



**LIVING WORD
EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

Evangelical • Reformed • Catholic

She Named Him Moses

Exodus 2:1-10

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Last Sunday we began our look at the book of Exodus and I started out asking how we should respond to the trials of life. The world is full of sinful people and we all face the fallout of it. We all face the trials associated with sin's corruption of God's creation. The wages of sin is death and, even as we live in hope of the life of God in age to come, sickness and pain and death are the reality of even God's own people in the present age. And then there's the opposition faced by the people of God in a world that resists with all its might the royal summons of the gospel. How do we respond? Last week I said that our first step is recognising that we are God's people. If we are in Jesus the Messiah, we are adopted members of his family and sons and daughter of God. We are part of the family, called, elected, chosen, formed by God that goes back to Abraham. That, itself, is a huge source of comfort in the midst of our trials, but the knowledge that we are God's people points us to the past *so that we* can have a future hope. The knowledge that we are God's people and family should drive us into the Scriptures. Because there we see how God has dealt with, loved, disciplined, delivered, and redeemed his people in the past. It's there that we learn that God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and always. And so we can know that how God has love and disciplined and delivered and redeemed his people in the past gives us direction and hope and assurance that he will continue to love and discipline and deliver and redeem us. The story of God and his people in the past assures us that God is working today. It's not that it gives us the

knowledge or understanding to say in any situation that God is certainly doing this or that or such-and-such and it doesn't give us permission to presume upon God. God has a surprising knack of doing very different things at different times and with different people. But the story of our past as a people teaches us principles and gives us assurance so that even in those times when God may seem absent, we can know that he is at work and has not abandoned us—even in the most difficult situations. If we know the story—if we've really internalised it and let it shape who we are and how we live and think—we can say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." And we can say that because we know that God does what he says he will do and he does it without fail.

In Chapter 1 the story opened. Really, it continued. Even though roughly four hundred years have passed, it picks up where Genesis left off. Abraham's family is in Egypt and God has fulfilled the first part of his promise to Abraham. The family has grown. The writer literally says that they're teeming or swarming in Egypt. God is at work in creative and redemptive power. But Pharaoh only sees the danger. He sees foreigners who pose a threat. First, he makes them slaves. He tries to break them through oppression. But God is on their side and their numbers continue to grow. Pharaoh then gives orders to the Hebrew midwives: kill the baby boys of the Hebrews as soon as they're born. But this doesn't work either. The midwives trust in the Lord and they fear him more than they fear Pharaoh. The Hebrews continue to increase in number. And so, in a final desperate effort, Pharaoh calls on the Egyptians themselves, ordering them to drown the children of the Hebrews in the Nile with their own hands. The Nile was God's gift to Egypt. It was the source of Egypt's life and the source of Egypt's prosperity. And Pharaoh turns it into an instrument of death.

The scene so far is bleak. But even though God hasn't even been mentioned yet, we see him at work and hope glimmers. If we know the story that precedes Exodus, we know that the Lord had made a promise to Abraham and in the prolific multiplication of this family we see God at work behind the scenes. He has called and he has purposed and nothing will stop his plans. Bruce Waltke writes this, "Election entails completion; what God elects to do, he does."¹ That's the light in the darkness. We'll come back to this later.

First, Exodus, Chapter 2:

Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. (Exodus 2:1-2)

Why do you think the writer makes a point of telling us that this man and his wife were Levites? Do you remember why the tribe of Levi was important? It hasn't happened yet, but when the Israelites get to Sinai, the Lord will choose the tribe of Levi to be the priests of Israel. They'll be the ones to carry the tabernacle and the ark, to set them up, to offer sacrifices, and to serve as mediators between the Lord and his people. The point in telling us this is to establish the child's priestly bona fides. It also points to the New Testament—or, probably better, the New Testament points us back here when the Evangelists tell us about the birth of Jesus and give us the genealogies of Joseph and Mary, reminding us that on both sides of the family, Jesus had a royal ancestry and was a son of David. In both stories we're also given a picture of how God works. In both cases, God calls a people, then he calls a tribe, and then he calls a single individual through whom he brings deliverance to the whole: From Israel, to Levi, to Moses and then again, from Israel, to Judah,

¹ *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 353.

to Jesus. The New Testament writers highlight things like this because they saw them as signs that God was about to act once again. As he called and raised up Moses, he called and raised up Jesus for something even greater.

