

A Failed Deliverance

Exodus 2:11-22

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Today we come to Exodus, chapter 2, verse 11. Let's hear God's holy word:

Now it came about in those days when Moses had grown up that he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. And so he looked this way and that, and when he saw there was no one around, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. And he went out the next day, and behold two Hebrews were fighting with each other; and he said to the offender, "Why are you striking your companion?" But he said, "Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid, and said, "Surely the matter has become known." When Pharaoh heard of this matter he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well. Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came to draw water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. Then the shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock. When they came to Reuel, their father, he said, "Why have you come back so soon today?" So they said, "An Egyptian delivered us from the hand of the shepherds; and what is more, he even drew the water for us and watered the flock." And he said to his daughters, "Where is he then? Why is it that you have left the man behind? Invite him to have something to eat." And Moses was willing to dwell with the man, and he gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses. Then she gave birth to a son, and he named him Gershom, for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."

Amen and thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Lord, this is Your word. We ask that you would speak to our hearts this night, even as we study it. Search us out O, God. Teach us to trust You even when it's difficult. Help us to learn the lessons of sovereignty, not just in our minds so that we can repeat back the truth of Your word and agree with it. But that we would agree with it with our heart, with the whole of our being in the very depths of

our being, and that that would impact everything. Show as well Your glorious redemption, cause us to worship You and praise You and to trust You for the good of our souls and for Your glory. We ask all these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

As we've said, at least two themes have already emerged in the passages that we've studied in this story of God's redemption in the Exodus. The first chapter of Exodus reminds us that the requirements and blessings of God's creation, the mandates, the commands, the ordinances that He gave in creation are still part of God's plan of redemption. Redemption and creation are linked in Exodus 1 by a repetition, for instance, of the fact that the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly. Those same words were spoken in Genesis 1. That language comes from the creation ordinances of marriage and procreation and indicates that even though God's people were oppressed, God's hand of blessing was upon them.

But also we have seen God's sovereignty clearly displayed throughout the first chapter of Exodus. We may view God's supremacy over the course of human events in at least two ways. First we see it in God's frustration of Pharaoh's plan. He uses two women, two lead midwives in order to frustrate the plan of Pharaoh. Now Pharaoh is a picture of the apex of human, political power. Pharaoh is a picture of that which is as powerful as it gets in the world of human government. Surely there would have been few women in his day who would have been able to check his rule. But God chooses to use those midwives to do just that.

And then again Moses' mother and sister and then again Pharaoh's own daughter showing us that God uses the weak to stymie the strong. And so God's sovereignty is shown in this way. And there's going to be a third theme that's going to emerge in our study tonight. But I'll hold that back and surprise you.

I want to direct your attention to three incidents in Moses' life recorded in this passage with three different groups of people. Moses in this passage comes into contact with the Egyptians, with his own Israelite people, and with the Midianites. And in each case there are incidences which reveal to us something about the character of Moses, but they also reveal something to us about the plans of God. And so lets look at those words tonight.

I. Moses' call to deliver his people

First in verses 11 and 12, Moses encounters the Egyptians. He senses a call to be the deliverer. By the way Stephen confirms that that is not simply reading into the text, but that it's true. You read Acts, chapter 7 as Stephen retells this story. He makes it clear that Moses sensed a call to be the deliverer of his people, and that's what is happening here in verses 11 and in 12. He identifies with the pain and hardship of his people, and he seeks to be their deliverer.

But here's the lesson I want you to see. Moses' experience here is going to mirror Israel's experience at the hand of the Egyptians, and it is going to anticipate God's actions on behalf of Israel. Moses' experience here mirrors Israel's experience at the hand of the Egyptians and anticipates God's action on their behalf. Many years have passed from verse 10 to 11. When we left Moses in verse 10, he was that little babe. In verse 11 he is a grown man. In fact, Stephen in Acts, chapter 7, verse 23, tells us he's 40 years old when this begins. A generation has passed in other words. Moses had grown up. And the first thing anybody would want to know is, okay, this young man who has grown up in the luxury and in the educational privilege and in the court privilege of the land of Egypt, does he really love his people? Has he been infected with the power and the pomp and the privilege of Egypt, or does he identify with his people? And Moses doesn't waste any time.

In verse 11, the minute he tells you that he's grown up, he immediately tells you that he identified with Israel. He went out to them, we're told in verse 11, he looked upon them twice. He refers to them as his brethren. There's no question where Moses is. His heart is with his people. The author of Hebrews is going to comment on that as well, noting that Moses chose to identify with his own people rather than to enjoy the luxury and the power of Egypt. So Moses tells you immediately that he identifies with Israel. With all the privileges of Egypt, his own, he still chooses to be identified with the people of God. By the way, Acts, chapter 7, verse 22 comments that by this time Moses had already been instructed in all the wisdom of Egypt. And by the way, in that day Egypt's educational system was one of the best in the entire world. And he would have been introduced to all the arts, and all the sciences, and to the basics of education, with the possible exception of Solomon, Daniel and Nehemiah, no Old Testament character had that kind of training and background that Moses had. In fact, Moses probably would have been trained in the laws of Hammurabi while he was in the Egyptian court. He would have given the perfect background needed to be the lawgiver of Israel, the judge of Israel, the leader of Israel and his people.

