

God Remembers: Our Plans and God's Purpose

Exodus 2:11-25

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Now if you would please take your copies of the Bible in your hands and turn to Exodus chapter 2, Exodus chapter 2, which you will find on page 45 of our church Bibles. We're going to read from the eleventh verse through the end of the chapter. Before we do that let's look to God together for His help. Let us all pray.

O Lord, we need Your Spirit's ministry to us now as Your Word is spread before us, as we hear it read and proclaimed. Would You send Him, the Spirit of Christ, to speak of Him to our hearts, to illumine our understanding, to generate faith within us, to receive and rest on Christ as He comes to us in the Gospel? Work to subdue sin, to slay it, and to sanctify us by the Truth. Your Word is truth. Do these things, O Lord, we pray, for the honor of the name of Jesus, in His name. Amen.

Exodus chapter 2 at verse 11. This is the Word of God:

One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, "Why do you strike your companion?" He answered, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid, and thought, "Surely the thing is known." When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. And he sat down by a well.

Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and saved them, and watered their flock. When they came home to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come home so soon today?" They said, "An

Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds and even drew water for us and watered the flock." He said to his daughters, "Then where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread." And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah. She gave birth to a son, and he called his name Gershom, for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."

During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel - and God knew.

Amen, and we give thanks to God that He has spoken in His holy Word.

The Centrality of God in the Scriptures

When I pastored the PCA church in Columbus, Mississippi we had a number of airmen who were in our congregation. They would serve, several of them, as instructor pilots at the air force base in town. One of them, a fighter pilot, a very capable man, was an elder, and he would often describe elements of his work to me. In particular, I well recall him talking about what would happen when they were planning a mission, even a training mission. The pilots would gather in a briefing room to plot the course and plan the coordinates. And he explained why getting those coordinates was so very important - if two planes set out for the same destination but one of the pilots has the coordinates off, just by a fraction of a degree. For a while it would make not much difference at all; they would still be following the same general trajectory. But over many hundreds of miles, by the time they both ought to have reached their targets the one with the fractionally incorrect coordinates would now be many, many, many miles away from his appropriate destination. A tiny miscalculation at first may not seem to affect very much, but over the long haul it has huge implications.

When it comes to interpreting the Bible, particularly if I may say the Old Testament Scriptures, one of the most common miscalculations we tend to make has to do with the central character in the Biblical story line. Who is the Bible mostly about? I suspect a great many of us, even if we get the answer correct verbally and intellectually, functionally, for a great many of us, the central character of the Bible, the Bible is mainly about ourselves; it's mainly about us. We're the central focus of its story line. The Bible's mainly about us. And like the pilot who makes a slight miscalculation as he sets out on his journey, at first, reading the Bible as though we were its center does not affect a great deal. There is still instruction in doctrine, there's still guidance for Christian living, but we have nevertheless badly miscalculated the coordinates. We are not the focus of the Biblical story. The Bible is not mainly about us; the Bible is mainly about

God. He is its central character. He is the one to whom it constantly directs our gaze. When we put ourselves at the center of the story we distort the story. When God is not the main actor and the central character and the hero of the Biblical message and instead we make ourselves the heroes, then God is inevitably and necessarily reduced only to a supporting role. He becomes an afterthought, a servant of our agendas, a sidelight on what really matters - which is ourselves, our comforts, our egos, our agenda.

Well as we continue in our studies in the book of Exodus, and we're looking today at the second half of chapter 2, I think it will help us to keep that pattern and principle in mind - that the Bible is mainly about God. Exodus is not mainly about Moses, not mainly about Israel, not mainly about Egypt; it's not mainly about us. It is also mainly about God. And actually, that is precisely the lesson Moses himself has to learn and God sets about teaching him in the portion of Scripture before us this morning. Moses had to learn, as we also have to learn, that his life is not mainly about Moses; it is mainly about God. So let's turn our attention to Exodus chapter 2, verses 11 to 25.

I want to notice two main themes here. First in 11 to 22, the lessons that God teaches. The lessons God teaches. And then in 23 to 25, the covenant God remembers. Very simple and on the surface of the text. The lessons God teaches. The covenant God remembers.

