

Deliverance From Slavery

Message 2

Preparing a Deliverer

Exodus 2:1-25

No Place for Babies

Would you have a baby if you knew you could not keep it? Would you and your spouse have a baby if you knew it was certain to be killed? I know this is hard for some of you to imagine, but try. You are madly in love with the greatest guy or girl in the world, and you conceive a baby. Month by month the little person grows in the womb. Fingers arms and legs emerge, fingers and toes form, and mom's belly gets big with the precious life within. You imagine a tiny version of you or your spouse, and think of playing with him or her, teaching him to walk, hearing her first words. But it will never happen. You know that as soon as your baby is born, hateful Egyptians will seize him and throw him into the Nile River. In minutes your wonderful baby will be dead, food for the crocodiles.

How did we ever get to this point, where babies would be fed to the crocodiles? It goes back 400 years. Last week we reviewed how the Hebrew people ended up in Egypt. Long ago Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream and saved Egypt from famine. As food disappeared all over the Middle East, only Egypt had enough grain in storage to prevent starvation – and Joseph's family moved to Egypt to survive the famine. That was 400 years ago. For a long time Egyptians and Hebrews lived together happily. The Hebrews herded sheep in Goshen, and the Egyptians farmed along the Nile. But the Hebrews multiplied rapidly and the Egyptians began to fear them. The Hebrews did not assimilate into Egyptian culture. They maintained their own language and God and customs. Anxiety grew into fear until a new Pharaoh who did not know about Joseph decided to reduce the Hebrew population.

We saw that there were three steps in this population reduction plan. First Pharaoh subjected the Hebrews to harsh slavery. But the worse he treated them, the more the Hebrews reproduced. Then Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill all male babies. But the midwives feared God more than Pharaoh, and they disobeyed his order. Finally Pharaoh ordered anyone who found a Hebrew boy to throw him into the Nile. He was determined to cut back the population of these pesky immigrants. What Pharaoh did not know was that the Hebrews were the people of Yahweh. God had made a covenant with them long ago. He had personally promised to care for them and protect them. The Hebrews were God's own nation. Pharaoh thought he was protecting Egypt from rogue immigrants, but really he was attacking the God of the universe.

What sort of people would have a baby under such conditions? Enslaved to a genocidal maniac, nowhere to go, and no way to protect yourself or your family – who would risk having a baby? Perhaps Moses' parents were so in love with each other they did not think about the consequences of sex. And of course there were no birth control pills in ancient Egypt. But the more we think about Moses' mother, the more she appears to be an unusual woman.

The Resourceful Mother

Here she was, a Hebrew woman with a baby boy. She knew the law. All boy babies must be thrown into the Nile. But what mother can just destroy her own baby? Like any mother, she loved her baby and thought he was the best thing in the world. So she did her best to hide him. It is possible to hide a small baby for a few months if he does not cry too loudly. We can imagine Moses' mother taking great care to see that he was well-fed, his diaper changed, and all needs met so that he would not fuss. But eventually babies get bigger and louder, and it is impossible to hide a baby forever. It came time to throw Moses into the Nile. But now we see the resourcefulness of his mother. She actually obeyed Pharaoh, but she was very creative about it. When Moses went into the Nile, he was protected by a little boat.

How likely is it that Moses' little boat would happen to pass by a friendly Egyptian princess? Certainly God was looking out for him. And how is it that Moses' sister was on hand to offer a nurse for the princess? Was it her idea to watch over her little brother? Was Miriam a courageous and thoughtful sister, or did her mother instruct her to keep an eye on Moses' boat? Did she on her own think to offer to find a nurse for Moses? Who can tell? What is crystal clear is that God miraculously preserved Moses' life. And the mother who cared so much about him had the pleasure of rearing him for several years.

This passage leaves us with many questions, but one other thing is clear – Moses' mother did not give up on her baby. Without detracting from God's divine role in Moses' survival we can see that Moses' mother used every means possible to protect her baby. Now you may say this is what any mother would do, and that is true. But how often do we, when faced with a tough situation, simply give up? The issue here is larger – much larger – than the survival of a beautiful baby. Moses' life was in danger because of Pharaoh's war against God's people. Pharaoh did not care about Moses, but about crippling the strength of God's people. So to protect Moses was to fight back against Pharaoh in his war against God.

