

Exodus | The Rise of a Liberator

A Man Married a Woman (And What Happened Next) or Unto Us a Child Is Born

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Exodus 2:1-10

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi. ² The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months. ³ But when she could hide him no longer, she got him a wicker basket and covered it over with tar and pitch. Then she put the child into it and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance to find out what would happen to him. ⁵ The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the Nile, with her maidens walking alongside the Nile; and she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid, and she brought it to her. ⁶ When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the boy was crying. And she had pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." ⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women that she may nurse the child for you?" ⁸ Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go ahead." So the girl went and called the child's mother. ⁹ Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. ¹⁰ The child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. And she named him Moses, and said, "Because I drew him out of the water."

Last week, we began a series we plan to follow right into the Christmas Season. This is the second book of the Bible, The Book of Exodus.

If you weren't with us, you can get that introductory sermon online or on the Kiosk at the back. And we'll look at more background material as we go.

Today I want to think with you about the topic of FATE. And it seems like one of the best places to find people discussing fate is in MOVIES, especially in romantic comedies. Boy meets girl and then he thinks, "THIS is the one! Fate has brought us together... this is our destiny...this is my soul-mate."

A great movie from the late 90's called "Sliding Doors" with Gwyneth Paltrow really delves into this idea but lots of others...especially Romantic Comedies.

Sometimes in modern movies it's called "The Universe" ("the Universe brought us together"). Or she says, "Well, I don't believe in that – I think we make our own plans and WE determine our own course by our decisions. There is no FATE!" And most often the viewer is left to conclude about the existence or possibility of fate... Is there a kind of predetermined plan or story with the end already written OR do we write our own stories... or maybe a combination?

And if the end is ALREADY written what does that say about our decisions and about the details? Are they also determined? What about small details like the choice of a spouse – can you marry the wrong person who is NOT your soul-mate and thereby mess up the plan? Can you spoil the plot? If you pull up to "Pump #4" instead of "Pump #7" won't that change things... maybe even ruin things...?

Well, I won't answer ALL these questions in one sermon but THIS STORY we read today does give us a behind the scenes look. I won't say that there's a soul-mate for YOU (if you're single) – I will tell you that I found MINE and I know that because I'm married to her.

Because I'm a Christian I have this confidence that even if our marriage was a real drag (and thankfully, it's just the opposite!) but I know THIS is my destiny; this is exactly what God planned for me and the whole set of circumstances that has unfolded in our lives (and that WILL unfold) is designed by God for one great purpose or end or goal, i.e. to move me toward perfection (I know: sounds funny!) to move me toward resembling Jesus Christ, so that God would be shown and that I would come to JOY.

That's what today's story teaches; it's what Christians have called "gracious providence". It's like fate but with one huge difference: it not only moves us toward a predetermined end/goal but that END is not some cold mathematical inevitability. It's a personal, relational, beautiful, celebration of love and joy.

So let's see in this text: 1) The Chaos on the Ground 2) The Folly of a Wedding (and all that comes NEXT) and 3) Lessons Learned/Bridges Burned and Pages Turned.

If you were right there, boots-on-the-ground, witness to these events, you'd probably feel that the world was coming apart at the seams...and that there IS no plan...or purpose.

I read an account this week of modern-day slave labor in brick-making facilities in some developing nations. It's unbelievably hideous! Lung disease...

And I say this just to remind you, we're still in the PROBLEM part of the Exodus story. The

people of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are enslaved... and things have changed and it's all dire and dangerous.

They are living with the constant treat of violence and their children and SONS (in particular) are being TAKEN from them and killed. It's a situation we can't even imagine.

And, to pick up on the dismal tone of the last chapter, we have to imagine that while God has moved unseen and even UNKNOWN to His own people, and while God has kept and protected them, they really don't seem to know Him. "There arose a king who knew not Joseph" but also a generation that knew not God.

And IN that place – danger, violence, no sense of purpose and no sense of the Presence and Plan of God or of a LARGER Story, it felt like absurdity.

And this has been the conclusion of modern philosophers who conclude that there IS no PLAN or STORY or an AUTHOR... life is absurd...suicide makes perfect sense. That's how it must have felt in that day.

But as chapter two opens, the music changes. There's a wedding... because... you know... the beat goes on! People fall in love and weddings are fun... and EVEN though...in that kind of dangerous and very desperate environment a WEDDING probably seemed... so impractical and even ridiculous...STILL... (v. 1) "a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and bore a son...

And then this ridiculous thing, this force of nature (As Sir Paul wrote, "you'd think that people would've had enough of silly love songs!")... a marriage takes place in this ghetto, this Hell-Hole, like a tender shoot out of parched ground...and then...a chain reaction takes place. A baby is born, a son.

He is "good" ("TOV" – as in and God saw all He created and it was "TOV" – good"). And all parents think their children are beautiful, right? But there was something special (I know they're ALL special) but this child really was, "TOV".

Twice in the NT that idea is repeated. This was almost like a new creation, "God saw that this baby ("was TOV"), was good."

So risking their lives they hide him from the goons and the "neighborhood-watch" tattletales who may have conspired with the Egyptians... they hide him till they can no longer...and then they take a wicker basket and they water-proof it and in faith and desperation (IS there EVER faith without desperation?) they launch the little ark into the

waters of the Nile River.

And that actually IS the word, “ARK”. It’s the only time that odd word is used in the whole OT except in the episode about Noah. This boy, seed of the woman, is “TOV” (like a new creation) and he is put in an ark and sent out on the waters...like Noah and that vessel that saved the other New Creation... in the midst of chaos there are signs of HOPE.