The Lessons that God Teaches

Let's think about the lessons God teaches first of all. Moses, remember, has been spared in the massacre of the Hebrew boys. His family had constructed an ark, a basket, placed him in the reeds and rushes at the side of the river Nile where he was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter who does not consign him to death but takes pity on him as he cries, this infant baby boy, and eventually adopts him into her own household giving him the name, Moses. In chapter 1, we watched in the general oppression of the Hebrew people, the purposes of God despite Pharaoh's malice, working for their prosperity and blessing, in His sovereignty, overthrowing the design of the wicked monarch and working out His purposes, on a macro scale in the lives of the nation. And then in the first part of chapter 2 we zoomed in a little and saw God do exactly the same thing in the life of one particular Hebrew family, working out His purposes, overcoming wicked designs that men intended for evil yet God nevertheless intended for good.

And in the second half of the chapter we zoom in still further to concentrate on the life of one particular Hebrew, this baby boy that was plucked from the reeds in the side of the Nile River - Moses now a grown man. We join the story in verse 11 and really we are leaping forward forty years. We know very little of Moses' life in the years between his infancy and his maturity as he reappears here in verse 11. Stephen's speech in Acts 7 verse 22 helps a little. Stephen says,

“Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and he was mighty in his words and deeds.” He was sent off to university in the court of the pharaohs to learn to become a good pagan Egyptian prince. We know that Egyptian royal education involved training in mathematics, in architecture, in art, in strategy, in politics. It was the very best that education could provide in those days. It was designed to prepare Moses for leadership, of course leadership in pagan Egypt as a member of the ruling dynasty.

Competing Truth Claims and a Crisis Point in the Life of Moses

But God has another agenda behind Moses’ training and preparation. He becomes mighty in word and in deed. Moses is immersed in all the wisdom, pagan and godless, of Egypt. How could he be anything other than a loyal prince in the Egyptian courts surrounded and immersed as he was, steeped in its paganism with all the allure of power tempting him? Yet verse 11 tells us that God brought Moses to a crisis point. In His providence, God worked to ensure that Moses had to choose between his early upbringing and heritage in the home of his Hebrew parents, Amram and Jochabed, where doubtless he learned the covenant promises of God and the history of God’s dealings with His people. He had to choose between solidarity with his own people. Twice in verse 11 they are called “his own people” or literally, “his brothers.” He had to choose between standing with them and all that he had learned and all that was offered to him in the worldly court of Pharaoh.

God, in His providence, brought him to a crisis point, a turning point, a moment of decision. Verse 11, “One day when Moses had grown up he went out to his people, his brethren, and looked on their burdens and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people, one of his brothers. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.” His actions are surreptitious. They certainly betray a guilty conscience - he buries him in the sand. He’s acting like an Egyptian - brutal, menacing, throwing his authority and weight around. He slays the man. Don’t miss what’s really going on here though. Despite Moses’ Egyptian manners this is, nevertheless, a decisive choice not to stand with Egypt but to stand with the suffering people of God - about as decisive as it can be. Moses, as he slays the Egyptian, opts to stand with the covenant people. Hebrews 11:25 puts it this way. “By faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.” Here is how God teaches - not with textbooks and laboratory tests but by way of His providence, training and teaching Moses. He knew the covenant promises from the training of his parents and he knew the allure of the paganism of Egypt. Forty years he has been steeped in it, but now the moment of decision has come. Which set of truth claims will govern his life?

We Must Choose Sides

The first key lesson that God teaches is that we must choose sides. We must choose sides. God has no patience for half-Christians. There is no middle ground. As Joshua would later say to another generation of Israelites after having come out of slavery in Egypt, who had themselves turned aside from the worship of the Lord to serve pagan idols, he would say to them, "Choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers serve beyond the river or the gods of the Ammorites into whose land you've come. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Choose whom you will serve. The paganism in which you are steeped, or will you serve the Lord who is your Redeemer? Or as Jesus would put it in Matthew 6:24, "No one can serve two masters. No one can serve two masters. He will either hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." That was the great competitor Jesus was addressing in that particular passage for the affection of the hearts of His people. You cannot serve God and money.

Whom will you serve? You must serve someone. You do and you will serve someone. Whose will you be? Choose this day. You must take sides. There is no gray. There is no middle ground. There is no neutral territory. You cannot love the world and love the Lord. You cannot be a worldling and a child of God. You cannot be both an Egyptian and an Israelite. Matthew 12:30, "Whoever is not with me is against me. Whoever does not gather with me scatters," says Jesus. Choose. Choose who will have the affections of your heart. Whose are you? Whom will you serve? Who stands at the center of your life story? That was the great dilemma confronting Moses in verse 11. For whom will Moses live? Is it the Lord his God, the God of covenant promise, or the empty idols and the allure and enticements of Egyptian power? Will you be center of your own life story or will it be the Lord God who bought you in His covenant love? You cannot serve two masters. So God is teaching Moses, He's teaching him that he must choose. And Moses does choose, wonderfully.