I doubt that any of us here are expecting a baby soon, but all of us are involved in the cosmic battle against evil. The first application of this passage is to engage the battle around us. Moses' mother did not have to hide Moses in a boat. She could have just kept him home and hoped for the best. But that was not good enough for a woman such as she. Moses' mother used all her ingenuity and devised a creative means of protecting her baby. Faced with overwhelming evil she did not give up. She faced her enemy square on with all of her ability.

Is this your attitude toward evil? When you find yourself in a difficult and perplexing moral problem, do you give up? Or is your attitude one of persevering until you find a way to serve God in the face of adversity? We can think of many real-life situations. In four months some of you here will be told to take a final exam on the Lord's Day. This is the day which God has reserved for Himself. In particular, Jesus calls you to assemble to hear His voice and eat His meal. For most of us this happens in the morning. Who are you going to obey? Jesus, or Lehigh University? Some Christian students shrug their shoulders and give up. They think they have no choice but to skip worship and take their exam. Now this is actually a relatively easy situation to solve. Lehigh will allow you to reschedule an exam for religious reasons. All you have to do is follow the procedure for rescheduling. And you should. How could you think of rejecting Jesus when He calls you to worship? Especially since there is a clear alternative?

Let us suppose you have felt God urging you to tell your roommate about Jesus. You feel a bit unsure of yourself, but you definitely do not want him to perish in hell. So you prepare to ask him about his beliefs. Maybe that will lead to an opportunity to tell him how wonderful Jesus is. So now you are alert for a chance to bring up this topic, but you find that every time you are with him, something gets in the way. He has to finish an assignment, or other friends come take him to the movies, or the rest of the hall starts playing video games in your room. Weeks go by, and there has been *no* chance to talk to him. Do you give up? Do you say, "I made a sincere effort, but it didn't work out?" Or do you say, "OK, this is tough. I'm going to need to find a different approach?" Perhaps you need to plan to go play racquetball with him, and talk after the game. Maybe go to the store with him. Maybe just say, "Bruce, I need to talk to you sometime. When are you free?" And maybe you think these are dumb ideas, but you see my point? Are you persevering and resourceful, like Moses' mother? Or do you give up easily?

One of the biggest obstacles to the growth of God's Kingdom is Christians who give up. And one of the biggest reasons Christians give up is a flawed understanding of God's will. One of the chief methods of determining God's will is to look for the "closed door". You wonder if you should go on the RUF mission trip, but your parents say no. So you consider that a closed door. You plan to go to church on Sunday, but Lehigh schedules an exam. Another closed door. You decide to share Jesus with your roommate, but an

opportunity never comes up. A closed door. Now of course sometimes God does block our paths. Dan planned to run track this spring, but he got mono. Now track is impossible for him this spring. Here is a case where God has blocked Dan's original plan. But often a supposed closed door is merely a delay. We already saw ways to pry open the "closed door" to Sunday worship and witnessing to your roommate. If your parents refuse permission to go on a mission trip, you should honor that. But that is not the end of the matter. Pray for God to change your parents' minds!

Our text does not tell us that Moses' mother prayed for him, but it is inconceivable that she did not. No mother in such a desperate situation would neglect to pray to whatever gods she thought might help her. But Moses' mother's God is the true God, Creator of heaven and earth – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Surely she prayed for God to protect her baby. It might have seemed like a hopeless prayer. What is the prayer of one woman against the might of Egypt? But you see how wonderfully God answered her prayers. If God could save Moses, He can solve your problems, too. Often we fail to serve God because we never even pray for God to overcome the barriers in our way. You think your parents will never change their minds, or your roommate will never listen to the gospel, or there will never be peace in the Mid-East – so you refuse even to pray about these things.

One of my friends is head of Frontiers Mission, one of the largest mission organizations in the world. Greg's motto is, "When God closes the door, jump through a window!" Now you could take this to mean you should act irresponsibly, which I reject. But Greg did not build Frontiers into one of the most effective missions into so-called closed countries of the world by letting closed doors get in his way. Greg's missionaries keep trying until they find a way to enter a closed country, and keep trying until they find ways to spread the gospel there. And when they get deported, they move to another country.

