

Sunday, July 28, 2019

Exodus 1:8-22; 2:1-10

### Moses in a Basket

Our fourth suggested topic for our “At Your Request” summer series, is the short biographical beginning story of one of the key biblical characters of the Old Testament. This man of faith was later chosen by God to do an enormous task that would last many years. Yet this man would not be able to see it to full completion because of sin.

Moses is a beloved character of the Bible because of his ability to administer and lead a huge movement of people, animals, and their possessions through the desert lands between Egypt and Canaan. This is the place where God’s Chosen People would be able to live autonomously, prosper and be the people God wanted them to be. However our focus today is not in how Moses was able to get the basic necessities of life for the many people on this journey, but the story of his beginning.

When we think of humble beginnings and prosperous results, or what we might term rags to riches stories, we might turn to individuals who were unknown at one time only to be discovered for their talents and gifts and were pressed into using them. At one point something occurred where these individuals happened to be in the right place at the right time to meet an industry leader and their lives were forever changed.

Harrison Ford was trained in carpentry to support his family and was hired by legendary director George Lucas to build cabinets in his home. Lucas took a liking to his carpenter and offered Ford a role in “American Graffiti” the movie. His career skyrocketed from there as of course he later became Indiana Jones and Han Solo.

Another actor, who as a child scraped together any money he could find to go and watch movies. He loved acting but as a teen, he turned down a partial drama scholarship in favor of a career in the U.S. Air Force. Eventually, in 1959, this same actor came to the realization that acting was his true passion and so he moved to Hollywood to see what he could do. He worked in the children’s show “The Electric Company and then for the soap opera “Another World”. But it was as a chauffeur that Morgan Freeman came to be known for his acting at the age of 52 in “Driving Miss Daisy”!

In both of these people’s lives, they made it big and then did not return to their roots except to help out as they could through charitable organizations. They moved from regular jobs to something

that drove the rest of their lives and still does. They are known for their acting abilities and also for the ways they give back to help others.

Yet when we recall Moses' beginnings this man did not do what was first expected or at least first thought. God's people had been living in Egypt for several generations because famine had led them from their previous land to Egypt. Joseph was one of their own who had been sold into slavery yet had done well for himself because of his ability to interpret dreams. Eventually Joseph had his family and all those who were in need move from Canaan to Egypt to live because there was no food.

Eventually there were so many Israelites and a new age began with a new king. He saw that the Israelite people were more numerous and more powerful than the Egyptians. So the king told the taskmasters to oppress them with forced labour. They built supply cities of Pithom and Rameses. The Hebrew people worked harder than before and they were oppressed and made to work even harder.

The king told to the Hebrew midwives named Shiphrah and Puah to kill the baby boys when they are born. But these midwives feared God and would not do this. When questioned about why they could not do this, these smart women told the pharaoh, that Hebrew women give birth too quickly- even before the midwives arrive so they cannot kill the boys just as they are born. From our 21<sup>st</sup> century eyes, we realize that the Pharaoh did not know how babies came into the world! We must credit these midwives for they saved many infants. But the Pharaoh did not stop there. He wanted to shrink the population of his workforce because if there was to be a revolt, they could easily take over the palace just by numbers. So the king commanded that every Hebrew newborn baby boy had to be cast and drowned in the Nile River.

The Hebrew people knew of this commandment and of course did not stop having children. It is then we switch perspectives in this story. We learn of a man and a woman from the tribe of Levi who marry and conceive a child. The child is a boy and for 3 months this woman named Jochebed hides her baby. But after 3 months, she can't hide him anymore. What causes Jochebed to do this?

This woman takes a papyrus basket and plasters it with bitumen and pitch. These elements would serve to glue the basket together and enable it to float safely down the river. The baby is readied and she places him into the basket. How could she do this with her baby boy? Yes, she has two other children, Miriam and Aaron, who are safe from the king's command but why does she do this? Had she rationalized the fact that if her son was meant to die, at the very least she would not want to witness the unbearably painful scene of his execution? Or maybe because of her faith in God she was aware of

her son's special destiny that it might be possible that as soon as he would be placed in the water, the astrologers would see that the savior of the Jews had already been "cast" into the water. By the baby being placed into the river herself, the purpose of the king's decree would have been accomplished and yet her baby would be safe. She just followed the command to cast her baby boy into the river, and if he did not drown she would be free to bring him back home.

For safekeeping, Miriam is sent to stand by the river to watch and see what happens. It was just soon after the baby was placed in the river that a princess, the daughter of the pharaoh came with her maidens to bathe. Had Jochebed known when the princess and her maidens would come for a bath? Had she witnessed this before and planned this time for 'casting' her baby into the river?

