

MOSES & ME

2022 FC Lectures

Here is a synopsis for "Moses & Me."

While the book of Exodus tells of some of the most well-known and inspiring events in all of human history, the character of Moses remains timeless. Through his failures and subsequent obedience, all of us can more clearly see not only ourselves but even more so a God who is faithful. So these sessions will ask, how does the life of Moses give us further knowledge of God and increased understanding of our identities?

On Tuesday, we will consider the LORD's call to Moses in Exodus 3-4, noting that Moses failed when he acted without God but was exalted when He listened. On Wednesday, we will walk with Israel through the Red Sea in Exodus 14-15, showing how God can transform our cries of desperation into songs of joy. On Thursday, we will ascend to Sinai in Exodus 32-33, noting how God's Word provides purpose and fulfillment in our lives.

The LORD is God, and our God creates from the nothingness. He created the cosmos from nothing. He exalted Moses from humiliation. And He redeems us to be His children.

Ryan Cummings

February 2022

TUESDAY

The Call of Moses (Ex. 3-4)

Thank you, Dr. Hamilton, for the introduction and for the invitation on behalf of the Bible Department to participate in the lectureship this year. It is certainly a privilege to be asked to serve as your guide through the life of Moses this week.

The last few years, Dr. Hamilton and I have served together on the FC Indiana Camp staff, and one of the highlights of our week is our Big Event. For those of you who haven't been to camp (like I didn't as a teen), the Big Event is a night where we live out and perform some of the stories of the Bible.

This last year, as a happy coincidence, our camp theme was the book of Exodus. For the Big Event, Dr. Hamilton portrayed Moses, and I was his faithful servant Joshua. Esther is our theme this year. We haven't yet drawn sticks to decide who will be Esther and who will be Mordecai. But for the record, I do think Tom would make a lovely queen!

So, now to Moses! The Bible Department has given me an exciting yet somewhat impossible task—to relate the story of one of the most interesting human beings in history to you and your lives over the course of three days. Not even at my fastest speaking rate would I be able to tell you all we know about Moses over the course of three lectures. But this seemingly difficult task was made possible to me through another camp staff member.

As the Indiana camp committee was discussing what our camp theme about Moses should specifically entail, Briley Hancock directed us to two verses in the book of Exodus that truly summarize both the life of Moses and the story of the book of Exodus. So here is where I plan to take us this morning. First, I would like to guide us through these two verses that speak to the life and legacy of Moses. Second, in light of these verses, we will consider in fresh light Moses' mistake and God's solution in the first four chapters of Exodus. And then we will close by asking how the story of Moses should write the story of our lives. So let's open the Scriptures together to Exodus chapter 3.

In Exodus 3, we follow Moses to meet God in the burning bush at Sinai. And when God meets people at a mountain, you know something marvelous is about to happen. In the first ten verses of this chapter, God calls to Moses from the burning bush, announcing His plan to deliver His chosen people from Egyptian bondage by the

hand of Moses. To say that this is a shock to Moses is an understatement. Forty years prior, he had left Egypt, rejecting his royal family and rejected by his blood relatives, the children of Israel. And he had spent these last four decades not preparing for a great military march against Egypt but as a shepherd in Midian.

Let me offer this as a quick, helpful reference. The life of Moses can be broken down into three periods of 40 years. From birth to 40, he lived In Egypt. From 40 to 80, he was in Midian. And at age 80, God spoke to him from the burning bush. And then he dies in the wilderness at 120.

So here we have an 80-year-old outcast shepherd being spoken to by the LORD from a burning bush on a mountain. Happens every day, right? Well, God has spoken, and He has announced His plan to use Moses as a chosen instrument of deliverance. Notice just verse 10 of chapter 3:

The LORD said, “Come, I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” The LORD 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

So the LORD announced His plan and His purpose for Moses. And how did Moses respond? “Who am I”? Let’s dwell on this question for a moment. After having spent 40 years in the wilderness of Midian shepherding his flock and raising his family, Moses sees himself as a nobody and cannot understand why God would choose him to deliver His people. “Who am I”?²

But did you notice the LORD’s response?

Verse 12: God said, “But I will be with you.”

Strange, isn’t it? In asking who he was or why God had chosen him to lead, the LORD responded not with a commendation of the qualifications of Moses but with the simple, powerful promise, “I will be with you.”

¹ All quotations come from ESV. (2011). *English Standard Version*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

² All images are in the public domain, through Wikimedia Commons, Unsplash, or Infogram.

This was the verse that Briley Hancock directed our camp committee's attention to in choosing a theme for our camp week, and I would like to suggest to you this week that the entirety of the story of Moses is contained with this question and its answer. That is, Moses' question of "Who am I" is overwhelmed by who God is. And this is the key to understanding the life of Moses. To know Moses, we must focus not on his life but on the life of God. To understand Moses, we must look not at his works but the might of God. And likewise to understand who I am, my attention must not be turned inward but above. But more on this later.

How did Moses arrive at this state of nothingness? For this, we need to go back to the first two chapters of Exodus. The first six verses of the book recount how Israel came to dwell in Egypt, briefly reminding the reader of the final events in the book of Genesis. Let's note verses 6 and 7 of chapter 1.

Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all the generation. But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.

From a historical perspective, we indeed are reminded of Jacob, Joseph, and the rest of his brothers. Moses did write both Genesis and Exodus, of course. This is going to become important in a moment.

Beyond the historical perspective, notice the literary connection between Genesis and Exodus formed in Exodus 1:7. Israel was (listen closely) "fruitful and multiplied." This, of course, is taking us back to God's original command to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28 to be fruitful and multiply. The Bible is filled with these hyperlinks and connections; New Testament scholar Richard Hays calls this *intertextuality*, which is a scholarly but helpful term to describe when one text is connected to another.³ But why is Moses wanting us to hear this intertextuality between Genesis 1 and Exodus 1? Sure, it's interesting! But what purpose does it serve to the narrative? Let's continue into verses 8-14:

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and if war breaks out,

³ Hays, R. B. (1989). *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. Yale University Press.

they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” Therefore, they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.

The plot thickens. Israel is in the land, fruitful and multiplying. Yet an adversary arises against them. Pharaoh (and listen closely) dealt shrewdly—or wisely, or craftily—against Israel. Again, clear intertextuality. Who is Moses wanting us to be reminded of in his description of Pharaoh? The serpent in Genesis 3. Notice the various hints at intertextuality in verses 8-14. First, Pharaoh is described as wise. Second, his desire is the oppression of God’s people. Third, looking at 1:13, Pharaoh wants to enslave these people. Fourth, like Adam, Israel is cursed to work bitterly from the ground in 1:14.