Moses' mother is a brilliant example of finding a way to obey God in a difficult and perplexing situation. The key ingredient is a refusal to give up. What about you? Are you a quitter? Do you let others block your path to serving God? Or will you never give up?

Champion of Underdogs

The second part of chapter two shifts the focus to Moses himself. Moses is grown up now. Born a Hebrew slave, he is now the adopted son of an Egyptian princess. As an Egyptian prince Moses received the best education in the world. Egypt was the most advanced civilization then, and Moses' education was the best in the world. Think about the knowledge exhibited by the pyramids, the mummies, the jewelry and artwork of ancient Egypt. Moses was a powerful man, positioned for a life of incredible influence. And he threw it all away.

Why did Moses kill the Egyptian? Was he angry that his countryman was being mistreated? Moses hardly knew the Hebrews. The palace was his home. Was it a more generic response, angry that one man was beating another? Was Moses naturally compassionate? Or did Moses see himself as a servant of God? Surely Moses knew next to nothing about Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The text gives us no clue as to exactly why Moses killed the Egyptian. But the next day Moses again interfered in a dispute, this time between two Hebrews. And later we see Moses defending some shepherdesses from rude shepherds. The profile that emerges is a man who possesses a sense of justice. In each case Moses could have done nothing. Neither problem was his. But he was not that sort of man. Moses could not sit by while someone was being oppressed. There was some sense of justice within him that drove him to defend the underdog.

You have to admire Moses. He reminds you a lot of his mother, doesn't he? What could one man do to alleviate the brutal oppression of the Hebrews by the Egyptians? It was a hopeless quest. And the more you think of it, Moses action seems outright foolish. Why didn't he bide his time in the palace? He could be

a moderating influence there. Perhaps he could persuade Pharaoh to soften his treatment of the Hebrews. Maybe he could persuade him to let half of the baby boys live. Maybe he could get a day off now and then for the slaves. Wouldn't wisdom dictate a more moderate approach? A moment ago we said Moses was admirable, but now we are not sure. Was he a noble hero, or a silly fool?

When you look at the result of his behavior, you can hardly conclude that Moses accomplished anything useful. He rescued one Hebrew for one day, but he failed to rescue another the next day. He forfeited his place of influence and had to flee like a common criminal into the desert. There he became a shepherd, which as an Egyptian he was taught to despise. When we leave Moses, he has a wife and child, but is living a life of poverty doing a loathsome task. Stuck in the desert, his last words to us are, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."

There are two lessons from Moses – one positive, and one negative. On the positive side Moses was a brave champion of the oppressed. Perhaps his methods were defective or even foolish. Probably he acted rashly. But at least he cared. While we cannot tell exactly *how* he was moved to act, clearly he was moved by genuine concern for those in need.

The application here is simple and obvious. Are you the kind of person who cares about others? Are you moved to help those in need? Or are you so concerned for your own success that you dare not risk the time and your reputation by getting involved in some questionable activity? Or are you so wrapped up in your own interests that you cannot even see the needs around you?

There are many ways needs, and many ways to get involved with people. Some people are struggling with their studies and need someone to devote the time each week to helping them master the material. There are people here who are chronically undisciplined and need someone to help them get places on time and keep their life together. Some people have physical needs, like the girls on Fourth Street whose house burned on Sunday. Some of us spent the afternoon helping them salvage their belongings and get settled elsewhere. Some people have emotional needs. They are struggling with a broken friendship or a failed romance and need someone to love them. There are men and women at Lehigh who have killed their babies, and they need to know that God will forgive them if they trust in Him. Some of you have friends and roommates who try to drown their sorrows in drink and sex, which only aggravate their problems. Chris Whitcombe has helped people with automotive problems, and many of you have served the children in the homework club. Perhaps cars are not your thing, or you would not know how to comfort someone whose boyfriend dumped her. But there is *something* you can do.

It is unlikely that you will face any service opportunity which might get you into trouble. More likely is that you will feel inadequate. But so was Moses. He was not a trained arbiter, nor was he a shepherd. But he did something. This is what you must do. Something. Open your eyes to the needs around you. Better, ask God to open your eyes to the needs around you. Ask God to direct you to serve somehow. Then believe that He heard and answered your prayer – and begin doing something. Perhaps you will make somewhat of a mess of it at first. God will use your sincere efforts to serve others.

