April 11/12, 2015

Don't Miss It

Creative Encounters That Changed Things

Exodus 3:1-10

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Over these next three weeks we are going to be talking about *Creative Encounters that Change Things*—times where God showed up. As a result, lives, families, and even history was changed as a result. As we go on this journey together over these next three weeks, we are going to ask you to remember. Remember the times God maybe revealed Himself and showed up in your own life, but also remember with us some great stories of the Bible. Now the Bible is the God-inspired, God-breathed book that's filled with incredible stories, stories that I think are there to encourage us and strengthen us and ready us for the moments that are ahead, stories that are there to remind us that this is real. God *does* show up, sometimes in some incredible, surprising, simple and profound ways.

As I talked about and thought about this morning for the last few weeks, several things came to mind. One was a time a few years ago. Marcia and I were on a little getaway, three-day getaway up in Estes Park, and we were coming out of our cabin about sunset. It was an April day, been snowing all day, and just as we came out, the clouds were starting to break overhead, and it was just dark enough you could start to see some of the stars—you know, at that time of the night up high. But the sun was still breaking on the horizon behind us; the wind was blowing in snow still from the horizon because there was a rim of clouds around the horizon to the mountains. And the sun, as it was setting, the rays were coming straight across and hit the cloud line across from us and just ricocheted up to put a spotlight over on the mountain peaks right across from us. It was like a "stop us in our tracks" kind of moment, felt like we walked into a Thomas Kinkade—just a really cool moment that, if we hadn't paused, we would have missed this kind of moment that God just kind of gave us.

Or there was this time on the San Diego Boardwalk a few years ago—a different moment—entering into one of the hardest, probably *the* hardest week of my life. Somebody close has just gone through a pretty traumatic, really tough time, and quite honestly I was in a moment of crisis of faith, not kind of knowing where God was at in all of this. I was in a pretty dark place, actually a place mixed with anger and disappointment and struggle, and a restless lack of peace. And I was actually out in California to meet some guys to talk about the continuing launch of Harbor Ministry, and these leadership events you've heard me perhaps talk about from time to time. It was the first frontend of the *Rhythm in Twenty*—twenty guys that we had invited from all over the country. Guys were flying into San Diego, and we were also selecting the next group, and I sat there on that boardwalk that morning and said, "I've got nothing; I've got nothing to offer these men. I don't even know for sure what I believe at this moment." I hadn't slept in a couple of days and was restless. At this time the sun was rising behind me and I remember thinking, "If I can't find some peace with God at this moment, I'm not sure when it will come." Just when I was thinking that, a dude comes up from behind—true story—put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Brother, have you ever felt the peace of God like you do at this moment?" *(laughter)* I'm not the sharpest tool in the shed but I think, "Something's happening here, right...something different?" And he wouldn't let it go. Actually he leaned in and said, "No, seriously, have you ever felt the peace of God at this moment?" And he said, "I don't know if you've got it, but I feel it, and I hope you can too, brother," kind of squeezing me on the shoulder and disappeared. You know, suddenly, you are in a different place!

Sometimes, it's as simple as a song or a moment. I love the arts...in a theatre or a pause in a song or a scene in a movie, right? And one of these times for me came from a movie that came out about a year ago. The central character in this movie was Walter Mitty, and his whole job is processing the negatives that are sent to him from this incredible photographer. He sends pictures he takes from all over the world. He sends them to Walter, and his job is sitting in a little office, processing them, getting it ready to go to *Life* magazine. *Life* magazine is coming to an end; the very last issue is coming out, and this guy sent his best, sent his best photograph to be on the last cover of *Life* magazine, and Walter's lost it...lost the picture! So the whole movie is him chasing this rogue photographer around the world, and he finally catches up to him in the upper Himalayas. And Walter's task and job at that moment is: find the photographer, get the negative, come back home, and get it on the cover—save my job here, right? That's what he thinks is going to happen. But in this moment there's something much bigger and much deeper as he slows down, pauses, and steps fully into what my experience was, what God had for *him* in this moment. Instead of telling you about it, I want to watch it with you. So take a look at the screen for a couple minutes.

[Movie Clip Showing]

Sometimes God just gives us a gift, a gift in a moment that reminds us that He's out there. One thing I love about this clip, and I thought it the first time I saw it and every time since, is that God can be in all of it—in the work they were doing as they engaged, in the quiet moment, or they just saw the gift that kind of wandered their way, in the play… that God created all of that, and it can be engaged in all of that with us in that moment, if we are able to slow down sometimes and just step fully into the moment.