And there are other recognitions of the connection between Pharaoh and the serpent in Genesis 3. Later Scriptures will liken the Exodus to the defeat of the sea serpent (see especially Psalm 74:14 and Isaiah 51:9). Likewise, the Nile’s shape is like that of a serpent. Egypt generally and Pharaoh more specifically are calling our ears back to the serpent in Genesis 3.

And in this light, the intertextuality between Genesis 1-3 and Exodus is not only interesting to see but more importantly meaningful to our interpretation of the Exodus narrative. Exodus is continuing the human drama set forth in Genesis. But let us remember how Genesis 3 ends. Woman is cursed. Man is cursed. We are promised conflict from the Adversary. And God exiles humanity from the garden. And we are about to see this cycle repeat itself.⁴

Amidst this dark drama of Israel’s enslavement, the first two chapters of Exodus offer two glimmers of hope. First, we are introduced to Shiphrah and Puah, the two Hebrew midwives who saved the male children from the belly of the Serpent.

⁴ For further connections between Eden and Exodus, see especially Currid, J. D. (2000). *Exodus, Volume 1 (Chapters 1-18)*. Evangelical Press, 14-17.

The second shimmer of hope comes in Exodus 2. Time doesn't allow us to work through the first ten verses of Exodus 2 in detail, but let me summarize. Pharaoh had called for the death of all male Israelites, yet a Levite woman named Jochebed gave birth to a son. After three months, she hid her son in a basket made of reeds, overlaid with pitch. Now, this is too fascinating not to mention. The Hebrew word *basket* in Exodus 2:3 is the same word translated as *ark* in Genesis 6 to refer to Noah's basket, which was also overlaid with pitch. As in the dark days of Noah, so in the days of Jochebed. The serpent is oppressing, yet God (in His own mysterious, often unrecognized ways) is at work redeeming. Jochebed then arranges for her son to be adopted into Pharaoh's house, not only saving his life but also preparing the future deliverer of Israel for his God-given purpose. And this baby, of course, was Moses. So with the narrative context set, let's read about Moses. Exodus 2:11-15:

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 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.

Well, that's about as much of a narrative disappointment as *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*! Let us remember that Moses was the one who wrote this. And how did Moses introduce himself into the narrative? With a call of God's creative voice like Adam? With a great call from heaven like Abraham? No, with an epic failure.

There are many mysteries to the life of Moses that remain unanswered, but I would like to ask, why did Moses fail here? He had been raised under Pharaoh and would have received the best education in the world. Yet his actions here (at age 40, so he's no child) are foolish. Why did he fail? Well, I think that both Stephen's speech in Acts 7 and connections with Adam in Genesis 3 are helpful to think through this. First, let's note Stephen's commentary on this story in Acts 7. Acts 7:23-25:

When Moses was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand.

A few observants. First, Moses (from Stephen's perspective, which I think we should take as accurate) seems to have good intentions. Rather than staying in the comforts of Pharaoh's house (using the words of Hebrews 11), he visited his brothers, who were slaves. Likewise, Moses was the original social justice warrior! He is defending the oppressed! But notice his failure. He acted based on what had come into his own heart. And he sought to bring about Israel's salvation not by God's Word but by his.

Reading Moses' failure in light of Genesis 3 also supports this conclusion. In Genesis 2, God had spoken to Adam about the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and they should have listened to the voice of the Lord. Instead, they saw that the tree was desirable, ate, and their eyes were opened. Twice in Exodus 2:12, Moses emphasizes that he acted by his sight—he looked and saw. Instead, he should have awaited instruction from the voice of the LORD. As in the days of the judges, God's people enter trouble when we do what is right in our own sight. So the story of Genesis 3 is continuing! The serpent deceived Adam and Eve through their eyes, and Moses fell into the same trap. And much like Adam and Eve, Moses is then exiled. Yet after Moses' failure and 40 years in Midian paying the price for his mistake, this remarkable statement of hope comes in 2:23-25:

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.

Just when everything appears hopeless, four simple statements speak of a profound, hope-giving truth. God heard. God remembered. God saw. And God knew. Even in His supposed absence, God was present. For 400 years of Egyptian slavery, Israel didn't

hear God. But God heard Israel. For 40 years in Midian, Moses didn't hear God. But God remembered Moses. God is on the move!⁵

So now we return to chapter 3. But before journeying back to Sinai, let us note where we are. As Moses comes to Sinai, Israel remains enslaved to Pharaoh, who at this point seems to be triumphing over the LORD by holding His people in bondage. Moses has spent 40 years in the wilderness of Midian, an exile from God and his people. Yet when on one was expecting, a bush caught fire in the wilderness. Exodus 3:1

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. And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned."

Before continuing in the narrative, listen carefully. Moses turned to *see*. The last time Moses acted by his sight, he was exiled 40 years in the wilderness, of course a foreshadow of Israel's future in Numbers. But this time, his sight is overwhelmed by the Word of God. Verse 4:

When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then God said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And the LORD said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Only when his sight was overwhelmed would Moses listen. God had heard the cries of the people, and it was time for Moses to listen to the call of God. Verse 7:

Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of the land to a good and broad land, a land

⁵ The ages of Moses are found in Ex. 7:7; Deut. 34:7; & Acts 7:23, 30.

flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” 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 seen you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

Who am I?, Moses inquires. If God were to have answered this honestly, perhaps He would have responded,

You are a nobody. It is a sheer miracle that you are alive at all because most of the other male Israelites your age were killed. But you spent your first three months of life hidden and then was put in a basket. After leaving the basket, you were raised in a cushy little life amidst the oppressors of your family. And rather than acting wisely, you tried to make yourself the deliverer of My people. And they rejected you. And you have spent the last 40 years herding sheep in the wilderness, surrounded by not just your family but your six sisters-in-law. Wheh! And (at this point, I'm going to give a very brief synopsis of the rest of chapters 3 and 4), you're about to question me four more times, tell a half-truth to your gracious father-in-law, and your unfaithfulness is going to require your wife to circumcise your sons. So in short, Moses, you are a nobody.⁶

But that is not God's response. Instead, Moses asks, “Who am I?” God responds, “I will be with you.” I will be with you. Moses' nothingness was answered by God's presence. Moses's failure was made right by God's call. Moses' identity was not based on who He was but on who God is. God called to Moses.

So having listened to the first part of the story of Moses—more accurately, the story of God—let us ask, how should the life of Moses shape our lives? If we are to live out the Scriptures, what should our script be? Well, the same God who called to Moses calls to us. Let's consider the promise of God's call.