We Cannot Mask our Sin

And God isn't done teaching Moses yet, is He? Look at the passage. The day after Moses kills the Egyptian he meets two Hebrews quarreling. He says to the one in the wrong, "Why do you strike your companion? Why are you fighting?" He's trying to reconcile them. Look at his reply in verse 14. "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" And Moses was afraid and thought, 'Surely the thing is known.'" Moses' sin, suddenly, is exposed; his heart stops. "I am discovered!" And just as an aside, isn't that a sober warning for us? Isn't it? "Be sure your sins shall find you out" - Numbers 32:23. "But sure your sins will find you out." They cannot stay hidden. You may cover them before the eyes of men but they are naked and exposed before the eyes of the God with whom you have to do. He sees. "Surely the thing is known."

James Boice uses the illustration of the masked carnival - Fasnacht it's called, in Basel. Every year the usually sedate and morally reserved residents of Basel don masks and run wild in their city. Restraint is thrown to the wind because, after all, no one knows, no one sees. They're wearing masks; their identity is a secret. Their sin will never be known. Boice, I don't know if this still happens, but Boice says each year in response the Salvation Army would put up huge posters around the city bearing the German inscription, "Gott sieht hinter deine Maske" - "God sees behind your masks." God sees behind your masks. "Surely the thing is known." Do not toy with sin. Do not hide it; do not cover it. That's no way to deal with sin. You will give an account. No, you must repent and turn to the only place where your sin can be cleansed. You must go to Jesus Christ. Don't hide your sin; wash it away in the blood of the Savior.

And so sure enough, Moses' actions do become known. Pharaoh learns about his crime and Moses flees for his life to Midian. Once again, Stephen, in Acts 7 and verse 25 provides helpful commentary on what was going on in Moses' heart and mind when he took action against the Egyptian that led to his exile. Stephen says, "Moses supposed his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand but they did not understand." Moses has not yet formally been called to be Israel's deliverer, so presumably he has somehow deduced from the extraordinary providences of God in his life and the remarkable equipping and training he has received, that if anyone is positioned to be an effective savior for His enslaved people, surely it is him. And if he has come to that conclusion, he reasons, surely they also will too. And when he intervenes he's expecting them all to fall into line behind his leadership immediately, only they don't. And under this impulse for leadership, Moses meets only hostility. It backfires badly and he has to flee for his life.

We Cannot Fight the Lord's Battles with the World's Weapons

You see what's happened of course. Moses has used the methods of Egypt to accomplish the agenda of God. Moses was not wrong in his deductions about the ways in which God was leading him, but he was still thinking too much like the Egyptian he had been raised to be. He was using the world's weapons to fight the Lord's battles. That's the next great lesson that this passage teaches. We cannot fight the Lord's battles with the world's weapons. Moses had to learn, and we must also if we are Christians, that "though we walk in the flesh we are not waging war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not according to the flesh but of divine power to destroy strongholds" - 2 Corinthians 10 and verse 4. Moses was acting independently, self-reliantly, with the logic of the world and the brute strength that is too often the world's strategy. And so God sent him into exile to learn the hard way to trust the Lord with all his heart, to lean not on his own understanding, in all his ways to acknowledge the Lord and to see the Lord make his paths straight. To learn that "It is not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord." God sent Moses out of Egypt so that he might

work to get Egypt out of Moses.

Could it be that in the disciplining providence of God in your life, hard and sore though they are, could it be He's actually at work in those providential trials to wean you from the world and its ways, to teach you to fight the Lord's battles with the Lord's weapons? To become people of dependent prayerfulness, patiently resting on the Lord and His timing? Not to act precipitately and presumptuously nor to act resting on the strength of your own arm but crying out that the arm of the Lord, which is not shortened that it may not save, would intervene for you, wielding His Word and promises as your great primary weapon?