That's why I'm excited to talk to you about one of the incredible encounters in all of the Bible, an amazing encounter. It centers around a character that I've absolutely loved studying these last couple of years—Moses. It was a day this happened that was not unlike any other day in the forty years that Moses had been shepherding sheep. I mean he'd been in the desert shepherding sheep for forty years, and those days probably looked pretty similar. The scenery was the same, the weather pretty consistent. The job was to get the sheep up, get them fed, protect them, and bring them back down. I mean every day for forty years that's what Moses has done. But this day ends a little differently.

This is Moses who was given up as a baby by his mother and, through a variety of circumstances, comes into the care of Pharaoh's family. In fact, he becomes kind of the adopted son of Pharaoh, the supreme leader of Egypt at the time. He grows up in a life of privilege and power, and one of the things he had power and oversight over was hundreds and thousands of Hebrew slaves that were under the bondage of slavery in Egypt at the time. But as an adult, Moses comes to find out that he is actually the son of Hebrew slaves. His mother actually gave him up to save his life because at that time Pharaoh was so worried that the Hebrew nation was getting so big; they were getting too powerful; so he ordered genocide and slaughtered babies to keep the numbers of the Hebrews down. So his mother gave him up to save his life. As Moses began to embrace this part of his life story, he takes a different turn. When he sees an Egyptian taskmaster mistreating a Hebrew slave, Moses snaps and he kills the Egyptian and as a result, he's banished to the desert for forty years. Now he's living out his life—probably a guy that's near eighty years old—and he kind of settled in. This is probably his life. He's met a family, got married, is shepherding sheep. "This is the deal; this is how my life's going to play out." And then we come to the story in Exodus 3:1-10! So if you want to turn to that, we're going to read it—a day that really changed everything, for Moses and for us! As it plays out, it affects history even to this day.

Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, "I must turn aside now, and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He also said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. The LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from the land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey… *(And skip down a bit)...*
Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." (*NASB, Exodus 3:1-10)

Now a couple of things stand out right away on this epic encounter...incredible encounter. One, the clarity in which God comes is obviously undeniable. I mean He comes clear, and He gives an epic mission to Moses. But the other thing that really stands out to me on this time I'm reading and studying through this passage is Moses didn't miss it. He *turned aside*. I mean, he could have kept going; he had a task; he was on the job. The sheep were out there; he's got things to do; he could have kept walking; he could have missed this moment—but he didn't! He fully stepped into that moment like we saw on the clip and engaged.

Have you ever done that? Have you ever been on such a run, a task of busyness? In the culture and family life that we live in, kids are involved in so many good things, and we are running from one thing to the next. We are making a living, and the press of life, you know, the reality of how we live in the United States, and just the press of busyness; you kind of miss moments along the way. I sure have. I think one time of a family vacation; we were at the ocean a few years ago. We rented a car to get to the other side of the island. We had a lot of great things waiting for us over there. Ben Harms actually told me about a cliff to go jump off in the ocean, and we were looking for a waterfall, so everybody couldn't wait to get over there. We were driving along the ocean, and I see some people gathering on the beach and a little movement, so I wheeled the car over quick and said, "Hey, let's get out and check this out." Five of us in the car but couldn't get anybody else out of the car. It's like, "Come on, let's go!" So I coax a couple, three times; no one came out, so I went over, crossed the street, went in. Giant sea turtles were coming out of the surf and kind of working their way up the beach. It was a really cool moment. You see these huge, pretty historical looking giant turtles were making their way out of the surf and the waves and kind of going up to nest in the beach. I mean it was a sight I'll never see again probably. It was incredible! And just this last Christmas, a few years after that, my daughter, just a couple of months ago says, "Dad, sorry I didn't get out of the car and see those turtles." I mean, she knew she missed the moment. You know, we did a lot of great things that day, but just for the sake of slowing down and pausing just for a bit, and not let something run by us.

Let's don't do that with this story. We are so used to even reading fast. In doing it, I want to take another look at this story. Let's not run by and miss it because there's gold in these pages and in the

midst of these short verses we are at in the story. I mean, so often we are kind of geared to get through it, and those of us who have walked with God for a while, we have a lot of things out there to read. Read the Bible in a year, which is great; I've done that; I need to do it more. But sometimes we just need to slow down and see the kind of gold and the great moments that await us. In just a few words in the Bible, there's so much there. So let's look at it again, Exodus 3:1-10. Read it a little slower.

Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up."

(This is an incredible part of this passage...this next verse:)

When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!"

(I mean, you hear it *twice*; you kind of get this image here that Moses is stepping toward it, and he like, "Uhh," you know, "Moses...Moses," you know, calls him over.)

And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He also said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." *(Now history is being pulled out; this is a moment.)* **Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. The LORD said…** (Vs. 4b-6)

(Now at this point, God goes straight to the heart because, remember Moses' background, right? He grew up in Egypt. He saw what was happening. In a passionate moment he flipped and killed an Egyptian. His heart was burning and hurting for the people back there, and God went right to the heart.)

"I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from the land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey…

(At this point Moses' heart has got to be jumping, right? It's like: alright, you know... finally. Then he realizes, "Wait a minute; I've got a role in this story, right?" So, skip down a little later.)

Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring (*you* may bring) **My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt."**

A lot of things come to mind on the second read for me. One is God could have done this at any time, right? I mean, He could have made this appearance and engaged Moses anytime during these forty years. Why now? I mean, I don't have an answer to that. I mean, honestly, part of that for me is a struggle. Part of the story—let's be real here—you know, this is hard for me to kind of absorb because during these forty years there are people suffering, right? I mean, there are people suffering and dying under the hand of the Egyptians here, but God waits for this moment. Why? I mean, I don't know all the "why," but I suspect part of the why from reading the story is Moses is now ready. He came to the moment when he's ready to hear, and God was, in a sense it seems, waiting on him.

Check verse 4 again, just one more time. It's amazing: **When the LORD saw that Moses had turned aside to look,** *then* God spoke from the bush. There's an element of readiness here that God

has chosen to work through Moses in this great task. And He's waiting, and now Moses is at a point he's ready to go. I mean, Moses obviously recognizes this is a weighty and different moment, a little bit like the boardwalk for me in San Diego. I mean, this is different! Moses doesn't have any choice—God tells him, *"This is holy ground; take off your sandals and stay; we're going to have a conversation."*

And then the epic nature of this mission He gives him. I mean, think about it a little bit. He gives him the plan, "We are going to go and we are going to free the people, take them out of the land of Egypt." But He doesn't give him any details. What does He ask of Moses? You know, as we play the story out, you read a little bit farther and it's, "Just go; I mean, here's the mission; I'm asking you to go." Think about what He asks him to do: Go back; talk to your family and probably get a little counsel from your father-in-law and see if you are ready to go. Then let's go, and you are going to go into the heart of the most organized and powerful nation on the planet, and you are going to go up to the doorstep of the supreme leader of that nation and you are going to say, "These hundreds and thousands of slaves that you built your whole economy around, God wants them to go free, and you are going to let them go, and I'm going to lead them out of here." That's what He's asking him to do, right? So this is pretty epic, and all He's asking Moses to do is, "Go." But the thing that really struck me on the study of this over the last couple of weeks is: what He asks Moses to do on one hand makes no sense, but on the other hand, makes perfect sense, because it's so in alignment with Moses' life story. What He's asked him to do makes a lot of sense in terms of the history of Moses' life and what he was about. He knows Moses is passionate about these people, about freeing these slaves; he knows that. He knows Moses' life story—born of a Hebrew slave. Who better knows the culture of Egypt and the leadership of Egypt? So what God calls him to do, and I think there are some truths in this for us—not always—but what He calls him to do in this case is very consistent with his life experiences, his life story, his passion, his talents, his abilities, all very consistent with him.

And that leads to this last, really amazing thing in this story for me, and that is this unexplainable combination of God's power and Moses' sweat. We know Moses goes to Pharaoh, goes into Egypt on his own and meets Pharaoh. He's dead, right? No? Impossible! In fact, we know if we play out the story, read farther, it took multiple acts of God to soften Pharaoh's heart and get him to a place where he's saying, "Okay, I give up. Moses' God is God." It takes multiple acts of God—no way this gets done minus God's power. But for whatever reason, clearly in the Scripture God works through the heart of a man, and that's true throughout the Bible. We see it again and again throughout history, how God works through the lives and hearts of men and women to bring His will about. And that's what gets me excited about this morning, seeing the thousands that will gather together here this morning, who are working in this community, who are engaged with people, reaching out, loving and connecting with our neighbors. What an impact we are going to have, are having, and will continue to have in this community as we do that! People on mission, and for whatever reason, there is just unexplainable combinations of God's power and our sweat that allows His will to happen throughout.