⁶ For an insightful take on these doubts, see Caldwell, Grant B. (1978). Moses: The faithful leader of God's people. *Florida College Annual Lectures*. Temple Terrace, FL: FC, 22-23.

In Romans 4, the apostle Paul is expounding on the promise God made to Abraham, and amidst this discussion, let's note the words of Paul in verse 17:

...as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations" — in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

The call of God is far more than the summons of God. Rather, when God calls, God creates. God called to Abraham and Sarah, creating a great family from their barrenness. God called to Moses, creating Israel's deliverer from his failures. Moses asked, "Who am I?" God said, "I will be with you." And let us note, *God creates from the nothingness.*⁷

Let us consider God's call into the nothingness in two areas of life, first as it applies to God's call from His crucified Son and second as it relates to our social identities.

First, God called to Moses from a burning bush at Sinai, which symbolizes the suffering of Israel.⁸ And God calls to us through another tree—a tree bearing the Son of God who has entered into the suffering of Adam's race. And who does our Father call to Him through His Son? The nobodies. The nothings. The failures. He calls you and me.

I waited until I was 17 to be baptized because I was convinced that I had to be perfect before responding to the call of God. Yet through the patience instruction of Todd Chandler, I learned that my perfection was not a precondition of salvation. Far from it! My supposed perfection would nullify the need for God's grace. In Romans 5:6, Paul writes:

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

God created the cosmos from nothing. God called to Moses from his nothingness—not during his success but into his failure. And God calls to us not when we are perfect but when we are ungodly. God creates from the nothingness!

⁷ Much of my presentation concerning the creative power of the Word of God is inspired by Rutledge, Fleming (2015). *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ*. Eerdmans, 333-36.

⁸ For an explanation between the burning bush and the cross, listen to Ralph Walker's sermon, *Seeing Jesus in the Burning Bush* (August 1, 2021), hendersonblvd.com.

A second consideration of the promise of God's call. You are at the stage of life where your identity is continually being shaped and molded. And that means, quite candidly, that being a teenager is confusing! Psychologist Erik Erikson proposed eight different stages of psychosocial development throughout life, connecting a particular psychosocial challenge to each stage.⁹ I won't go into detail as you'll learn all about this in Dr. Dickey's psychology course. But as an example, Erikson proposes that for my twin boys who are two, the main challenge is autonomy versus self-doubt, meaning that they are continually challenged by whether they can do something by themselves or must ask for help. And from opening doors to changing clothes to refilling drinks, this is certainly true.

But the psychosocial challenges of my two-year-olds are different from yours. For the teen years, Erikson proposes that the main dilemma concerns identity vs. role confusion, meaning that there is a challenge to figure out who you are as an individual versus who you are in your social roles. Erikson supposedly coined the phrase "identity crisis" to describe this phase of life. As teenagers, you are continually asking who you are and where you belong. Are you an athlete or an academic? Do you fit in with the cool crowd or the outsiders? Do you belong in FFA or Beta Club? And these are daunting questions to ask even without consideration of finding a significant other who you feel accepted by. From Erickson's theory then, the worst experience for a pre-teen is embarrassment whereas the worst experience for a teenager is exclusion.

A word of encouragement and then a word of exhortation. First, identity confusion does decrease after your teenage years. The thought that consumes nearly every teenager is how they look to others, especially their peers. This all-consuming question will not go away but will decrease. So know that this is the struggle of the teenage years.¹⁰

Now for an exhortation. Do not shape your identity by looking at those around you but by listening to the promises of God and God's people. God says that you are loved. God says that you are an heir. God says that you are His chosen child. God says that you are worth redeeming. God says that you are worth His Son dying for.

⁹ Erikson, E. (1950/1963). *Childhood and society* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

¹⁰ Rosner, B. S. (2017). *Known by God: A biblical theology of personal identity*. Zondervan Academic.

Looking at your peers for your identity will put you through the perpetual process of social comparison, meaning that you are trying to discover your worth in how you think you compare to others. You are either more or less attractive, more or less intelligent, more or less popular, more or less athletic, more or less humorous, more or less desirable, etc. than your peers. And your identity and your worth hang in a state of continual confusion when you engage in social comparison. This is the true danger of social media misuse; Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat continually encourage us to look to others for identity formation. Acting by our eyes is the snare of the Serpent. When Adam and Eve did what looked right to them, they were exiled. When Moses did what looked right to him, he failed. And when we form our identities by looking to others, the Serpent is at work.¹¹

Rather than looking, let us listen. God does not speak directly to us today, but He speaks to us in a mediated fashion through the Holy Scriptures. And that means that we need to listen to those who are speaking in harmony with the Word of God. When your parents tell you that you are loved and valued, listen to them, for they are speaking to you the promises of God. When your mentors at church or at camp tell you of your value or mention to you skills that you possess, listen to them. For they are speaking forth the love of God. I tell you this not as one who passed through my teenage years living this call to listen but as one who wants to share with the wisdom of God. And I ask you to listen to my exhortation not because it is from my mind but because it is from the wisdom of God.

But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” The LORD 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.”

I would like to close by sharing with you two of my special memories from camp this last year. First, at our opening ceremonies, we were all so excited to be together after having had to cancel camp the year prior. Our director, Brad Brewer, spoke about labeling, and Brad made the point that only a thing’s creator has the right to label it. God created us. God has called us. And only God can label us. Second, during our Big

¹¹ Much of my presentation about seeing and listening is inspired by McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. New York: McGraw Hill & Ong, W. J. (1967). *The presence of the word: Some prolegomena for cultural and religious history*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Event, Dr. Hamilton played the role of Moses, and he was finishing the night, without warning me, he changed my script. The script was supposed to close with Dr. Hamilton saying as Moses, "I am who you say I am." However, Dr. Hamilton threw off his head garment and proclaimed, "Heh. I'm not Moses. I'm not even worthy to play Moses. But I am who you say I am."

WEDNESDAY

The Cry of Moses (Ex. 14-15)

Thank you, Dr. Hamilton, and welcome to each of you. I am thrilled to have a chance to develop three lectures this week that explore what the life of Moses teaches us not only about ourselves but also God. Yesterday, we considered the call of Moses. My lecture today will consider the cry of Moses. In his usual pun-fashion, when Dr. Hamilton read this title, he asked if I was going to be spending a whole day on baby Moses. But, instead we are going to journey together through the Red Sea, when Moses cried to God. But we have some terrain to cover before getting there.

