

Sermon 5, A Self-Appointed Messiah, Exodus 2:11-22

Proposition: Moses chooses God’s people for his own, and in the process learns the lessons of rescue, exile, and providence.

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 - A. Identifying With God’s People Can Get You in Trouble, vv. 11-15
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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the passage in front of us contains some fascinating stories. We have an old-West style gunfight between Moses and an Egyptian guard. We have a showdown at the well, a marriage, and a new baby. But why? What’s the point of these accounts? What do they tell us about God, who is not even mentioned in this chapter until the very end? I think the best way to organize this chapter in our minds is to speak in terms of the three lessons that Moses learned — for they are three lessons that God had for His servant Moses, and they are three lessons still for us as we serve God today. In our passage, we see Moses choose God’s people for His own, and in so doing to learn the lessons of rescue, exile, and providence.

I. The Lesson of Rescue, vv. 11-22

The first lesson Moses learned was the lesson of rescue.

A. Identifying With God’s People Can Get You in Trouble, vv. 11-15

Moses, born with a silver spoon in his mouth, went out to his people. He knew that they were his. The narrator (who is Moses!) calls them so. He saw one of his brothers.

Now, Moses presumably did not have to identify as a Hebrew. He looked Egyptian according to the daughters of Reuel. He had the chance, Hebrews tells us, to enjoy the pleasures

of sin for a season. But he chose the people of God. And the text tells us here, in the lead-up to the deliverance from Egypt, that identifying with God's people, though necessary, can get you in trouble. Accepting that God's people are your brothers can mean — in fact, probably will mean — suffering affliction, as the Hebrew writer says. Don't think that joining the church just means that you have gained a family and that such a gain is only positive. It is positive, for sure. But it also means a bunch of liabilities, problems, and miseries. Moses was one of the royals, but he chose to accept the Israelites as his blood brothers.

Are you ready for that? As you look on the burdens of your people, are you willing to accept them as your people, and thus as your burdens? Are you ready to be burdened by these things?

B. Good Intentions Aren't Enough, vv. 11-22

Well, Moses was, and he set out to make a difference, to do something about the bondage of his people.

1. Failed Rescue #1, vv. 11-12

So immediately (for surely it didn't take long, in such a land and under such conditions of slavery) he witnessed a beating. An Egyptian was smiting a Hebrew. Moses looked and saw that there were no witnesses, and he smote that Egyptian. The word is the same both times in Hebrew. And presto! The Egyptian slavery ended. Not. Already the story makes it clear that you can't exactly deliver an enslaved race just by killing one overseer. That's not how these things work. If all it took was a self-appointed Messiah waltzing in and bumping off the nearest oppressor, then surely Israel would have been freed long ago.

2. Failed Rescue #2, vv. 13-15

Undaunted, Moses tries to intervene the next day. But his efforts are rebuffed. Moses tries to take the moral high ground, tries to get his people to stop fighting, only to find out that they think of him as a murderer. Far from the moral high ground, he is actually down in the quagmire of wickedness. And soon it came to Pharaoh's ears, and led to a warrant being put out for Moses' death.

3. Successful Rescue, vv. 16-22

So this time, Moses flees to Midian, a land located in modern-day Jordan. There he sits down by a well and witnesses yet another act of oppression. The shepherds come up and steal all the water that these seven shepherdesses have drawn for their own animals. Rightly incensed, this time Moses intervenes again, and it works! Indeed, he gets a wife and a place to live and a job out of the deal. It's not so much that his spirit had changed. Clearly the man Moses was temperamentally suited to lead the people out of Egypt. He hated injustice and wanted to put a stop to it whenever he saw it. But it took three times for him to learn how to do that successfully (hint: without killing anyone).

C. Act According to Your Place and Calling, v. 14

In brief, we could say that the lesson of rescue is this: Act according to your place and calling. Being a self-appointed Messiah does the world no good. Killing that Egyptian taskmaster did not free the Israelites, did not even make the time in Egypt easier. In the providence of God, of

course, it set up the conditions for Moses to go out into the wilderness and meet God at the burning bush — but Moses didn't know that when he did it. The lesson of rescue is that you must act according to who you are and the position and authority you have. Moses' place was not smite Egyptians. He was not a judge and ruler over the Israelites. But he was justified in standing up for the rights of the shepherdesses at the well.

II. The Lesson of Exile, v. 22

So Moses is in exile, far from home.

