the name of Jesus Christ? This is what sin does: It perverts the good gift of God. It takes words intended for encouragement and turns them into slander. It takes the gift of sex, and it turns it into personal preferential pleasures and desires. It takes friendship and it turns it into possession. It takes love and it turns it into hate. This is the enemy's desire: To take good desires within us and then turn them into sin. Whenever that happens we put ourselves in a place where we need redemption. Here's the thing. I don't even need to ask you. "Has anybody here ever had a good desire that then Satan turned it into a sinful desire?" I mean... come on! If you deny that, we've got to talk... (Laughter)... because every person here has done that. I know that I have done that. I tell you that whenever that happens... here's the funny thing about that... It's that what God is demonstrating through Moses and in our own lives is the fact that we are in need of redemption. We're broken. We need to be rescued. We don't even like to say it but it's definitely true. We need someone to save us.

You see, if you're here today and you're saying, "You know, I think I've pretty much got it all together." You are so far from understanding God's grace because you are deceiving yourself because you refuse to acknowledge the fact that Scripture says that "you are dead in your transgressions... that you are a slave to sin... that there is no one who does good; no, not one." The Scripture testifies to it over and over and over. "You are broken. You are sinful." You, left to your own devices, will take all of the good things that God has done and you will pervert them from your sinful heart, and you will use them for evil. Given enough time, you will corrupt everything that you touch. You say, "Wow! I sound terrible." You are. So am I. But... but, God's desire is for us to understand that in this place of brokenness and sinfulness, that is the moment when He can begin to work redemption into our own lives.

Here's the thing. You know, we gloss over Moses sometimes. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of my favorite theologians and writers, wrote from his prison cell in Germany during WWII. He said, "I love to read the Old Testament because there the people seem real." He said, "They're really sinners." Guys... Moses is a murderer. I want you to think about that. You know, whenever I say the word "Moses," you picture someone with a nice flowing gray beard. He's got a staff. You kind of picture him as just a real holy Santa Claus... kind of a snuggly guy. (Laughter) Listen. This guy killed someone... He killed someone. In Texas, there would be protests: "Fry, Moses... Fry." I mean, you know, that would be the way that people would approach this kind of a man. He was guilty and he knew it. Not only was he guilty, he was a fugitive and

he ran. This is the sort of person that God decides to use. You see, Moses is the reminder that when we operate from our own power, apart from God, more often than not, then we change good intentions into painful consequences and evil actions because we are broken and sinful.

So what does Moses do? Verse 15: *"When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses."* What did Moses do? He did what any person would do in this situation. *"Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. And he sat down by a well."* Moses ran. He knew that what he had done was wrong, and he tried to get out of there as fast as he could. He went to the land of Midian. Now, the land of Midian is across the Sinai Peninsula, across the Gulf of Aqaba. It's a land of polytheistic people that are sheep herders, and that's where Moses decided to make his home. That's where he ended up living at this time. He went into what later would be termed the wilderness. He crossed over that same area that he would cross as he led the people of Israel out, later in the story, and into the wilderness.

2. Pushes Us Into Wilderness. (2:15)

Wilderness. His sin pushed him out into the wilderness. Have you ever been in a spiritual wilderness before? Have you ever been in that place where you have done something wrong... you've hurt someone... and relationally things just break apart. You feel distant. Have you ever done that sort of thing where you've betrayed someone or you've done something you know you ought not to do, and so therefore your relationship with that particular organization or that particular group of people is completely now changed into something else where you have no peace whenever you're around them? You feel angst inside of you. You're in a relational wilderness. Have you ever been in a spiritual wilderness, maybe not even of your own doing... Maybe you didn't even sin, but this is the crazy thing... Moses, in Scripture, is not the only person who goes into the wilderness. Jesus is taken by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days. David goes into the wilderness, on the run from Saul. He had done nothing wrong, but he has to hide there so that Saul won't take his life. Paul, the Bible tells us, goes into a wilderness and studies before he ever does any sort of ministry. Elijah goes and has to run into the wilderness whenever he's on the run from King Ahab. The Scripture is filled with people who have to go into a wilderness, and God does something to them while they are there. You see, Moses immediately comes upon a situation almost identical to the one with the slave and the Egyptian taskmaster. There are these women and they're being harassed by these shepherds, and he's got to do something. Now Moses, just a week earlier, would have struck those guys down and killed them; but he has learned. He is growing. He is changing. God sometimes, either through our own actions, will choose to use it, OR simply because He is sovereign and divine and wants to shape and form us, will push us into a wilderness. Why does God push His people sometimes into a spiritual wilderness? He does it for one reason. He wants to grow you up. He wants to change you. He wants to move you into a new place. He wants to grow you.