To give you a forecast of where I plan to take us this morning, we are going to move in two stages. First, we are going to overview the plagues of Egypt, drawing a sharp contrast between Pharaoh and Moses. In doing so, we will draw considerations about what God is telling us about our Christian walk with him. Second, we will then walk with Israel through the Red Sea, experiencing the deliverance that God worked through Moses. In doing so, we will then draw considerations about what God is telling us about salvation and baptism. So let's start with God's call to Moses. Exodus 3:11-12.

But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" The LORD 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."

Yesterday, I proposed that this passage is the summation of the life of Moses. Moses had failed to be Israel's deliverer when he did what was right in his own eyes, spending the next forty years exiled in Midian. But out of nowhere, the LORD appeared, calling to Moses from the burning bush on Sinai. Moses asked, "Who am I?" God responded not with the might of Moses but with a promise, "I will be with you." Yesterday we considered how God's call shaped Moses—and in turn, our own identities. *God calls into the nothingness.*

So how did Moses respond to God's call? Let's pick up in Exodus 5. After reuniting with his brother Aaron, the two of them go to confront Pharaoh. Exodus 5:1

Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the

wilderness.” But Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.

Let us note the clear contrast between Moses and Pharaoh. God spoke to Moses through a bush, and Moses asked, “Who am I?” God spoke to Pharaoh through Aaron, and Pharaoh asked, “Who is the LORD?” These conflicting responses demonstrate the true difference between Moses and Pharaoh. But before exploring this difference further, let’s remember the narrative role of Pharaoh.

In Exodus 1, Pharaoh is likened to the serpent in Genesis 3. Later Scriptures like Psalm 74 make these literary allusions more explicit, but here is Pharaoh. He is an arrogant ruler who oppresses God’s children, bringing bitter bondage and ruthless oppression upon them. Whereas God created humanity to be His children, Pharaoh made Israel to be his slaves. So as we continue reading, we are noting contrasts not just between Moses and Pharaoh but really between the righteous and the ungodly, children of God and children of the Serpent.

So back to the narrative. Moses had received a word from the LORD at Sinai. Although he was uncertain and reserved, he still listened. In contrast, the rest of Exodus 5 recounts Pharaoh’s disobedience to the Word of God. Rather than letting Israel go, he made their work more difficult, forcing them to make bricks without straw. Israel’s leaders met with Moses and Aaron in response. Let’s pick up in 5:20:

The leaders of Israel met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for them, as they came out from Pharaoh; and they said to them, “The LORD look on you and judge, because you have made us stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.” Then Moses turned to the LORD and said, “O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all. But the LORD said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.” God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the LORD.”

We have reached preliminary conclusions about Pharaoh based on his response to the word of the LORD, but let us make two observations about Moses on the same basis. First, even though Moses had responded to the word of God at Sinai, his walk with God

was still filled with doubt. His first interaction with Pharaoh had resulted in the further oppression of his people, and he regressed to the doubt and fear that had driven him to Midian. Second and more importantly, Moses still listened to the word of the LORD. When fearful, he didn't quit but turned to the LORD. When filled with doubt, he didn't return to Midian but prayed to God. And when God recommissions him in chapter 6, he goes back to Pharaoh. And let us note carefully God's words to Moses in 6:2, "I am the LORD." Moses asked in chapter 3, "who am I?" God responded, "I will be with you." Moses asked in chapter 5, "why did you send me?" God responded, "I am the LORD." Yet again, the answer to Moses' doubt was the faithfulness of God. God is good at creating from the nothingness.

Time doesn't allow us to cover the further interactions between Pharaoh and Moses in detail, but the synopsis comes in 7:4-7:

Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them." Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the LORD commanded them.

Time and again throughout the Egyptian plagues, Moses and Aaron obeyed the word of the LORD. But Pharaoh refused to listen. When water turned to blood, Moses and Aaron obeyed the word of the LORD, but Pharaoh refused to listen. When frogs swarmed Egypt, Moses and Aaron obeyed the word of the LORD, but Pharaoh refused to listen. When gnats filled the land, Moses and Aaron obeyed the word of the LORD, but Pharaoh refused to listen. And even when all the firstborn in the land were threatened with death, Moses and Aaron obeyed the word of the LORD, but Pharaoh refused to listen.¹²

So now let us turn our attention from Egypt and its dreadful plagues to the desires of our God. As we saw yesterday, the Bible is centrally the story of God, and we need to continually be listening to the Scriptures' witness to God. So what does God desire of His followers? Quite simply, God wants His people to listen to Him. The real difference between Moses and Pharaoh was not in their status, their wealth, their

¹² For an exhaustive analysis of the dialogues between Moses and the LORD in Exodus, see Arnold, M. P. (2015). *Revealing the Name: An Investigation of the Divine Character through a Conversation Analysis of the Dialogues between God and Moses in the Book of Exodus* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Gloucestershire).

power, or even their might but in their response to the Word of God. And this is *the* distinguishing factor between the godly and the ungodly. That is, in the garden, Adam was meant to listen, but the Serpent haughtily refused the Word of God. And the single most important characteristics of our lives is whether we will listen to the Word of God. We, like Moses, may ask, “Who am I?” God responds, “I will be with you, so listen to me!”

The witness of the New Testament is in harmony with the message of Exodus, and the exhortation to listen comes forth forcefully in Hebrews. In Hebrews 1:1, the anonymous author begins:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world.

According to the author, Jesus Christ is both the message and the medium—that is, He is both what is said and how it is expressed. And how should we respond to Jesus Christ, the Word come to humanity?¹³ Chapter 2:1

Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

Like Moses, we must listen to the Word of the LORD. Again, *the* distinguishing characteristic between the godly and the ungodly is our response to the Word of God. Will we listen? But let’s explore this further. My experience both as a communication scholar but more really my role as a father of three toddlers has taught me that listening is a difficult task. How does God want His children to listen to Him? In quoting from Psalm 95, the author exhorts in Hebrews 3:7

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.”

We must listen with our hearts! Although the term *heart* in our society refers to the seat of one’s emotions, the biblical concept of the *heart* is far more comprehensive, referring to the center of one’s self. Much as a nesting doll has multiple layers leading to a center, so our heart is our core. So then we must listen to the Word of God with our very center, allowing the voice of God to recreate each layer of ourselves and every part of our lives.

¹³ For an approach to Hebrews that holds listening as a key theme, see McClister, D. (2010). *A commentary on Hebrews*. Temple Terrace: FC Press, 60-61.

Whereas the world tells us to listen to our hearts, Scripture says our hearts should listen to God.

So having considered the example of Moses and the witness of Hebrews, what should the shape of the Christian life be? We have noted that Moses listened while Pharaoh was hardened. And we have heard the author of Hebrews exhort us to listen to Jesus Christ. God desires us to listen. But how do these observations instruct us to live?

