

Moses: Preparation & Commission

Exodus 2:16 – 4:17

Introduction: Moses on the Run

Last week we were introduced to Moses in the book of Exodus. The Pharaoh, concerned about the growing numbers of Hebrew slaves, gave an order that all male children were to be thrown into the Nile River. Jocabed hid this beautiful child of hers for three months. No longer able to guard his life, she put him in an ark – that’s the Hebrew word – and set it adrift in the Nile.

Pharaoh’s daughter, who had come to the river to bathe, spotted the ark, opened it up and took pity on the baby. She decided he would be hers. The baby’s sister had been keeping watch. She offered to find a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby; of course the nurse would be the baby’s mother. And for the next 3-4 years, the baby grew up in the home of his natural parents, no doubt being taught about the God of his forefathers.

For the next 36-37 years of his life, Moses was raised in the palace of the Pharaoh, a royal son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He enjoyed all the privileges and benefits that came with this exalted position.

Then at the age of 40, he went out to one of the work camps where the Hebrews were being brutalized in slavery. Seeing one of the Egyptian overseers beating a Hebrew slave, Moses intervened, killing the Egyptian and burying his body in the sand.

Moses thought he read the signs correctly and set out to be the deliverer of Israel. But, obviously, he didn’t read the signs right. And there were consequences. It pays to read signs correctly.

Sitting on the side of the road and waiting to catch speeding drivers, a Massachusetts State trooper sees a car pattering along at 24 miles per hour. He thinks to himself, “This driver is as dangerous as a speeder?” So he turns on his lights and pulls the driver over.

Approaching the car, he notices that there are five elderly ladies, two in the front and three in the back, wide-eyed and white as ghosts.

The driver, obviously confused, says to him, “Officer, I don’t understand. I was going the EXACT speed limit. What seems to be the problem?”

The trooper trying to contain a chuckle explains to her that 24 was the route number, NOT the speed limit. A bit embarrassed, the woman grinned and thanked the officer for pointing out her error.

“But before you go, Ma’am, I have to ask, is everyone in this car okay? These women seem awfully shaken.”

“Oh, they’ll be all right in a minute, officer. We just got off Route 128.”

Moses doesn’t read the signs right. It’s not the time, nor the place for the deliverance from slavery, and certainly he’s not the man – at this time.

After his failed attempt at being the “deliverer” for God’s people, he flees for his life.

Exodus 2:15

He runs off to Midian. The Midianites were a nomadic people who moved on both the east and west sides of the Gulf of Aqaba, between the Sinai Peninsula and Arabia.

Exodus 2:16-22

Moses ends up staying with the family of a Midian priest, becoming a shepherd, and marrying one of the priest’s daughters – Lady Bird. That’s right, the original Lady Bird. Zipporah: Zippor in the Hebrew is “bird;” “ah” is the feminine ending in Hebrew.

What do you suppose Moses is thinking and feeling over the years in the desert? Failure; questioning his actions back in Egypt and God’s intentions; despair of a bad choice, of terrible timing; feeling “stuck;” a grudging acceptance of a life to be lived out in the desert; a destiny gone awry?

Perhaps he feels like the man who wrote this letter to his pastor, Erwin Lutzer:

I am a man thirty-one years old and divorced, though I fought the divorce bitterly. I feel bad because I have no hope for the future; often I go home from church and cry. But there is no one to hold me when I cry. No one cares. What hurts most is that I’ve begged God for the grace to be single for his glory and to fix my eyes on Jesus, but nothing changes. I continue to fail.

I am a basket case emotionally, or on the verge of collapse. Something is very wrong. I am so crippled and embittered that I can scarcely relate to others anymore. I feel I have to sit out the rest of my life in the penalty box.

Have you been there? Felt like that? Maybe that would describe your situation – in the penalty box! This must have been something of what Moses was feeling.

When we come to Exodus, chapter three, forty years have passed in Moses' life.

I. The Desert Education: Preparation

A. Two important things we should note:

- 1) God was not unaware or uncaring of the needs of his people. – **Exodus 2:23-25**

Are you ever tempted to think those thoughts? God doesn't know what I am going through; God doesn't seem to care. Let me remind you of David's comments in Psalm 139:

How precious are your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand.

- 2) God was not rushed to prepare his servant and to accomplish his task. God's perfect timing – the intersection of Israel's suffering, the passing of those who sought Moses' life, the completion of the 400 years of bondage foretold to Abraham in Genesis 15, and the preparation of God's man – Moses; Moses becoming lead-able.

Listen, God has never missed one of his deadlines! Not in your life either!