We'll learn later that his man and woman are called Amram and Jochebed. We'll also learn that they already had a daughter, named Miriam, and a son, named Aaron. But those details can come later. The focus here is on the son born in the shadow of Pharaoh's oppression and murderous decree. The woman gave birth to this son and she saw that he was good. The ESV, unfortunately, masks something important here when it says that she saw he was a "fine child". The Hebrew word is *tov*. It's the same word used in the first Chapter of Genesis as God creates. Each thing he created God saw as *tov*, as "good". Again, the creative power of God is at work here in the birth of this little boy—the power that will unleash re-creation into the world, bringing deliverance and setting right what sin has corrupted and made a mess of.

For three months, we're told, Jochebed hid her baby from the Egyptians. How did she do it? Veronica said to me this week, "You can't hide a screaming baby." Presumably their neighbours covered for them. Aaron was only three and the cries of the baby, if they attracted attention, might have been blamed on little Aaron. But Veronica is right. You can't hide a baby forever and Jochebed figured this out. Maybe they had a close call. She had to find another way to hide her boy. Look at verses 3 and 4:

When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him.

Ironically, Jochebed follows Pharaoh's orders: she puts her baby in the Nile. God is a god of irony and poetic justice. We see it time after time. Pharaoh commanded that all the baby boys of the Hebrews be thrown in the Nile, so into the Nile goes Amram and Jochebed's baby boy. Of course, she puts the baby in a basket first. Again, the ESV obscures an important part of the writer's story-telling. The word used for the basket is the same word used for Noah's ship: it's an "ark". The word is only used in these two places and it highlights a connection that leaves no question: Even though he hasn't been named, God is at work. The idea of hiding your baby in a basket in the reeds at the edge of a great river is crazy. But so was building an ark. And God, sovereign over all, used both. He spared Noah's ark on the raging waters of the flood and he'll spare Jochebed's ark in the waters of the Nile.

Of course, things don't always go as planned. The popular image, probably thanks to movies, is that Jochebed put her baby in an ark and set him adrift on the river, entrusting him to Providence. I'd never thought much about that image until I started digging into the story and the longer I looked at it, the more I saw something different. I'm convinced that Jochebed's intent was simply to hide her baby, not to set him adrift. She put him in the reeds, no doubt a short distance from their home. (That wouldn't have been hard, since virtually everything in Egypt was within a mile or two of the Nile. Look today at satellite images and you'll see the narrowest of narrow green strips that follows the Nile the length of Egypt. More than a mile or two from the river and you run into open desert.) So Jochebed put him in this basket—really something like a chest—made of papyrus reeds and sealed with tar and pitch so that it was water-tight. She put it near the bank of the river in a place where the current wouldn't grab it, and she stationed her young

daughter to keep watch. If anyone saw her, they would just assume she was a kid playing in the river. Jochebed, herself, could sneak down to the river periodically to hold and nurse the baby, but his cries would be far enough away, hopefully, that no one would hear them. And, of course, who would suspect. What kind of bad mother puts her baby in a basket in the river? But then something happens that no one expected. Verse 5:

Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. (Exodus 2:5)

Pharaoh's own daughter comes to the river for a swim. Miriam must have known what it meant if an Egyptian found her brother. Imagine her panic as she sees the women pointing at the basket in the reeds and then as they open it up to find the baby. And yet there's more at work here than human planning. Jochebed's plan was, honestly, kind of a stupid one. But God is at work. Jochebed's plan didn't go as expected and—imagine Miriam's heart racing as the princess opens the basket—neither do Miriam's expectations of what's about to happen. Look at verse 6:

When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children."