Let me explain the question a bit more personally. After I was baptized, I didn't experience so much of a mid-life crisis as an early life crisis. I knew that I wasn't supposed to sin and that I was supposed to glorify God, but these generic, abstract goals didn't give me much direction in my everyday walk with God. Now having had a few more years to walk with God, He has taught me the purpose of this walk, and it is what I now call *grounded and growing*.

To explain this, I now have to share with you my favorite metaphor (which any of you who have been in my camp classes will have heard at least ten times) — that of a fruit tree. Is the Christian life more similar to a fruit tree or a Christmas tree?¹⁴ Well, whereas a Christmas tree is adorned on the outside, a fruit tree grows from the inside out. A fruit tree is nourished through its roots, and then it grows. Of course, we are to be fruit trees.

And here was the life of Moses, after first responding to the call of God. Moses not only heard the voice of God, but he listened to the Word of the LORD. And much like the godly man in Psalm 1 who is like a tree that is planted by streams of water, Moses was rooted in the word of the LORD. He was grounded in the mission of God. In being grounded, he then grew.

As we have noted, when Moses first responded to the call of God at Sinai, he was filled with hesitation and doubt, on the verge of disobedience to God. But like a good fruit tree, Moses listened and was nourished by the voice of God. Let's recall our two observations about Moses from earlier. Moses remained imperfect throughout his walk with God, but he listened! God never gave up on him, and he never ceased listening to God. Yes, he made mistakes and fell into temptation. But still, he listened to the at-times corrective, at-other-times encouraging but always-guiding voice of God. His heart was filled with the word of God.

¹⁴ I first heard of the Christmas tree vs. fruit tree distinction in Wright, N. T. (2010). *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters*. New York: HaperCollins.

It's fascinating to trace the transformation of Moses from the burning bush to the Red Sea. Exodus notes in 11:3

And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people.

Why did Moses find greatness? Because he listened to the voice of the LORD. Why did Pharaoh meet destruction? Because he refused to listen. And how will we be lifted out of the nothingness? By listening to the Word of God.

Florida College is a liberal arts school, meaning that we value integrating knowledge from a variety of disciplines, rather than allowing wisdom to remain sequestered into respective disciplines. Very briefly, I would like to explain how statistics enriches our understanding of the view of Christian formation that I have just presented. One of the basic tenets of statistics is different levels of measurement.¹⁵ Let's say that we're trying to measure how many people attend the different lectures this week. Nominally, we could say a lot of a few. We could be a bit more specific and offer a scale of 0-20, 20-40, etc. Or we could measure the precise number in each lecture, which is called ratio-level data. I was sitting in a graduate class on statistics learning about this when it hit me, the Christian life is not merely nominal (saved or unsaved), but there are levels of growth to Christian formation. When you are first baptized, you are a little sapling. But as we, like Moses, listen to the word of the LORD, we will be grounded and we will grow. No, God does not expect us to be perfect, but He desires to listen. And to grow.

So let's move to our second scene in Exodus this morning. Having considered Moses' walk with God and what witness this provides about God's desire for our Christian formation, let's now consider how God saved the whole nation of Israel. Exodus 12-14 is one of the most exciting sections of the whole Bible, and I would like to draw our focus to a few features of this thrilling narrative. Let's begin in Ex. 12:11b-12:

It is the LORD's Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

¹⁵ Stevens, S. S. 1946. On the theory of scales of measurement. *Science* 103: 677-680.

Sealed by the promise of His name, the LORD promises mercy to Israel and judgment on Egypt. Yet the judgment of the LORD was reaching out not merely to Pharaoh but also to the gods that the proud king had yoked himself to. Through the Lamb, God was bringing judgment and mercy. After giving further instructions through Moses, the text notes in 12:28:

Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

After striking down all of the firstborn of the land of Egypt in verses 29-32, Pharaoh is urgent to release Israel from his bondage. Verse 33, beginning:

The Egyptians were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste. For they said, “We shall all be dead.” So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their cloaks on their shoulders. The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor [or grace!] in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians...[verse 50] All the people of Israel did just as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron. And on that very day the LORD brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.

Again, let us note the pattern. The LORD is saving, and Israel is listening. God’s grace is saving His people while paradoxically judging their enemies. God is on the move.

As we continue into chapter 13, Moses institutes the Feast of Unleavened Bread to commemorate the LORD’s salvation of His people. Verse 14 summarizes the chapter:

And when in time to come your son asks you, “What does this mean?” You shall say to him, “By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery.”

The LORD is the savior. Yet while the LORD is resolute in the salvation of His people, Pharaoh falters in his resolve, demanding that his slaves return. So Pharaoh sends his army after Israel. 14:10:

When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried to the LORD. They said to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in

Egypt: 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."

Here Israel's response to the LORD is not one of listening and faithful obedience but of crying in fear to the LORD. Surrounded by Egypt's army and chariots, Moses exhorted Israel not to fight back but merely to be silent. God then addresses Moses (v. 15):

The LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground."...[v. 21] Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided....[v. 30] Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so that people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

Like Israel, Moses should not have cried to the LORD but remained silent. And when Moses listened to the voice of the LORD, Israel was saved. Exodus 15 proceeds to tell of the song of Moses. Through the gracious salvation of God, Moses' cry was turned to song.

The Exodus from Egypt becomes the foundational moment for the nation of Israel. It is not an overstatement to claim that everything in the rest of Israel's history is told in light of the Exodus. You will have the chance to trace this development more fully in the freshman Old Testament History and Geography course, but I would like to consider the most important event that echoes back to the Exodus. Let's turn to the prophet Isaiah. If the Exodus framed the rest of the Old Testament, Isaiah 40-55 frames the majority of the New Testament. In these oracles, the prophet bridges the history of Israel with promises of God's coming deliverance. Let's note Isaiah 51:9-11

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?