So how do we do this...how do we do this? How do we not miss the moments? How do we not miss the burning bush in our own backyard? We are going to get really practical over these next three weeks, and I want to start it now. We are going to start to engage an idea, a thought, something to stir us every day for the next twenty-one days as we talk about creative encounters that change things. And this week we are going to look at seven things—one each day for a week—just ask you to take a few minutes, and just kind of get around this idea and thought, a practical way that we can all start to engage this idea of really fully stepping into the moments together. Actually there is

going to be a handout at the exits when you leave; make sure you grab one. That kind of gives some questions and thoughts, just an idea, so I want to go over those with you this morning real quick.

So later today I'm going to ask you to ***Remember***, to continue the work we were doing during the *Oceans* worship song, to really take some time later today to really write down some of the things that maybe come to mind—times that God's shown up—because there are strengths and power in remembering. I had a conversation with my daughter who's a teacher—the same daughter who missed the turtles—in North Omaha. As a dad, I kind of had a dad moment a couple of weeks ago, where I was kind of saying, "With all of the stuff that's going on right in the heart of where she's at, it's like, 'Maybe you can work at another school or something.'" You know, kind of hit that dad moment, and she emailed me later and said, "I do not feel like I've chosen this, Dad. God has chosen it. In college I felt the Lord called me to this kind of environment I've been working in, and I've been working and preparing myself ever since. God has me in north Omaha, and I sense that every day. It's not easy, and God never told me it would be easy. He never even told me I'd be safe. He just told me to go and He'd be with me through all of it. So I trust Him in that. I know I'm supposed to be there to be a light that shines for Him." Well, okay, Dad's in line now. You know, it's like, "Okay, I get it." You know, that's power in remembering. When you remember a context or a why, that makes the day today doable, reasonable. So **Remember**; write some things down, kind of get a thought of whatever comes to mind.

On Monday, ***Learn to be attentive***. What does it look like in your life to be attentive? You know, to have that kind of full attentiveness toward things that are going on around us—to our family, to our relationships, to our relationship with God. What does that really look like? We talk to our kids about this all the time, right? "Pay attention." You know, I mean that's part of what school's about, the struggle, But we know that's different for all of us, what that looks like and what that experience is. Our oldest son had a really strong, demanding presence as a little guy and actually still does now in his twenties, but when he was young, he was talking to us and trying to get our attention—if he didn't sense we were tracking—as a two-year old, three-year old, or four-year old, he would come over and grab my face and make me stare right at him, saying, "Dad!" You know, my wife wants to do that with me most nights, I think. *(laughter)* It's like, "I'm talking to *you*." Right! That's what I mean, that attentiveness that really locks in.

An author I follow and read quite a bit, Ruth Haley Barton says, "The practice of paying attention awakens us to the extraordinary in the ordinary." Those kinds of moments we've been talking about—the practice of paying attention—awakens us to the extraordinary in the ordinary. That's a beautiful truth there I think, and that's what Moses did—that walk down the mountain. There's something extraordinary going on and being *fully in the moment*; I'm really willing to and able now to step into it.

On Tuesday, ***Change it up***. Do something different. Alright, break the routine; drive a different way home. You know, do something real simple here. Moses took the sheep down a different path this day. I mean, it says in the passage, "We went down this way;" he must have felt a draw to go to what was the mountain of God, the place God resided...do something different. So the picture you see up here—*Rhythm in Twenty* guys—okay, that's the leadership group. Twenty guys at a time come; Mike Tolerico is the guy on the left you see, on the picture up there. He's a church planter out of Denver, Colorado, and grew up in Colorado, born there, hiked mountain peaks; he's a CrossFit guy, incredible shape. In the third year of these leadership journeys that we do, we ask these guys to go and climb a peak, and we talk about what it looks like to finish well. What does it look like for a young leader to finish this next season, this stretch of life well? And what are the

kinds of things we think about? So we talk about that as we make this climb. As we got to this mountain peak and got up there, Mike said, "I'm always climbing to the next peak. I'm always going to the next thing. I'm always pressing. This time I'm going to stay on this plateau, and just kind of enjoy it." I'm like, "I'll stay with you," because a lot of the guys are heading onto the next peak. But it was a really beautiful time for us of holding on to what was a really unique moment for him. He became this coach, this coach that encouraged people coming up, climbing, pulling them up, offering a hand. Because he did something different, because he did something unique and different, it changed it up; his life and leadership changed as a result of that. So a neat time—change it up; do something different.