The princess recognises the baby as a Hebrew from the get-go, but seeing him there, crying in the basket, she takes pity on him. She falls in love with the little foundling. She must have known that she couldn't take a Hebrew baby home. He would have been taken back and thrown in the Nile, this time without the basket. And now Miriam step in, with some quick thinking, and saves the day.

Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. And 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.

Miriam boldly approaches the princess and says, "I know someone who can nurse the baby for you." From the perspective of the princess, it's the perfect solution. If she's going to keep the baby, she's going to need a wet nurse anyway and she also knows that she can't take the baby home for fear it will be taken away and killed. This solves both problems. The nurse can return the baby when he's been weaned, which probably would have been about the age of three or four. Hopefully, by then, Pharaoh's order to throw the Hebrew children into the river would have been rescinded or, at least, no one would have had the heart or the gall to kill the princess' adopted three- or four-year-old son.

Imagine Jochebed's surprise and joy when she finds her problem has been solved. The Lord took her crazy idea to hide the baby in the river and did something absolutely amazing. Now she can raise her baby in the open and without fear. And, we're told, she even received an allowance from the princess in exchange. God is good.

Verse 10 now jumps several years ahead:

When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

At the palace there would have been some kind of formal adoption ceremony in which the child was named. The explanation for the name

"Moses" is difficult and scholars don't all agree on exactly what's going on here. One thing that's obvious and that everyone agrees on is that "Moses" is an Egyptian, not a Hebrew name. It means something like "boy child" and it was a common component of Egyptian names that you've all heard, like "Thuthmosis," which means "son of (the god) Thoth". It's very possible Moses was just part of the name given to the baby here. Whatever the case, it also happens to sound similar to the Hebrew verb "to draw out" and the writer connects the two. Moses, the boy-child, has been providentially drawn out of the water so that he can one day draw his people out of their slavery.

That's as far as we'll go today. There's still no mention of God, but we see him at work nevertheless. It's impossible to miss, especially when we know his promises given in the part of the story that came earlier in Genesis and have already seen the way he so often works to fulfil his plans in ways that were totally unexpected. The story of Jochebed trying to save her baby illustrates beautifully the truth of Proverbs 16:9, "Man plans his journey by his own wit, but it is the LORD who guides his steps" (NEB). The Lord used Jochebed's crazy plan to do something far beyond her wildest expectations and, as the story continues, we'll see the Lord working through Moses to do far more than save the life of one little boy.

And that gets back to our original problem. Where is the place for our faith in the midst of trials and suffering? What does it do for us? Jochebed's story turned out to be a happy one. God not only saved her baby, but gave him right back to her. There's a lesson there for us. But what about all the *other* Hebrew mothers who had their sons ripped from their arms and drowned in the Nile? I wonder if they doubted God. I wonder how many of them saw God at work saving the life of Jochebed's

baby and became resentful and bitter when their own babies died, asking "Why did God save her baby, but not mine?"

That's how it so often goes in so many ways and in so many different situations. Why did that person get better while I'm still sick? Why are their kids still faithfully following Jesus while mine aren't? Why is so-and-so rich and I'm poor? Why is that church growing, but ours seems stagnant? Contemporary Western Evangelicalism with its constant focus on the therapeutic and the message that God wants us happy and comfortable has left us unprepared to answer the question of suffering. Worse, the false Prosperity Gospel that seems to be everywhere these days is telling people that health and prosperity are the fruit of faith and that suffering and poverty are due to a lack of faith. It's no wonder that the faith of many Christians is crushed by this sort of thing.

We've lost sight of the bigger picture—not to mention the words and promises of Scripture. We've misread St. Paul. He writes in Romans 8:28, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" and we've taken "good" to mean that we'll be happy all the time. But that's not at all what Paul is saying. God's vision of the good is far broader and deeper and long-term than we can ever fathom. God's vision of the good is aimed at the renewal of the entirety of his Creation—the creation we corrupted with our sin and idolatry. The good often comes, not through our wealth and health, but through our trials and tribulations. As Tertullian once said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."² It was through the faithful witness of those who died for the sake of Jesus and his kingdom that the gospel eventually swept through the Greco-Roman world like wildfire.