At any rate with that aside, let's look back at verse 11 again. Moses tells us that he looked on, or he saw this situation with perhaps one of the Egyptian taskmasters literally beating to death one of the Hebrews. This isn't just a fistfight, this is an Egyptian taskmaster seeking to strike down to death a Hebrew. And when Moses tells us that he saw, he doesn't mean that he looked with detachment. It means just like when God sees and takes action, so he sees.

In fact, it's very interesting in this very chapter. If you look down at verse 25, we're told that God saw the sons of Israel, and he took notice. Now that's an old theme in the Bible. You saw it back in Genesis, chapter 22. When God saw the need of Abraham on Mt. Moriah, He did not merely look with detachment and say, "Hmmm, Abraham needs a substitute for his son." He actually provided so that the Hebrew word for God *to see* can literally mean for *God to provide*. *Jehovah-jireh* or *Yahweh-yireh* literally means God sees, but it also means God

provides. And here in this passage Moses sees his brethren in need. And it doesn't mean that he sort of looks upon them and says, "Hmmm, something needs to be done." Moses looks with emotion and involvement and seeks to take action on their behalf. And so he is mirroring God's actions on behalf of Israel.

Notice also in this chapter that this language is used of God subsequently throughout the Exodus. In Exodus, chapter 3, verse 7 and 9 and Exodus, chapter 4, verse 31 and Exodus, chapter 5, verse 19 that language of God seeing is used of God coming to the rescue of the children of Israel. In this passage, Moses identifies with his people, and he does it in four ways.

First of all he enters into direct conflict with the Egyptians. Secondly, he becomes the subject of Pharaoh's special death warrant. Moses as a child had been under the general genocidal death warrant that Pharaoh had given out, but he had survived it. Now he once again comes under a special death warrant issued by Pharaoh for him. Thirdly, he has to flee from Egypt, and he meets God at Sinai. Now it's very interesting in Exodus 14, verse 5 we are told that Israel fled into the wilderness. So just as Israel would later flee into the wilderness, so now Moses flees into the wilderness. And just as later Israel will meet God at Sinai, Moses will meet God at Sinai. And then finally, at the end of this section that we've just read, Moses will describe himself as a stranger in a strange land. In all these ways, Moses identifies with his people. He mirrors the experience of his people, and he anticipates God's actions on their behalf. Moses is living and almost pre-living the story of his people. God is preparing just the man that they need. God wants a leader for His people that understands the trials that they are going through. Moses had grown up in the relative luxury of the Egyptian court, and had not experienced the alienation that his people had experienced, and so God in His wisdom, causes Moses to know that alienation by being a stranger in a strange land. So that when he comes back to lead those out of Egypt, who are strangers in a strange land, he will know what it is like to be a stranger in a strange land. God is preparing just the man that His people need.

II. Moses is rejected by his own people.

Notice also in verses 13 through 15 Moses in a second incident. Moses and the Hebrews. Moses senses the call to be judge and lawgiver, and he yet faces the rejection of his own people. And again here Moses' experience mirrors God's actions and experiences with both Egypt and with Israel and prepares him to be a mediator. Look at verses 13 through 15, but remember back to verses 11 and 12 for a few moments.

Notice Moses in verse 11 sees Israel's oppression, just like God. That is, he sees, and he takes action. In verse 12 he strikes down the Egyptian and notice that over and over in the Exodus we will be told that God struck Egypt. Moses' action against the Egyptian pre-figures God's action of judgment against Egypt in

its oppression of His people. Notice also in verse 13 in the passage that we're looking at right now, that Moses confronts wrongdoing even within Israel. Two Hebrews are struggling amongst themselves. Moses discerns which one is the offender, which one is in the wrong, and he confronts him. He judges Israel here and confronts a wrong just like God will appoint him to do with Pharaoh and just as God Himself does.

In the Exodus narrative, it's very interesting that God confronts Pharaoh with his wrongdoing. And if you will turn with me to Exodus, chapter 9, verse 27, in a moment of weakness Pharaoh will even admit his wrongdoing. Exodus 9:27. "Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron and said to them, 'I have sinned this time; the Lord is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked one.'" It's interesting that though God prevails, and Pharaoh announces his own wickedness, this Hebrew confronted by Moses never admits that he is the wrongdoer. In fact, he calls in to question Moses right to judge him. This Hebrew rejects Moses peacemaking efforts, and that mirrors what is to come as Moses becomes the leader of God's people. This is not going to be easy work. The people of God are not going to like many things that Moses does, and they're going to let him know. In Exodus, chapter 6 they're going to say, "You've made it worse for us." Throughout the visit into the wilderness, they'll say, "We wish we were back in the land of Egypt. Moses, why did you bring us out here to die?" Over and over the people of God will resist the leadership of the man that God has appointed for them. They'll even rebel against him in Numbers, chapter 16. God is here preparing Moses, giving him a pretaste of what is to come. It's not easy being a mediator, even for God's people, and Moses is being prepared for this work.