Although Moses was right to champion the oppressed, he went wrong in taking the law into his own hands. The Hebrew hit the nail on the head when he said, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us?" Who indeed? Although Moses was a prince of Egypt, he had no authority to murder a man for beating another. Nor did he have authority to arbitrate disputes among the Hebrews. Moses' concern for the oppressed did not give him license to be a law unto himself.

The application here is that you ought not to take the law into your own hands either. Perhaps the Bethlehem city council is doing things that make the life of the poor more difficult. That does not give you

an excuse to break the law to alleviate the suffering. I knew some people who refused to pay that portion of their federal taxes which they thought went to our military budget. This is wrong. All of us can find something we do not want the federal government to do. The U.S. is no worse than Rome under Nero, and Paul instructed the Roman Christians to pay their taxes. The greatest injustice in the U.S. is the killing of unborn babies. You can understand the outrage that leads a few people to destroy abortion clinic – or worse – but such acts are unjustifiable.

Closer to home for most of you are injustices you may experience from Lehigh University, or your professors, or your parents. I believe that perfect justice is nowhere to be found. You and your friends probably have been unjustly treated at some point. Still, there is no room for taking matters into your own hands. The core problem in this is failure to recognize that God is the ultimate ruler and judge. God allows injustice to happen and to persist for a time. And God will someday bring justice everywhere. By taking matters into your own hands, you deny God's rule and act as though you were God. At its heart breaking the law is a denial of God's care.

In a democratic society there is legal recourse to injustice. In a free country you are free to care for those who suffer injustice. But at all times and places our first and most important response to the suffering of others should be to pray. We pray to the God of heaven and earth, the God who sees all, rules all, and acts to save His people. We pray to a God who hears, a God who is compassionate, a God who suffers with us, even if He delays our rescue.

The God Who Knows

This God was not ignorant of the suffering of His people in Egypt. While Moses was making a glorious fool of himself, God was preparing to save His people. Why did God wait so long? I do not know. There are many things about God we do not know. If we knew everything about God, He would not be God – I would be. And that is a constant temptation for man. We want to accept God on our own terms. We want to dictate what God should be like, and we refuse to worship Him unless He conforms to our ideas about justice. But the true God will not bow to our foolishness. God will rule heaven and earth in order to save His people – whether we like it or not.

The last paragraph of this chapter is a moving reminder that God cares about us. When you are struggling with your classes, or relationships, or against sin – God sees and cares about you. The last verse of this chapter is translated in various ways, but the ESV is closest to the Hebrew. “God saw the people of Israel – and God knew.” God knows. God knew all that was happening in Egypt. God saw the cruelty of Pharaoh. God saw the suffering of His people. God saw the longing of a mother's heart and the outrage of a young Hebrew man. God saw everything, and God knew. The word “know” in Hebrew means more than cognition. It means an intimate knowledge, and experiential knowledge. It is the verb used for sexual relations between husband and wife. God not only knew the facts about the suffering of the Hebrews, He understood and shared in their suffering. God was not distant. He suffered, too.

Has this message been too challenging for you? Are you doubtful whether you are up to following the example of Moses' mother and those Frontier missionaries who never say no? Could you frankly care less about the hurting around you? Do you really just want a little religion to make your life at Lehigh go easier? If that is what you want, I cannot offer it to you. But what I do offer is a God who knows you. He knows your heart. God knows if you are hard-hearted or lazy or faithless. But the God who knows the facts of your condition also knows you personally. If you are baptized into covenant with Him, He is bound to you and He will not let you go. Perhaps you cannot imagine yourself serving God the way we have described here. Perhaps you are a coward or worship success. No matter – God can transform you.

The point of this chapter is not that you should try harder to serve God better. The point is that God

knows you and will change you into His humble, courageous servant. The question to you tonight is whether you will change willingly or unwillingly. Do not go from here with a firm resolve to try harder. That will be acting in your own strength. Do not go from here hoping to forget God's call to heroic service. God will keep calling. Go from here with the assurance that God knows you and will make you into a hero of the faith. And as you go, ask Him to show you the next challenge. Then attack it with the confidence that God will use you in some amazing way to advance His Kingdom.

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