And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Notice all of the echoes of the Exodus in this oracle. The slaying of the dragon, in reference to Pharaoh. The drying up of the sea. The separation of the waters. The return of the redeemed. And the song that follows. In echoing the exodus from Egypt, Isaiah is promising a new Exodus to come. Beginning in 52:13, Isaiah tells of a servant who will be high, lifted up, and exalted. This servant will bear the sickness of the people, carrying away their sorrows. But let us read closely 53:7:

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

This is the promise of God. *The LORD will bring about an exodus of His people from slavery, redeeming them as His children, through a lamb that is slaughtered and a servant who is silent.* Jesus is the lamb. Jesus is the servant. God has worked an even greater exodus through the revelation of the Son of God.¹⁶

Let's listen to the echoes in two places in the New Testament, first in the gospel of John then in Romans. John begins his gospel with the identification of Jesus as the Word of God, and in 1:29, John the Baptist proclaims:

Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

Jesus is the Word. Jesus is the Lamb. And He has come to lead God's people from the bondage of sin. In John 12, Jesus makes further allusion to Isaiah 53. John 12:31:

Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

At this point, we must let the text speak to us about the nature of salvation. Why did Jesus die? The simple answer (that is certainly true but incomplete) that I would have offered to this question most of my life would have been "to forgive me of my sins." Yet when we allow the whole of the Bible to speak to us (especially listening for echoes of the Old Testament in the New), we hear of various, complementary purposes of the cross. In John (which is echoing Isaiah 53, which is echoing the Exodus), Jesus tells us that His death would be the judgment on the ruler of this world. This is what theologians

¹⁶ For a more complete theological treatment of the Passover, see Rutledge, F. (2015). *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ*. Eerdmans, 220-22. See also Wright, N. T. (2016). *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion*. HarperOne, 295-354.

have called *Christus Victor*, meaning that Christ is victorious over sin and death. In the Exodus, God delivered His people while judging Egypt and her gods. In the cross, God has again delivered His people from bondage while judging Satan and his power. Yet the methods of God are mysterious. He accomplished this cosmic victory not through power and might but through His Son who was humiliated and silent before His captors. The Lamb has been slain. The Servant went to the cross silent. And God has delivered His people.

How can we participate in this cosmic victory? For this, let us turn to Romans. In Romans 6, Paul is responding to charges that his gospel is antinomian (that is, against righteousness by encouraging sinning). And he anchors the preaching of his gospel in the death of the Son of God. Romans 6:5

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

In baptism, our body of sin is brought to nothing. But here is the good news of God's grace. God creates from the nothingness (remember Romans 4:17). From this perspective, we can proclaim that baptism is the moment we are recreated. Do you remember in Exodus 14:21 that the waters of the Red Sea were separated? This is another instance of intertextuality, where one text echoes and connects to another. When else did God separate the waters? Genesis 1! In the beginning, God created the cosmos from nothing. In Exodus 14, God created His people from nothing. And through the cross of Christ, God creates us from nothing.

Romans 6:6 also promises that we would "no longer be enslaved to sin."

Romans 6:7

For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we will believe that we will also live with him.

Here is the good news of Jesus Christ. Through the death of Christ, evil has been judged. Through the death of Christ, God has been victorious. Through the death of Christ, the Lamb has been slain, and the Servant has been silent. Through our death with Christ, evil will be judged. Through our death with Christ, our body of sin will be brought to nothing. Through our death with Christ, we will be recreated, set on the path of life, grounded and growing in Christ.

Let us close by echoing the heavenly song written in Revelation 5:5:

Worthy are you to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people from God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

THURSDAY

The Consecration of Moses (Ex. 32-34)

But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

The LORD said, “But I will be with you.”

God’s promise to be with Moses has inspired our three studies together this week. And before we proceed today to my final lecture, let me say how much of a blessing this week has been. You all sit with Florida College as a possibility for your future, and I now reminisce on my time at FC as a rich treasure of my past. But as many alumni will tell you, FC continues to have such a positive impact on my life. I met my wife at FC, and we now have three baby falcons. It has been so good to see friends this week and to make new ones. And I hope that my lecture today or, for you who participated each day, have shared with you a small portion of the grace and knowledge that I have received from the people of FC—the faculty and friends of FC. So let’s get back to Moses.

On Tuesday, we considered the call of Moses, learning from the life of this ancient servant that God calls his people out of the nothingness. And our identity rests not on ourselves but on our Creator. Yesterday we considered the cry of Moses, recognizing that much as He did with Moses in Egypt and Israel through the Red Sea, God saves us with His outstretched hand. We must not cry out in fear but listen and respond to the voice of God.

Having traveled through Egypt and the Red Sea, we are going to camp out at Sinai today. When I had the chance to teach this text at camp last year, we were in a covered shelter with a marvelous thunderstorm surrounding us, echoing the thunder and lightning of Sinai. While I can’t reproduce that today, here is where I plan to take us. First, we are going to sit under the foot of Sinai, recounting the LORD’s giving of His law to Israel. After doing that, we will then ponder together the puzzling, tragic, yet insightful story of the golden calf, then drawing these two strands together in consideration about God’s continuing voice and instruction to us today. Let’s begin in Exodus 19:1:

On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They set out

from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.'" So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe forever."

God has kept His promise. In Exodus 3, the LORD had promised Moses that he would return to Sinai to worship Him, and God has brought Moses back to Him. And again, God calls to Moses from the mountain. Yet this time, Moses has been transformed. Earlier when God called to Moses in Exodus 3, he responded with doubt and fear. Yet having now been transformed by the Word of God, Moses listened, speaking to the elders of Israel the oracles of God. And this time, the fire of God will reach out not only to Moses but to all of the people. In the subsequent verses, Moses prepares the people for the coming of the LORD, consecrating and cleansing them. But then God comes.

Verse 16:

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln. And the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of

the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

With this awesome theophany, the LORD proceeds to give the ten commandments to His people. Exodus 20:1

And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me."

If you were my camp students, I would have you memorize these verses, then half of you would avoid me the first two days of the next camp year, out of fear that I ask you to recite them. (You know who you are.) Two observations I would like to draw our attention to. First, let us note Deuteronomy's commentary on this event. Deuteronomy 4:11:

And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom. Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice.

Not only does listening distinguish the godly from the ungodly (as we discussed yesterday), but the voice of God distinguishes Yahweh from idols. Idols can be seen, touched, smelt, and even tasted (think the golden calf), but only the LORD can be heard. And it is the voice of Yahweh that separates Him from all other Gods.

Observation two. Since leaving Egypt, God has provided for His people. In Exodus 15 and 17, the LORD provided water. In Exodus 16, the LORD provided bread. By His Spirit (or His Breath), He has provided words of life. And He has even sent the refinement of fire. Water, earth, fire, air. Last Air Bender, anyone? But through His providential care, God is taking care of His people. This is an important conclusion that we must hold firm, and we will return to it toward the end of the lecture.¹⁷

So having camped out at the foot of Sinai, let me quickly overview the rest of Exodus. In Exodus 20-24, the LORD provides the foundations of His covenant with Israel, arriving at a climax in Exodus 24. As your Old Testament teachers here will tell,

¹⁷ For a positive evaluation of the Torah, see Gentry, Peter, J., & Wellum, Stephen, J. (2015). *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

this is one of the five critical texts of the Old Testament. And then the rest of Exodus is devoted to the tabernacle. It is written in a chiastic (A, B, A) pattern. Exodus 25-31 tells of the commands to build the tabernacle while Exodus 35-40 tells of the actual construction of the tabernacle. At camp last year, our Big Event was the construction of the tabernacle to a quarter-size replica built by Brad Brewer, and I would love to spend the next few hours telling you not only about this but also the amazing details of the tabernacle in these chapters. But instead, I would like to turn our attention to this middle section in Exodus 32-34.¹⁸

Moses spent 40 days on the top of Sinai, communing with the LORD. And Israel becomes impatient, uncertain if he will return. So in the first part of Exodus 32, they exhort Aaron to construct a golden calf; Israel is ready to reject the LORD and His servant Moses. Let's pick up our reading in Exodus 32:7

And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!' And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore, let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you."