By the way, in this passage, we are seeing that third theme emerge that I mentioned earlier on. It is very clear that it's going to take God to deliver His people, and it's going to take God to rule His people. Human powers, human capabilities, however impressive Moses is those things are not going to be avail to the people of God. It's going to take God Himself to deliver, to save, to redeem His people. It's going to take God Himself to rule and judge His people. Moses' intentions as far as we can see are pure. Moses truly desires to do his people good, but he doesn't have the power in and of himself to do what needs to be done. Only God Himself can do that. And that theme is already emerging here early in the life of Moses.

III. Moses in exile.

And then if you look at verses 15 through 22, here Moses encounters the Midianites. He's had an encounter with the Egyptians, he's had an encounter with his own people, the Hebrews, now he encounters the Midianites. He learns leadership in the wilderness, and he learns what it means to be a stranger in a strange land. And again here, God is showing Moses what it means to be a

Savior and a helper and a deliverer of His people. Moses, in his actions towards the Midianites, manifests himself as one who has the heart to be a helper and a deliverer of his people.

In verses 16 and 19 notice. Moses has come upon this well which would have been the center of whatever local village would have been existent. The ladies who were the daughters of Jethro, or Reuel as he is called here, have come to the well to water the sheep. That was always a job that women did. It's still a job that only women do. Men never do this job in Arab and Nomadic cultures in the Near East, even to this day, and so these daughters of Reuel or Jethro were coming to the well and along came some shepherds. And as soon as the daughters had drawn the water to water the flocks of their father, immediately the shepherds come and they drive them away so that they can bring in their sheep and use the water that they've already drawn. An act of oppression on their part. Moses is near by, and he stands up and it's very interesting that we are told that he helped or he saved these women. Look at verse 16. They came and drew water and filled the troughs in verse 7. The shepherds came and drove them away. Moses stood up helped them. He *helped them* or *saved them*. That word is the same word that is used of God in Exodus, chapter 14, verse 13 and verse 30 to talk about what he did for the children of Israel in bringing them out of Egypt. He helped them. He saved them. Notice also that when the girls report to their father what has happened, in verse 19 they say an Egyptian delivered us from the hands of the shepherds. And again that word to "deliver" is used of God in Exodus 3:8 and Exodus 6:6 and in Exodus 12:27 to talk about what God does on behalf of His children, His people, Israel.

So Moses is prefiguring here the redemption of his people. He is showing us here his key role as a leader, as a helper, as a savior, as a deliverer for his people. But notice, isn't it ironic that whereas his own people, the Hebrew, has rejected him; and he has had to flee into the wilderness, he is welcomed by strangers. Does that remind you of anybody? Do you remember how John says in his prologue in John 1, verse 11, that He came to his own and His own received Him not. And so we're seeing here in Moses, not nearly the preparation of a leader who's going to have to face the rejection of his people, but a pre-figurement of the Lord Jesus Christ as he comes to save his people and yet is rejected by his own. God is preparing the heart of Moses by breaking the heart of Moses that he might be a savior and a deliverer of his people.

Who would have thought that God's plan of redemption involved sending Moses into the wilderness. You could have been saying wait a minute, God, you've got the perfect man. Don't send him into the wilderness. Why are you doing this? But think about it. Moses' status as an Egyptian meant that he must move away from Egypt. If he was to understand Israel's sojourning experience as strangers in the land of Egypt, and Moses gains this identity as a sojourner amongst the Midianites and helps Israel as it will have to sojourn amongst the Midianites in the years to come. Life in the wilderness enables him to see more clearly his

task, his calling and his God and so helps him to show Israel her tasks, her calling, her God. And so the wilderness, ironically, becomes a more hospitable place for him than Egypt, as it will be for Israel. God knows exactly what He is doing. He's sending Moses into the wilderness for Moses' good, for His people's good, for His glory.

Now that's a great lesson for all of us. Some of you are in the wilderness right now. Some of you are on the way into the wilderness right now. I trust a few of you are on the way out. But even if you aren't, remember the lessons of this passage. God is at work. God's plan never fails. God overrules the wicked designs of those who would hurt His people. God has given us a Savior in Jesus Christ, who has experienced our pain, who has sojourned with us and will be our helper, our Savior and our deliverer. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for Your sovereign rule. We thank you for Your goodness to Your people. We thank you, O God, for Moses. We thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ, who he set forth even in His life. We ask, O God, that You would enable us to trust in Jesus Christ only and wholly. We pray that You would conform us to His image, even as we learn to trust Him. We pray that You would help us to trust Him in the wilderness no matter where we are right now, for Your praise and glory. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

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