B. Chuck Swindoll suggests that Moses was educated in the Desert University by four faculty members:

- 1) **Dr. Obscurity** – from the limelight of Egyptian royalty to the obscurity of a shepherd in Midian. He went from a "somebody" to a "nobody" quicker than you can shake a staff. How quickly he fell off that radar screen. One thing I have observed over the past 30 plus years in Washington is how fast people in prominence can fall off the public stage.
- 2) **Dr. Time** – Moses was to learn that God's time was not his time. He had set out to help God out and to deliver the Israelites in his own way. He acted impulsively and impetuously, thinking that the people would rally around him, proclaiming him as deliverer, and follow him to the Promised Land. Boy, was he wrong! Instead of being heralded as a Deliverer, he was hunted as a fugitive.
- 3) **Dr. Solitude** – The desert is a lonely place. Moses had a lot of time to think. We have no record of divine interaction, but certainly Moses must have reflected upon his failure, analyzing and agonizing over what went wrong. At some point, he must have resigned himself to a shepherd's occupation for life, sitting in the penalty box.

4) **Dr. Discomfort** – God used the harsh environment of the desert to toughen Moses up. Could he have led the Hebrews out of Egypt and into the desert from his luxurious living in the palace? I don't think so. Moses was certainly hardened physically and mentally for the task of leadership that lay ahead.

How do you handle the “desert” experience?

- “I don't need it!” Danger of pride and a sense of indispensability.
- “I'm tired of it!” We often come to this point well into the process; danger of discouragement and doubt
- “I accept it.” As someone has said, “Let confusion work for you.”

And then, God steps onto the scene – **Exodus 3:1-9**

II. The Divine Revelation: Consecration

God takes the initiative. Moses isn't seeking anything, but now God begins to implement his plan, the center of which is Moses. God identifies himself in a way that Moses would understand: the “God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” – the God of his forefathers.

God teaches Moses something of his character – in fact, the central quality of his character: his holiness. That word “holiness” means essentially *separation* – something that is set apart. God is set apart from everything he has created. This is the great distinction between God and man. He is separate from, other than, all other things and beings.

This was a lesson that Moses and the people would be challenged to learn frequently during their sojourn. That revelation of holiness calls forth from Moses the response of consecration.

There is also a reminder that God's plan and timing have not been thwarted by this 40-year period of preparation. He again reiterates that he has heard the cries of his people; he has seen their suffering; he knows their condition; he has remembered his covenant.

What follows now is a remarkable account of Moses' commissioning to his divine mission – remarkable in Moses' human frailty and God's patience.

III. The Divinely-Appointed Mission: Commission

Now, God doesn't ask for Moses' advice nor seek his permission. He simply tells him to go. Moses is still trapped in his old paradigm: “I already tried that, and it didn't work!” You see, Moses failed to see he was not the Deliverer, but only the instrument.

Exodus, chapters three and four, records a dialogue between Moses and God. God tells Moses his plan. Moses wants to negotiate the contract! He throws up a series of objections. With each, God counters, until Moses must finally choose: God's way or his way.

A. Objection 1: "I don't have the credentials." Exodus 3:10-11

We live in a metropolitan area that worships credentials – so much so that many fall into the temptation to pad their resumes and accomplishments. Now, education is fine, but the temptation becomes that without more, I can't do anything for the Lord.

I remember a very successful businessman who printed business cards with his name followed by "DMN." He was asked, "What does that stand for?" He replied, "Don't Mean Nothin'."

God's answer: "You have Me!" **Exodus 3:12** The promise of God; the presence of God.

The smartest person, the most credentialed person isn't often the person God uses. In fact, sometimes worldly smarts gets in the way.

A minister, a Boy Scout, and a computer expert were the only passengers on a small plane. The pilot came back to the cabin and said that the plane was going down but there were only three parachutes and four people. The pilot added, "I should have one of the parachutes because I have a wife and three small children." So he took one and jumped.

The computer whiz said, "I should have one of the parachutes because I am the smartest man in the world and everyone needs me." So he took one and jumped.

The minister turned to the Boy Scout and with a sad smile said, "You are young and I have lived a rich life, so you take the remaining parachute, and I'll go down with the plane."

The Boy Scout said, "Relax, Reverend, the smartest man in the world just picked up my knapsack and jumped out!"

More important than who you are, is who God is!

B. Objection 2 – Exodus 3:13 "I don't have all the answers. I'm going to go back and the people are going to say, 'Hmm. Tell us about that bush that burns but is not consumed. Very interesting! Did it have a name?'"

God's answer: "Tell them what you know – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Move from the known to the unknown.

Exodus 3:14-22

There's debate among scholars as to the name that God uses to reveal himself. It might be "I AM," or it might be LORD – Yahweh: God's covenant name.

It's interesting that though God so often ties himself back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the past, he is the God of the present. "I AM" – the Hebrew verb "to be." Present tense. God is eternally in the now.

Go with me on a relevant rabbit trail for a moment. The reason you can trust God is because he is eternally present. He knows the beginning to the end. Time does not govern him; he created time and exists outside time. Someone wrote a piece that captures the significance of this for us today.

I was regretting the past and fearing the future...

Suddenly my Lord was speaking:

"My name is I AM." He paused.

I waited. He continued.