To say that God's statement here is confusing is like saying that Florida is a bit warm in August. God seems ready to turn from His promises, casting away His children that He had waited 430 (or so—ask Dr. Hamilton about this for details) years to redeem. Some Bible readers have claimed that this story actually witnesses to the malleability of God—that is, God may change and amend His earlier promises. But that is a scary thought. What if at the second coming of Christ, God turns from His earlier promises, claiming, "No, I don't want to save those Christians anymore." How could we live with news of such a capricious God? Well, let's listen to Moses' response. Exodus 32:11

But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt

¹⁸ For a concise biblical theology of the tabernacle, see Roberts, Phil (1988). *The story of the tabernacle. Florida College Annual Lectures: Hebrews for Every Man*. Temple Terrace, FL: FC, 65-83.

with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, “With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth”? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.’” And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

When read quickly, this text again seems to speak to the change within God. Moses recognizes that God would appear quick to change and faithless to His promises if He were to give up on Israel. Moses even claims in verse 12 that God would seem to have evil intent if He were to consume Israel.

However, I would like to suggest that Exodus 32 is not speaking to a change within God but a change within Moses.¹⁹ A few features of the text lead me to this conclusion. First, when it appears that God will change from His promises, Moses, in verse 13, calls the LORD to “remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel” and the promises God made to them. If God is quick to change His mind, why would Moses call the LORD to remember His promises made hundreds of years prior? The LORD relents in verse 14 not because Moses brought forth new evidence about Israel’s current actions but because Moses called to mind God’s everlasting promises. Second, God promised to make “a great nation” of Moses in verse 10. This was the first promise that God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:2. In this echo of the foundational promise of Israel’s identity, perhaps the test is not for God but for Moses. In Genesis 22, at a different mountain, Abraham was called to destroy His child of promise, testing his faithfulness to God while demonstrating God’s mercy to him. In Exodus 32, at this mountain, God Himself was calling to destruction His child of promise, testing not His faithfulness but the faithfulness of Moses while demonstrating His ongoing mercy to His people. God is faithful. God is just. And God is merciful.

In the subsequent section, Moses descends Sinai, breaking the tablets in anger and destroying the calf. The judgment of God descends on the people. But note Moses’ response on the next day. Exodus 32:30:

¹⁹ For a more extensive explanation of this text, see Master, J. (2002). Exodus 32 as an argument for traditional theism. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 45(4), 585-598.

The next day Moses said to the people, "You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin."

James 2 states that Abraham's faith was made complete in Genesis 22, and in Exodus 32, the identity of Moses is made complete. In Exodus 3, God called Moses to shepherd His people, yet Moses was faithless to the LORD, responding to God's call not with the readiness of obedience but with fear. However in Exodus 32, Moses demonstrated fully the purpose to which God had called him, not only leading the people from slavery to freedom but now willing to take the judgment for the people's sins upon himself. Does this remind you of Someone else who was willing to take our sins upon Himself? In Exodus 33, Moses receives further blessing for his faithfulness. Verse 7:

Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. Thus, the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.

Moses had obeyed the voice of the LORD, and he communed with the LORD. I am a communication major, and the very heart of communication is communion. Authentic communication is not merely sending information from one person to another but communing with another. And I would like to suggest that we can tie our two narrative threads together through the concept of communion.

In Exodus 20, God came down to His people, and through the Ten Commandments, God revealed Himself to His people. The foundational claim of this covenant was God's words that "I am the LORD your God." And everything that Moses revealed to the people was God's gracious revelation of Himself. God was communicating with the people. In Exodus 32, the people needed to be brought back to God, and Moses reconciled Israel back with God. Through their mediator, Israel

communed with God once more. God has come down, that we may be brought back. This is communion.

Moses' mission was not merely to lead Israel out of Egypt but to lead them to fellowship and communion with God. And the life of Moses is but a witness to a greater Mediator who would come. Twentieth-century theologian Karl Barth claimed that Jesus Christ is the "revealing and reconciling word of God to man."²⁰ And I love the simple profundity of this statement! God has revealed, that we may be reconciled, and commune with our God.

And this was the purpose of the tabernacle. Although every detail of the tabernacle was a witness to God's gracious presence with His people—as the prophet Ezekiel later relishes in—its central purpose was to demonstrate God's communion with His people, Israel. The tabernacle had three sections: the outer courtyard, the holy place, and the most holy place. And in the very center of the holy place was the ark of the covenant, and in the very middle of the ark of the covenant was the ten commandments, a reminder that God was communing with Israel not only during the life of Moses but also throughout subsequent generations.²¹

Taken together, the Torah and the tabernacle were reminders of God's grace to His people. To Israel alone had God revealed His name. To Israel alone had God revealed His oracles. Israel alone, had God released from slavery. Israel alone, God had reconciled to Himself at His holy mount. To Israel alone had God granted the tabernacle, on which His presence would dwell. And all of this is a shadow of the One who would come as both Word and Tabernacle of God—see John's prologue in John 1:1-18.

So as I have tried to do each day, let's ask, how does the life of Moses shape and transform our own lives? We may be separated by 3500 years, but we serve the same God. The same God calls us. The same God guides us. The same God saves us. The same God sanctifies us. And the same God communes with us.

Let me pose a conflict that I think the witness of Moses helps us to resolve. Why should an enlightened, twenty-first century people listen to the life teachings of an

²⁰ Barth, Karl (1932). *Church Dogmatics* I.1, p. 10. Ed. G.W. Bromiley & T.F. Torrance. T&T Clark.