Wednesday, ***Solitude is critical***. It's a critical discipline that we don't talk about—the idea of solitude, of quiet, of listening. We talk about it—those of us who have walked with God for a long time. We think about it in terms of reading the Bible, connecting with people that are also talking to God, and pursuing God, and a reason and a need for that. But this is a discipline that we don't talk about much, so consider this idea of solitude, of quiet, of taking a posture of listening as something you would do on Wednesday, okay?

Thursday, ***Schedule it***. Practical stuff—schedule it, schedule an hour or two of just listening and quiet. If we are all kind of doing that, engaging in some of that, the next week or month there's going to be some pretty cool stuff that's going to be happening. So think about scheduling on Thursday.

Friday, ***Linger***. Take the idea of lingering, and get around this idea of really staying fully in the moment, and take some time to just pull back and linger in the moment of the day. Maybe it's taking that extra moment with your kids or family when you would be rushing by to the next thing, or that coworker that's sharing something with you. Maybe the lingering application here is to ask a question, and take that next step of engaging with them in their story.

I had one of those lingering moments this last summer—*Bucket List* trip to Montana. Never been there, of all the travel I've done, never been to Montana—Yellowstone. We offered it to our kids, all three of our twenty-something kids joined us on it, which we must have been doing something right, but maybe we just paid for the trip and they came; I don't know. *(laughter)* But they all came. We had a great time. We were fishing, hiking, doing all of that stuff. But we stayed in a lodge in Bozeman for three nights. Each night after dinner there was this Cornhole game—this bean bag toss game. You know, we started playing it at night; by the second night everybody was so excited to do it and reengage in that. By the third night we were at this great place to eat in downtown Bozeman; we were all like, "Let's get back, play Cornhole," couldn't wait, you know, to get back—just this quiet, still, relaxed moment. I remember thinking on the second night we were doing this: This moment isn't going to come every day; I mean this might be it in a lot of ways with the five of us gathered, just playing, not pressing onto the next thing, and just kind of being able to stay in a moment. Just the time of those next two nights, that hour before sunset, couldn't have gone too slow. Man, I wanted to slow that clock down, and just really enjoy being with them in that time. That's kind of the idea of lingering and cherishing and stepping right in to the full moments that God has for us.

Saturday, a little tougher task for you: ***Start thinking about what it means to attend to what's burning in your own heart in life***. Maybe there's a flicker in there, something that's burning, something God's doing to get your attention. Maybe it's been there for a long time; you've kind of brushed it by and said, "That's impossible; I can't do it," or haven't thought about it, or whatever.

Maybe it's simple, something you wanted to do, a place you want to go, something you want to accomplish, something you want to see with somebody. Take a little time to say: what is God potentially stirring in my own life. Come back; talk to your wife or engage with some friends, or family, or whatever. See, maybe God is in the midst of some of that. What's been burning? What's a burden, a thought, a passion, or something you've had in your heart that maybe you've ignored?

So we are going to close this time to do a little lingering ourselves; we can't *not* do that. We'll take a couple of minutes before we finish up with some worship. What my appeal to you is, "Don't leave this too early; don't leave this moment too early." I mean, we are giving you a couple of minutes of quiet, to just linger, and I'm going to close with a prayer, just re-reading this passage out of Lamentations that I started with. Really step into the couple of minutes we are giving you—if something comes to mind out of the stories we just read, write it down. That's great. Otherwise, just be fully in these couple of minutes. Then the last couple of worship songs we are going to do—man, this is an opportunity we have to be together, to engage this, to remember that God's with us, that God loves us, and He's backing each of us. He's got something for each of us in this moment. So let me read Lamentations 3 as a passage of prayer as we close, just as a reminder that God is in this thing. He shows up and He's in this thing with us:

I remember it all—oh, how well I remember—
the feeling of hitting the bottom.
But there's one other thing I remember,
and remembering, I keep a grip on hope:
GOD's loyal love couldn't have run out,
his merciful love couldn't have dried up.
They're created new every morning.
How great your faithfulness!
I'm sticking with GOD (I say it over and over).
He's all I've got left.
GOD proves to be good to the man who passionately waits,
to the woman who diligently seeks.
It's a good thing to quietly hope,
quietly hope for help from GOD.
It's a good thing when you're young
to stick it out through the hard times.
When life is heavy and hard to take,
go off by yourself. Enter the silence.
Bow in prayer. Don't ask questions:
Wait for hope to appear. (Lamentations, 3:20-29, MSG)

*Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
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