And Mom and Dad go home...maybe to pray... maybe because they can’t bear to watch (“Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!”) but older sister stays behind...and that’s when the daughter of Pharaoh arrives... hears the crying...sends the maids to fetch the little ark...and she’s MOVED by the sight of this “TOV” baby...and crying. She knows it’s one of THEM, the enemy, the vermin my father hates... but, “Look...aww...how cute...” (Please Dad, can’t we keep him...can we please...please!!!)

And the baby’s sister speaks up... “I can find someone to nurse the baby...if you want”

“GO!” says the princess. And she finds her mom and the baby’s mom...and she gets paid to breast-feed the baby until weaning...maybe 3 or 4 years... And then he’s adopted into Pharaoh’s own house. And she names him, “Moses” meaning to “draw out of the water”. And isn’t that his destiny, to lead his people through the waters of BIRTH and NEW CREATION and of baptism and salvation, to draw a people out of the water as he was drawn out of the water... Was that the princess’ bright idea or was that the child’s destiny? Answer: YES!

This is as close as they came to an adoption agency in the ancient world, “Cast your bread on the surface of the waters, for you will find it after many days.” (Eccl 11) There’s an ancient Babylonian myth that uses a very similar story because THIS is what women did who could NOT keep their babies...cast them on the water and trust in their gods to keep them alive.

There are other stories in the OT about children born or preserved in miraculous ways, Isaac (born to an old couple way past child-bearing age) Samson, Samuel...God bringing together all these extraordinary circumstances AND these very mundane, natural-looking, common-sense human decisions and weaving them together so seamlessly and thereby orchestrating His plan. It can be so easily missed especially by the eyewitnesses too close to see the Big Picture and Big Plan.

And eventually, in the fullness of time, God will bring another tender shoot out of parched ground (Isa 53.2) and another miraculous birth. A virgin will be overshadowed by the Power of God and a zygote planted in her womb, a baby...and truly “TOV”, in fact the ONLY truly

and flawlessly good human being to ever be born of a WOMAN, this is THE Seed of the Woman promised in the Garden.

Jesus Christ will be born... a fulfillment of all the special births in the OT...He will escape the death decree of Herod. He will be placed in an unusual crib and He will be given a significant Name, "you will call Him Jesus, i.e. salvation, for He will save His people".

He will become an INSIDER in the house of the enemy; will become ONE with Adam's rebellious race in order to save us. He will eventually be charged with MY sin, will be drowned in the River of Justice, so I could be pulled out and saved.

He will give up His identity (as Moses did) so that I could be given the status that was His and so I could call God, "Abba, Father" the Name only He, Jesus Christ, deserved to speak.

It's out of this chain reaction that the Almighty God orchestrates in every detail, that hope springs for the world. It looked like a silly little wedding between a man and woman of the priestly tribe of Levi – but it was God orchestrating it all. And it looked like just another criminal dying on the Hill but it was God orchestrating it all for the salvation of all His people.

Now I'll end with this: lessons learned, bridges burned and pages turned.

Under Lessons Learned we include the fact that all these characters were just doing what they had to do, what they wanted to do, what seemed like the think to do. The princess out to take a swim. The sister looking out for her vulnerable brother. The parents struck by something in this child, hiding him and then making a little waterproof boat and sending him off. That's the story we SEE.

But in the STORY of God (the story we DON'T see), He is weaving these acts together to achieve His purpose: He will reveal His character to the world and will bless all nations through Abraham's people.

In the NT it says that these parents, even after hundreds of years of no organized worship and only oral tradition, but they STILL believed what their parents told them and somehow believed that God would save...they trusted that God had a plan for his people, a destiny for them and for their child.

Hebrews 11 put it this way, "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was an elegant child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict." (23)

The Big Lesson learned is that God is doing His thing, with or without you. There is a destiny and you can live without knowing the purpose or meaning of life...OR you can actually enter in, as these parents did, by BELIEVING. Believe what Jesus Christ did for His enslaved people and life takes on new meaning, you enter in, as it were, to a new creation BY FAITH.

Lessons Learned and BRIDGES BURNED – as a believer in the Gospel, a PROVIDENCE MAN, I can look back on my life and I am freed from a sense of regret and incessant second-guessing. I don't have to wonder if I married the right person. I know I did... not because I'm such a great judge of character or beauty AND certainly not because Missy was (believe me, she got the short end of the stick!) but because God is committed to me – to US. He swears to work all things (including your marriage, your circumstances, your failings, your disabilities/weaknesses) ALL THINGS together for your good. To perfect you and to make you more like Jesus Christ – IF you are a believer.

We've burned the bridge on regret. That is SUCH amazing good NEWS. IT is well with my soul!

Finally, Lessons Learned, Bridges Burned and PAGES TURNED - I am eagerly anticipating the unfolding of the rest of the story. God's story IS my STORY.

Whatever meets me in the coming days, as I turn the pages I know whatever awaits me is gracious providence. It's better than fate because while the story IS indeed already written, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. (1Co 2:9 KJV).

In the short term, it might look chaotic, could be painful and frightening (I'm sure it was for that sister and those believing parents) but I can REST and know that ULTIMATELY I walk into a wonderland, that I haven't even imagined.

The birth of that Child tells me so, (the Good Son, better than Moses, Jesus Christ) ... a tender shoot out of parched ground...life will come out of death beyond what I can even imagine. I march forward NOT into the impersonal throes of fate but into the loving arms of our Father.