²¹ For further discussion of the theological significance of the tabernacle, see Beale, G. K., & Kim, Mitchell (2014). *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 51-64.

ancient, out-of-date book? Haven't social psychology and empirical observation done far more for human flourishing than the teachings of the Bible? Even further, the teachings of the Bible seem not only irrelevant to our cultural moment but restrictive to human potential. Especially as it relates to sexual ethics, doesn't the Bible prohibit lifestyles that if embraced, could lead to human happiness? When we become Christians, do we just put on a straitjacket, exchanging human flourishing for lives of repression?

I am sure that the problem I just expressed is one that either others have asked you about or perhaps one that you yourself have thought. When I was about 18 to 19 years old, I was plagued with all types of doubt about God and His Word. And the problem I just posed was one of the most pressing. Yet I was fortunate to be at Florida College and have wise, gracious professors who helped navigate me through these doubts back to a greater faith in God. So here is how we are going to explore this question together. First, we are going to consider again the purpose of the tabernacle. Second, we will return to the purpose of the Torah. And hopefully along the way, this conflict will be resolved.

When I was a student at FC, I took Dr. Moyer's philosophy of religion course, and in that class, we read Francis Schaeffer's *Escape from Reason*, which has become one of the top five most impactful books on my life.²² Schaeffer was a twentieth-century apologist who explored cultural fragmentation, which essentially means divides within western culture. We have divided reason from emotion, facts from values, religion from the social sciences, etc. And in the process, reason, science, and empirical observation have at best nullified the need for but more realistically demonized the place of God in this life. And so, we enter a twenty-first century culture that is constantly confused. Science tells us that heaven has nothing to do with earth and that God has nothing to do with humanity. We must discover morality in the same place that we have discovered cures for diseases and sparks of scientific innovation—within humanity on earth. From this perspective, the chief value is autonomy.

Yet what was God's purpose in the tabernacle? To reassure Israel of the promise He had made to Moses first at Sinai: "I will be with you." We have sought independence from God through science and reason, yet God has sought communion with us. We

²² Schaeffer, F. (1968). *Escape from reason: A penetrating analysis of trends in modern thought*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP.

have pursued ourselves, but God has pursued us. He dwelt with Israel through a tent, and He dwells with us now by His Son and His Spirit. God desires communion while science prides itself on autonomy.

And in light of this communion, we must hold tabernacle and Torah together. God promised to be with His people, and the tabernacle was the sign of God's faithfulness to this promise. And we know from Exodus 32 that God is faithful. Yet for what purpose was God going to dwell with His people? Deuteronomy 7:20:

When your son asks you in time to come, "What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?" then you shall say to your son, "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, *for our good always*, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day.

God promised to commune with His people for their good. And such a promise is difficult for our Enlightened ears to hear. Modernism and science have told us that truth and human progress is found in the world around us, and postmodernism has told us that truth and personal progress is found in the world within me. From either perspective, revelation from above is an unwelcome disruption from a heavenly dictator. We are fine. We are progressing. We are saving ourselves. We have no need for communication from or communion with a Creator because we are doing fine on our own.

But here is the truth of the human predicament. Left to our own selves (to our modern autonomy!), we will end up in bondage, taken captive to the power of sin. When we do what is right in our own eyes, we do not progress but decline. Human wisdom leads not to self-actualization but to selfishness. And this is the power that we need liberation from.²³

²³ The fragmentation of modernity is explored at length in Wright, N.T. (2019). *History and Eschatology: Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology*. SPCK.

So then the Word of God enters not into a world but that is doing fine by itself but like Israel in Egyptian bondage or Moses in Midianite exile, we need redemption—we need communion with our God. For a long time, I thought that the Old Law was a burden, meant to drive Israel to God’s grace. But this is a misconception. The Old Law—like everything that God reveals to His people—was for their good and for their healing (see also Deuteronomy 7:12-16). As Old Testament scholar Daniel Block asks, why would God lead His people from one form of bondage to another?²⁴ Yes, the Torah was meant for Israel’s communion with God, and this would lead to their healing and their flourishing.

So how does all of this instruct us to engage either our hearts or the hearts of others with the role of the Bible in our modern lives? Let me bring all of this together with an illustration that Tim Keller offers in his book, *The Reason for God*. A fish is most free in the water.²⁵ Choose your favorite fish; mine is Nemo. Nemo is most free in the water. Nemo is not free on land. Nemo is not free on the beach. Nemo is not free on a stand in a dentist office. Nemo is most free in the water. A fish is most free when it’s in communion with the water.

Before the Word of God calls us, we are dried up and dying. But the Word of God puts us in the water, and there we can flourish. Israel was meant to thrive in the land of Canaan, led by the Torah and the Tabernacle. We are meant to flourish in this life, led by Jesus Christ and His Spirit. Flourishing is not a life without trials, basking in my own success but a life that is sustained and strengthened by God’s grace. Rather than welcoming the water, our society has tried to sustain the fish on land—reinforcing the divides that Francis Schaeffer warned us of.

So what do you say the next time a friend asks you why we need the Bible in our enlightened society? Tell them they look like a fish. Fish are friends, not food, after all. Or you can say that true human flourishing is found in communion with God by His Word. The Bible is not a straitjacket meant to keep us from fullness of life but the water in which we thrive. True freedom is not discovered in my independence but in communion with God. Following my wisdom leads to further bondage, but the revelation

²⁴ For an excellent overview of the Mosaic covenant as a life-giving Word from God, see Block, D. I. (2009). Preaching Old Testament Law to New Testament Christians. *HIPHIL Novum*, 3(1), 1-24..

²⁵ For the freedom/fish analogy, see Keller, Timothy (2008). *The Reason for God*. New York: Riverhead, 47.

from above liberates us to a life sustained by the presence of God. The words of God don't damage us but heal us. God's covenant is not a burden but a gift.

Let me offer a few illustrations of this communion-based ethic, hoping to demonstrate that the moral demands of Christianity are not a straitjacket but the waters of communion and flourishing. Let's apply this to something as basic as lying. As a rhetorician, I would strongly argue that the Bible's vision of truth and deception is the water in which the healthiest relationships thrive. Human wisdom tries to create criteria for lying based on what looks right to me, but when we listen to the Word of God, truth and harmony should flourish in our relationships. Let's apply this to sex. Human wisdom creates guidelines for sex based on what feels right within me, but we must live out the truth that God's commands are for our good. True sexual flourishing and happiness is found within the waters of the words of Christ. So rather than perceiving the Word of God as a straitjacket, let us demonstrate that life outside of Jesus Christ is the dry land, the wilderness in which a fish cannot swim.

But taking our series this week full circle, God knows how to deliver us from the wilderness. He knows how to lead us through the waters, and His presence is the living waters that give us healing and life. God calls into the nothingness, and His voice saves us, transforms us, and sustains us.

But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" The LORD said, "But I will be with you."