I was reading this great quote this week from Charles Spurgeon who was talking about the spiritual wilderness that sometimes comes our way. I want you to listen to this: This is what Spurgeon says: "He (the Lord) promises to draw us apart for there He can best deal with us, and the separated place is not intended to be a paradise." Did you hear that? When God pushes you into a wilderness, He's not sitting there going, "There, there... It's going to be okay." No. He pushes you into the wilderness but a wilderness, since in such a place there will be nothing to take our attention from our God. "In the deserts of affliction..." I want you to hear this. This is a great sentence: I could never say anything this good.... Listen to this: "In the deserts of affliction, the presence of the Lord becomes everything to us." (Whistles) "In the deserts of affliction, the presence of the Lord becomes everything to us, and we prize His company beyond any value which we set upon it when we sat under our own vine and fig tree in the society of our fellows. Solitude and

affliction bring more to themselves and to their heavenly Father than any other means." Translation: God will take everything away from you and strip you down into a spiritual wilderness so that He can have his way with you and break you down into the person that He wants you to be. Now this is different than what we were talking about last week. Last week we were talking about how God would use suffering. This isn't even necessarily a suffering. This is just a place where you are isolated and you are alone, and all you have is Him. That's it. Why does God do that? Because He wants you to get to the place where you have decided, "I don't need anything else. All I need is Him. That's all I need." He will do whatever He has to do in that time because He wants you to want Him more than anything else.

You guys don't know this but before I came to Houston I was in a spiritual wilderness. My wife and I had been planting a church. It was tough. It was bad and there had been days.... We knew that God had called us to do it, but we sort of had these delusions and these ideas that when God called us to plant this church, what He was doing was He was about to create this incredible movement in the southwest corner of Fort Worth. Do you know what? That's not what happened. It was hard and it was lonely and it was difficult and we were broke. We drained all of our savings trying to do this. We got to where I remember Joy and I were sitting at the kitchen table. We weren't even crying because there were no tears left to cry. I don't know if you have been in that place. We were just emotionally and spiritually exhausted. I remember we had our palms on the table and we just prayed. We said, "Lord, we came here because you told us to come here, and we will stay until you take us away, but we have nothing left to give. So, if You want us to do something else, whatever it is that You want us to do, we will do it." The next week, this church called. I want you to understand, and I mean this in the most loving way possible, I would not have come to this church before that. It's not because I didn't love you. It was because I hadn't been completely weaned in the wilderness yet. God wasn't done stripping all the junk out of my life.

Some of you right now are in a spiritual wilderness. This is what I want you to understand. If you're in a spiritual wilderness, do you know what your tendency is? I'll tell you what my tendency is... when I get into a spiritual wilderness. The first thing, when I go into a spiritual wilderness... number one, I like to whine a lot. I kind of like to complain for a little while, kick... "Why, Lord? This is terrible." Then the second thing I do, when I get in a spiritual wilderness, is I like to try and run away and get out of it myself. You know, I'll go do this; I'll go do that. Finally, once God has beaten me about the head enough to bring me back, He says, "Hey, listen sucker. I ain't going to let you move until you do exactly what I want you to do." Then the third thought, typically, that enters my head, and unfortunately it doesn't happen this quickly... "I wonder if I'm here for a reason. (Laughter) I wonder if God wants to teach me something." Listen to me. If you are in a spiritual wilderness right now, I want you to hear me. Relish it. I know you're like, "That is crazy!" No; it's beautiful. This is what I want you to hear. It's only for a little while. However long it is for, it is for a little while. It is for a season, and the Lord is doing this. He is pruning you. He is pulling away deadness. He is ripping out sin. He is ruthlessly and lovingly disciplining you for this reason. God sends His people into the wilderness always... always for one reason: To bring glory to His name. I want you to hear me on this... listen. Do you know that Acts 7:30 tells us? Are you ready? Do you know how long Moses was in Midian? Forty years! You're like... "Oh, I've had a bad week." Uh huh! Forty years. (Laughter) Forty years! Why? Because God would then use Moses to do the most important spiritual act of his life for the following forty years. He needed forty years to have His hands directly upon His servant to shape him into precisely the vessel that He wanted so that then Moses would do His bidding, to bring glory to His name and not to himself. You see before, Moses wanted justice. Moses wanted to set things right... but why? ...Probably for his own name. And now... you know, to be honest with you, prior to chapter 3, we don't even know if Moses knew who the Lord was. The first encounter we know that Moses has with the Lord is chapter 3 and