A. The Reproach of Christ Hurts, Hebrews 11:26

Exodus shows us the everyday character of his life. He was just out walking and found a family who was happy to take him in. But Hebrews shows us the spiritual side of that life. Yes, Moses' life in these forty years was just as quotidian as yours or mine; indeed, it was possibly more so. But beneath it all was the reproach of Christ. This is not Christ reproaching him. Rather, it is the hostility of the world toward the Son of God that spilled over onto Moses, the Servant of the LORD. Moses would rather be the world's enemy than the prince of Egypt. He would rather suffer the hatred that Christ suffers than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

The reproach of Christ is not easy. Moses paid a heavy status penalty in choosing to identify with his brothers. Every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians. Imagine that your parents have become eager Black Lives Matter activists and spend their days and nights trying to defund the police. Imagine telling them that you think you are called to law enforcement and that you have taken a position as a deputy sheriff. That is a status penalty. That is suffering a major loss of reputation in their eyes. Well, that is something comparable to what Moses went through — perhaps even to the point of rejecting his adoptive mother, the woman to whom he owed his life.

B. Life in a Foreign Land Fundamentally Shapes One's Identity, v. 22

And Moses felt it. Oh, he felt it all right. The Bible doesn't comment on what people are thinking. It only tells us what they did and occasionally what they said. But what did Moses do? He named his son "Exile," or literally "Ger sham," "Stranger there." In naming his son, as one commentator pointed out, he named himself.

Do you feel that Heaven is your real homeland? Do you have sympathy with immigrants, refugees, children of divorce with no proper home of their own, and displaced human beings of all kinds? Have you been a stranger in a strange land? Don't let familiarity with this world confuse you. The lesson of exile is one that Moses needed to learn. As we heard a couple of weeks ago in our 1 John series, the world lies in the wicked one! That means that we need to be strangers here, not too comfortable lest we are found comfortably lying in the wicked one ourselves.

Are you ready for the lesson of exile? Moses had to learn it before he could take the Israelites away from the only home they had ever known into the howling wilderness to find new homes in a promised but foreign land. You will have to learn it before you can tear yourself away from the America you've grown up in and be ready for the promised yet foreign Heaven which is to come.

III. The Lesson of Providence, vv. 1-22

The final lesson Moses had to learn was the lesson of Providence. This chapter is a second chapter of background before the main story of Exodus and its focus on the knowledge of God really gets going. We could almost launch straight from ch. 1 to ch. 3. But the narrator could not resist telling how one of the sons survived the oppression of Pharaoh and rose to become the one who would deliver God's people from Pharaoh's wicked tyranny. Thus, this chapter focuses on how that happened. Aside from the obvious merit of the stories it contains simply as stories (they are good stories!), there are two main lessons here about the Providence of God in the lives of the people of God.

A. Daughters Give Life

The first lesson is that daughters give life. The word "daughter" appears seven times in the Hebrew text of this chapter, just as the previous chapter ended with "let all the daughters live." The tyrant let the daughters live, and that proved his undoing.

1. Jochebed, v. 1

Jochebed, a daughter of Levi as the text calls her, hid Moses by faith and by faith put him in the path of this particular princess.

2. Miriam, v. 4

By faith in God's providence Miriam approached Pharaoh's daughter, when who knows what horrible consequences could follow from such a thing.

3. Pharaoh's Daughter, v. 6

We talked last week about the character and integrity of this daughter of Pharaoh. Despite the milieu in which she lived, she clearly had compassion and respect for life. She offered to pay Jochebed, even though she could hardly have been simple-minded enough to ignore the obvious relationship between her and the child. Her integrity frustrated the worst designs of her father.

4. Zipporah, v. 22

And finally, Zipporah too stands against the tyrant's decree.

B. Pharaoh's Decree Can't Kill 'Em All, vv. 2, 22

You see, the chapter begins and ends with marriage and a son. What is the point? Why this frame around the chapter? Because it is an obvious counterpoint to the ending of the previous chapter! Though Pharaoh may rage in all his murderous splendor, he cannot begin to touch the greater power latent both in created human nature and in the special people of God. This is the power of reproduction, by which the earth always brings forth another crop in the spring, by which one generation always passes on life to the next. Be fruitful, God said, and multiply. Those were His first words to the human race after He blessed them. And here, in this second chapter of Exodus, the natural rhythms of life carry on despite the wicked decree of the genocidal tyrant.

Can you trust God even in the worst circumstances? Like Moses, can you too learn the lesson of Providence? Brothers and sisters, the lessons of rescue, exile, and providence are not fun to learn. But they are necessary for life here on this earth. Moses had to learn them before he could deliver God's people. God prepared him through the faithfulness of daughters, and sent him a son. Pharaoh cannot triumph. Already God is revealing Himself in the blessed constancy

of nature. Can you trust the one who let Moses live and sent him a son? God prepared to deliver His people. And deliver us He will. Amen.