"When you live in the past,
With its mistakes and regrets,
It is hard. I am not there.
My name is not I WAS.

"When you live in the future,
With all its problems and fears,
It is hard. I am not there.
My name is not I WILL BE.

When you live in this moment,
It is not hard.
I am here.
My name is I AM."

God was present with Moses, and wants Moses to find in him that sense of the present. It's that promise, "I am with you – right now, right here."

C. Objection 3 – Exodus 4:1 "They might not believe me. I've tried this before, remember?"

God's answer: "I give you my power. I will demonstrate my power through you."

Exodus 4:2-9

This is one of three periods in biblical history where there is a broad display of the miraculous to authenticate the message and the messenger. By the way, where did Moses get this staff with which he would do miracles? He got it while serving in the penalty box. It was the instrument of his vocation during his desert education.

D. Objection 4 – Exodus 4:10-12 “I don’t have the ability.”

God’s answer: “I have given you all you need.” Folks, God has uniquely gifted you, as he did Moses, to accomplish all the tasks he has given you to do!

Here is where we have to be very careful about the disease of comparisonitis. We look at others and think – “Those are people God can use, but not me.

It’s like the two cows who were grazing in a pasture. A milk truck went by on the road. On the side of the truck were the words, “Pasteurized, homogenized, standardized, vitamin A added.” One cow turned to the other and said, “Makes you feel kind of inadequate, doesn’t it?”

E. Objection 5 – Exodus 4:13-16 “I’m not qualified.” Moses is running out of excuses, so he pulls out the ultimate stopper: “Just send someone else!”

God’s answer: “You are my choice, but you won’t go alone.” God tells Moses that his brother, Aaron, will be his spokesman. I believe Moses misses some of the blessings God had for him because of his excuses. Not only that, Aaron is put into a position of leadership that later causes great harm.

Moses is faced with the choice: his way or God’s way. He chooses God’s way! He returns to his father-in-law and asks for his release that he might return to Egypt. And so he does. That’s where we will pick up the story next week.

Conclusion

Have you seen yourself anywhere in Moses’ experience yet?

Some of you might be living in the palace of luxury: assimilated into the culture, blissfully unaware of or uncaring about God’s way. God wants to awaken you, shake you from your lethargy, wants you to get serious about his call in your life.

Some of you might see yourself, as Moses did, this way: “Isn’t God lucky to have me on his team?” And, whether with pure or selfish motive, you are trying to serve God on your

own – in your strength and wisdom. The first step in God’s renewal plan with Moses was to show him his holiness. When we see God as he really is, our only response will be to fall on our knees before him, confess our sinfulness and need of him, and put our lives at his service.

Some of you might be giving God all the excuses you can think of why you shouldn’t be serving him. Queen Elizabeth of the British Commonwealth is celebrating her 60th year on the throne. When she was crowned in 1952, those of noble blood received invitations with the words, “All excuses set apart.” It was unthinkable that someone would have used an excuse to miss the coronation. God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, wants you – your life, your obedience, your service. How could we refuse his invitation?

Some of you might be in the desert experience of life. You feel you have failed God, failed in your service to God. You are sitting in the penalty box, resigned to the fact that God will never be able to use you again.

You might be tempted to give up on yourself, but God doesn’t give up on you! Moses is prime example # 1.

So often we have good intentions, only to go down in flames – confused, discouraged and defeated. And we sit on the sidelines and conclude that God is done with us. How we wish it weren’t so!

The old country preacher, Vance Havner, once said: “You don’t need to pray, ‘Lord, use me.’ You get usable and the Lord will wear you out.

That’s Moses here. He just had to get usable.

Do you remember the man who wrote the letter about being in the penalty box? Three years later, Lutzer received the following letter from him:

I am writing to testify of the marvelous grace of God. I’ve learned many lessons in my desert – my penalty box – but God has used my pain to bring me lovingly, mercifully to him.

Just when I thought I was hopeless, God revealed my sin and self-centeredness that was my sad condition before him. He stripped me of my pretension and showed me my unbelief. I learned that God cannot simply be one of my options, but I must risk my life, my soul, my sanity on him, and him only. I must believe that he is exactly who he says he is in his Word. When I was most bankrupt, he gave me the strength to forsake all and follow Christ.

Before, my focus was always on me: my happiness, my circumstances, my emotions. Now, it is on God. As a by-product of focusing on him, his joy is alive in me. Though tough circumstances still have their sting, I can cast my care on him and he gives me “his exceeding great and precious promises.”

It strikes me that these are admonitions I have heard for years, but it is the doing of them that makes all the difference. Through my desert times, false cults and false brethren would offer a way that seemed right, but would cast doubt upon the Word of God. Yet, I found victory by fully committing myself to God. Thank God I’m out of the penalty box and back in the game.

Wherever you see yourself this morning, I encourage you to look to God, trust in God, wait for God. He will meet you where you are and reveal himself to you through his Word and give you direction on what you should do.