² *Apologeticus*, 50.

We may see the good now, but we may have to wait. We may never see it in our lifetimes. But God's promise to his people remains.

We see it in Exodus. The promise to make his people into a great nation was fulfilled. It was a sort of down payment on the rest of the promise—to give them the promised land and to make them a blessing to the world. Having seen a partial fulfilment, the Hebrews could live in faith and hope that God would complete what he had begun. And if that was true of them, how much more true is it of us? All of this was working towards Jesus. He died and was raised from the grave. That was the hard part, but it's been fulfilled so that we can live in faith-filled hope that God will do the easy part of fulfilling the rest, one day making all things new, wiping every last bit of sin and death from Creation and, with it, every last tear.

Brothers and Sisters, this faith, rooted in the faithfulness of God, is what keeps us walking, whether it's beside still waters or through the valley of the shadow of death. It's that faith that trusts God even when he doesn't go along with our plans or doesn't do things the way we expect or think he should. Again, God's vision is infinitely wider than ours and his plans always turn out better than ours ever could. Think again of Exodus. God could have dealt with Pharaoh's murderous decree by simply striking him down. That would have saved the Hebrew babies, but it wouldn't have saved the Hebrew people in the long run. Instead, God used Pharaoh's wickedness against him and for his own purposes. He providentially saw that Moses was put in the very Nile where Pharaoh would have had him drowned, then ensured he was found and adopted by Pharaoh's own daughter, and placed him right in Pharaoh's own household. The deliverer of Israel can grow up in safety and later accomplish something on a grander scale than Jochebed could have ever imagined.

We see the same principle at work in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus could have struck down his enemies at any time. That was essentially the devil's temptation in the wilderness. That would have brought glory in the short-term, but would not have brought redemption to humanity and to the world. We often think that Jesus brought salvation *despite* death, but the reality is that he brought salvation *through* his death. Jesus could only triumph over death by experiencing it, by enduring it himself. Jesus allowed sin and death to do their absolute worst *so that* he could rise from death as the victor. They did their worst, but Jesus did better. And something similar goes for us as his people. Suffering, says the Bible time after time, is a cause for joy, because we know that through it God is building perseverance and hope. Paul writes in Romans 5:2-5:

We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

And be careful. Paul's not talking about enduring suffering with a stiff upper lip or putting on a bold front. He's talking about finding a faith-filled joy as our faithful God brings us closer to himself. James says something similar:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Brothers and Sisters, all things work together for good, because all things—

in God's plan—bring us into conformity with the character of Jesus. Pete Enns writes, "This same resurrection power that raised Christ from the dead is also at work in the lives of those who are called according to purpose in Christ. In the same way that God's resurrection power brought Christ victory *through* death, so too does this resurrection power bring us through all our trials and challenges, and, like Christ, ultimately through the great challenge, death itself...It is a great comfort to know that the Lord is so mighty that he actually uses these circumstances for our good—what a mystery this is! He does not always 'do battle' with them and defeat them. As Moses' birth and Christ's resurrection show, he sometimes actually converts those same debilitating circumstances into some benefit for his saints."³

That's not to say that living in faith and finding joy in all our circumstances is easy. If it were easy, Paul and James—not to mention Jesus—wouldn't have had to spell it out for us so many times. But, Brothers and Sisters, if we know who we are—we are the people of God—and if we know our story, that becomes the foundation, the bedrock of our faith in the God who always has and always will complete every good work.

Let us pray: Father, we prayed earlier in the Collect, acknowledging you to be the governor of all things in heaven and on earth and, in light of that, we prayed for your peace. We pray, too, for faith. Teach us to find assurance in your sovereign governance, drive us into your Word that we might know, backwards and forwards, the story of your past faithfulness, and grow our faith that we might live in hope and be joyful in all things, firm in the knowledge that you are bringing good to your creation through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

³ *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 74.