the burning bush. It's there... It's then that God says, "I've just got you. I've got My hands on you. I'm going to mold you." Paul goes into Arabia, the Bible tells us. Why does he have to do that? So God can work on him. What does he do next? He plants churches. Jesus goes into the wilderness for forty days to be tempted by the devil. Then what? Then His public ministry begins. Elijah goes on the run. David goes on the run from Saul... right before what? Before he becomes the King of Israel. Listen. Scripture is filled with this. People get pushed into the wilderness right before God asks them to do something significant for Him. If you have been called into the wilderness and you're wondering, "Why am I here?" It's because God wants to do something to bring glory to His name. If you're still in the wilderness, there are a few reasons why you might still be there. Number 1: You haven't learned yet. You keep whining and complaining. He says, "You can whine all you want, but until I'm done shaping you, you are not getting out of here." So, relish it. Get down to business. Number 2: Why else might you still be there? You might still be there because, for whatever reason, you refuse to believe that there is a purpose in this. You might still be there because you think that the most important thing is you. Listen to me. This is the beautiful thing about redemption, and this is what I want you to hear. God redeems Moses, not so that we will learn Moses' name. God does not redeem Moses so that we would say, "Oohh, Moses is incredible!" God redeems Moses so that one day we will declare "Jesus is incredible!" I want you to think about that. God does what He does in the life of Moses to eventually bring the people of Israel into a Promised Land so that one day a Messiah named Jesus could come and usher in a new kingdom. Everything that God does in the wilderness is designed so that you will bring glory to Jesus. So, if you're in your wilderness saying, "What is in this for me?"... You're not ready yet. Because God wants you to get to the place where you say, "Whatever You want, for Your name's sake." End of story. This is the way that the wilderness works. It's only done when He says it's done.

I like to wrestle with my kids sometimes... because I'm mean. What I'll do is... I'm not really mean, guys; that was supposed to be funny... I'll take my kids and I'll wrestle with them and we'll have fun. Eventually I get tired because, you know... You all don't know my kids real well, but my youngest... he's kind of like a spider monkey... He can crawl all over me all day long and he never gets tired. But finally, this old man gets tired, and when I'm done then we end it. This is way we end it. I can pin him whenever I want to. Right? So we're having fun, this is great, but when this is over; this is over when I say it's over. We're done. Now, whenever I say that it's over, he never thinks it's over. (Laughter) He says, "Oh no... we're still going." I'm like, "Oh no, we're done." "No, no, no, Dad. Come on." "Okay... We're done." Then BOOM, he's down on the ground, and he's pinned down like this. I say, "Are we done?" He always tries to fight me a little bit longer. He weighs 80 pounds. He is kind of wiggling on the ground (Laughter) I'm just going to sit on you until you say, "We're done." So I just get on top of him and I wait until he says, "Okay... we're done." The funny thing is... you already know how this is going to work, don't you? I say, "Are you sure we're done?" "We're done." I get up and immediately he tries to jump back on me, and I just grab him and put him back down on the ground. "Are we done?" "Okay, we're done now."