The princess saw the basket and that he was crying. Because of his tears, she took pity on him. Miriam then appears and asks the princess if she should get a nurse from amongst the Hebrew women to nurse the child. Miriam is quite remarkable to think this out because of course she gets her mother who has nursed this baby since he was born and by doing so, saves her brother's life. Jochebed goes to the river and speaks to the princess. The princess instructs her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." Was this a great outcome to the problem or what? Now Jochebed has the baby back, is able to raise him and nurse him at his home and gets paid to do so. Yes she must bring the child to Pharaoh's daughter after he grows up but he will live in the palace of the pharaoh! The baby is named "Moses" because he was drawn out of the water. The water that was initially supposed to kill him not only saves him, but is the meaning of his name.

Why do we like this story? Because it is filled with hope amidst loss, death and life are intermingled and because it is the beginning of the story of a man who will save his people from the hands of those who really save him. It is the Egyptian throne through the emotional attachment of the princess which gives shelter to the powerless infant. Pharaoh's daughter has pity for the baby who is set free to die in the river and she cannot cope with the death of this baby. We don't know if she ever spoke to her father about her thoughts on this command he made about male infants. But we do know she has pity upon the child as it slowly drifts down the river under the watchful eye of his sister

After he is weaned, Moses returns to the palace and lives as an adopted grandson to the pharaoh. In the palace, Moses will be educated by a tutor as he will be considered a prince. Tutors not only taught basic skills of language and communication, but also about leadership, military power and

defining the enemy. His tutors would include high officials of the court and often retired military leaders who advised the pharaoh.

Yet we know that Moses is not content in the palace and even though he has moved from a rags to riches situation, he leaves the court because he still identifies himself with the Hebrew people. We read in Hebrews 11:24-26 "By faith, Moses when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considers abuse suffered for the Messiah to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt. " He marries from within his tribe and soon after God calls to him to begin the period of his life called the journey. God set Moses' task before him and he was to lead his people into the Promised Land.

From an infant born into a loving family, to the risk of death for who he was, to being nurtured as a young child, Moses had a strong Hebrew beginning. He later moved into the palace and was taught military techniques and languages. Yet Moses was not content and when he saw that the Egyptians were still oppressing his people, he killed a man. He then left the palace and returned to his Hebrew roots. He soon learned from God it was time to leave. It is Moses who humiliates, pesters and proves to the pharaoh that God is the one who determines life and death. Eventually the Hebrew people are released to go with Moses leading the way.

The pharaoh's command to kill all infant males backfires upon him with time. For one of those babies who was supposed to die, was saved and becomes a clear leader in the court. It is Moses who declares his roots and grows stronger in faith as he proves to the pharaoh what God can do. It is Moses who leads his people through the desert for over 40 years. When they are to enter Canaan he merely looks at the land. He is highly revered for his leadership as he led generations of the Hebrew people to this point. He has used the talents and wisdom he has been given by God and through faith his humble beginning is justified-a man brought out of water dies knowing he could do no more.

Just for a moment think about your life, its beginnings, its middle times (where you are right now ) and its endings. Is God moving your life from rags to riches? That is spiritually you have come to know Christ within you and your life is abundant? Or were you once rich and living with the best only realizing that what was missing was your grounding as a child, the simple faith knowing that God loves you and that Jesus died and rose for you? Or are you at a point in your life where you are comfortable,

both physically and spiritually? What does this mean as we seek to grow in relationship with Christ Jesus? Are we searching further, deeper or at all?

As Moses story ends in Deuteronomy, he blesses each tribe as they prepare to enter Canaan. He also shares his faith and is grateful to God. Moses' beginning almost ended in tragedy. Had it, we would not know of his faithful life. Nor would we know of the princess who had pity on the infant which in time would become the one who would lead to the downfall of Egyptian power.

Yet when we think of Moses we are grateful for he lived to fulfil his life's plan. Moses moved from a baby drifting down the river to a man of great faith and he used everything God gave. What a life testament? What about you? How might you respond to the words of Erma Bombeck in this moment? Are you still using your talents, answering God's call to serve, hearing Jesus' voice calling you to tell others? What do these words mean to you?

"When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left; And could say I used everything You gave me."

We pray:

Thank you God for the story of Moses whom you called to a special task to save the Israelite people. You have called us and we are yours. Enable us to use all the talents you have bestowed upon and enable us to fulfill what you call us to do and be here, now and for the rest of our lives. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.