Listen to me. This is the way that the wilderness works. It's over when God says it's over. You see. This is the funny thing. It's that God will be shaping us in the wilderness, and we will say, "Okay, I've got it. I'm done now." And He says, "No. It's over when I say it's over." This is the beautiful thing about redemption that takes place in Exodus chapter 3. God appears to Moses in a burning bush, and He tells him, "I've got a job for you. I want you to bring the Israelites out." And Moses now has been broken down to where he feels completely worthless. He's a murderer. He's a fugitive from justice. He's an Egyptian or has been raised as an Egyptian, at least, so he has been taught that sheep herding is the lowest of the low. He is watching sheep for his father-in-law. He doesn't even really have his own father figure. It's important to remember

on Father's Day, Jethro becomes a valuable man in his life... A story for another day. But all of these things, he is just broken down and he feels worthless. He has nothing left to give. Then He says, "I want you to do this." Moses says, "Who am I? Who am I?" I mean, guys... how often do you think that Moses had been out herding sheep where he had been taught it is a worthless job... how many times do you think he had been doing that he had said something like this: "I'm so stupid. I can't believe I did that. If I had just would have controlled my temper that day, I wouldn't be in this situation right now. Why did I ever let my anger get the best of me? Why did that ever have to happen?" He is feeling like he has got nothing left to give. It's in that moment when he has finally and totally completely, maybe even come to peace and says, "Well, I guess I'm just going to be a sheep herder." The most educated sheep herder in the history of Midian. It's finally in that moment when the Lord then appears to him and He says, "It's over. I want you to go and I want you to lead the people out." And he says, "Who am I?" Then what does he say? Chapter 3, verse 12: He says, "Who am I?" And the Lord says, "I will be with you." Moses says, "I have nothing to give." The Lord says, "That's right. You're worthless but I'm here." Moses says, "I have no ability. I'm a fugitive." He says, "That's right. But I love you and I forgive you anyway." Moses says, "I've done everything wrong." And the Lord says, "That's right. You have been broken down precisely now so that I can use you in the way that I want."

Are you in the wilderness? Would you relish it so that God could use it to shape you? Spiritually... have you been rebelling so long against God that you have failed to see this beautiful truth that through Jesus Christ He chooses murderers, He chooses adulterers, He chooses the lowest of the low? It's really only the people who think they have it all together that miss out on grace because, as Robert Farrar Capone has said, "Grace can only raise those who understand that they are truly dead." If you say "I am spiritually dead," as Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in Spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"... You need to know that you are poor. You have nothing to give... nothing to bring. Then guess what? Grace can raise you.

So today, many of us are in one of two places. We're either in a spiritual wilderness, and we need to just sit back and let God do His beautiful, painful, frustrating, important, refining work in our lives... Or, we need to finally understand that God split time and history whenever He gave His Son Jesus Christ on the cross, and through freedom, unmerited and unearned grace, He called you into His family. Maybe you are in a wilderness of your own making where only Jesus saves, or maybe you're in the wilderness that God Himself has ordained so that He can form you... but in either case, the reward is the same, and the reward is Jesus Christ. This is what I want you to hear today. God will shape and form His people so that you will cry out only one name... the name of Jesus. So church, how will we respond today? Will we say "Yes" to Him? Will we surrender to His will? Will those of us that are far away, who have yet to say "Yes" to the grace, finally stop kicking against the goads and surrender? ...Because that's what He wants. He wants our hearts. He wants our desires. He wants our affections. He wants us to delight first and foremost and only in Him, and it begins when we finally say "Yes" to what Jesus wants. Amen and amen.

Let's pray: "Lord, we thank You. We thank You for the fact that You love us enough to chasten us... God, that you love us enough to bring us into a place where it feels lonely sometimes, Lord, so that in deserts of affliction the sweetest gift that we might have will be your Word. Father, we love You and we praise You. Now God, at this moment right now, we pray and we ask this: 'Lord, make us understand that the sweetest and the best gift that we could ever have is the gift of your Son Jesus.' Father, I want to pray for two groups of people that are here right now. Father, those, first of all, who have yet to say 'Yes' to Jesus, that came today because of Vacation Bible School, or something else, but Lord, right now, I pray that You would call them into your family right here today. Then, God, for those that have been in a wilderness and today you have been saying "Why am I here?" God, I pray that You would speak to them and comfort their heart and

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say, 'I'm working on you. I'm working on you. I'm refining you. Let Me do what I need to do so that you can be used to bring glory to My name.' Father, we pray and we ask that right now You would move people to respond in the name of Your Son Jesus. Amen."