We Must Realize our Bankruptcy and Weakness and God's Riches and Strength

Well in Moses' case as he flees to Midian, it does appear to be a lesson that he begins to learn well. It seems that Moses is a quick study. Once again he's called upon to intervene and defend the weak and defenseless. This time there are some young women who are watering their flocks at the well and they are attacked by shepherds. And Moses, this time, he does not kill; he defends the weak. He even goes beyond the call of duty and waters their flocks into the bargain. No longer do we see Moses, the prince of Egypt, simply assuming all will fall behind his leadership. Now we see Moses a servant, a humbled man, who, as he acts to defend the weak and the powerless goes on to enjoy by God's kindness and grace a season of rest and blessing. He takes up residence among this Midianite community. Acts tells us he was there for another forty years. You see these sequences of forty - forty years in Egypt, forty years in the desert of Midian, and then forty years later with Israel leading them through the wilderness.

Jim Boice, again, puts it like this. He says, "Moses was forty years in Egypt learning something, and forty years in the desert learning to be nothing, and forty years in the wilderness proving God to be everything." That's good, isn't it? Forty years in Egypt learning something, being prepared for leadership; forty years with the Midianites in the desert learning to be nothing, humbled. And then having learned that he is nothing and God is everything, forty years leading Israel, teaching them the very same set of lessons. God teaches us a great deal but His chief lessons are about our smallness and His bigness, our weakness and His strength, our sin and His grace, our bankruptcy and His riches, that we are nothing and He is everything. And therefore you ought not to lean and rest on yourself but you can always lean and rest on Him. The lessons God teaches.

The Covenant God Remembers

Then secondly and quickly, the covenant God remembers, verses 23 to 25. Turmoil has erupted in poor Moses' life. Imagine him at the well, sitting there rather dazed thinking, "Just two weeks ago I was the prince of Egypt and now I'm a no one in the middle of nowhere now!" It's dizzying. A tsunami has swept

through Moses' life reeking absolute havoc. But in verses 23 to 25 it's as though we're taken down to the ocean floor to see the shifting tectonic plates deep below the surface that are the real cause of the tsunami that has swept through Moses' life. The covenant that God remembers. Pharaoh dies, verse 23, "the people of Israel groan and cry out for help" under their terrible sufferings. It is a cry, we're told, that "came up to God." And then we're told what that means, verses 24 and 25. Look at it please. Verses 24 and 25. "God heard their groaning, God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God saw the people of Israel - and God knew." What a beautiful string of active verbs those are - filled with comfort for a suffering people. Perhaps for you, amidst your trials as you cry and groan out - He hears, He sees, and He knows. Job 23:10, "He knows the way that I take, and though he test me, I shall come forth as gold." He knows. He hears. He sees. He knows.

And He does all of this, our text says, because He remembers; He remembers His covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God had promised Abraham to be a God to him and to his children and to his children's children, to give him a land, to multiply them, to make them a great nation, and in his seed to bless the nations. But when they came down to Egypt they were not a great nation, were they? They were seventy people. But now, now they are! Now they've multiplied and prospered even amidst terrible suffering. And so now, as God has been working to keep His promises all along, He prepares for them a deliverer in Moses that His covenant may be fulfilled, that He might indeed lead them from slavery and into the land He has promised to give them. It must have looked to the Israelites like God had forgotten them, that He wasn't listening. All these years of suffering and groaning and crying out. God was doing nothing it must have seemed to them. But all unseen, the tectonic plates were moving deep below the surface. God was working things together - the brutality of Pharaoh, the courage of the midwives, the compassion of the princess, the royal education in the pagan court of the king, even the murderous actions of Moses and forty years being humbled at the backside of the desert. All of this He ordered and superintended to keep His promises to Israel and to prepare for them a suitable savior, a deliverer.

A Fixed Gaze on God's Covenant Promises

And that is how God continues to keep His covenant with us - not so much by fixing our problems always, though He is often gracious to intervene when we cry and bring us out of our trials in His great mercy, but the heart of His answer, His faithfulness to His covenant promise, is not so much to fix our problems as it is to provide a perfect Deliverer, not to give us simply a solution but a Savior. He prepared Moses for Israel; He has prepared Jesus Christ for you. You're groaning and crying out under terrible trials - "Where is God? What is He doing? How can I be sure that He hears and sees and knows?" You can be sure that He hears and sees and knows because of the cross, because He has prepared a Deliverer, because Jesus Christ has come. He can save you from your sin. He

can strengthen you in your sorrows and one day He will come in glory to deliver you forever from your suffering. God has kept His covenant with you and He has provided a perfect Deliverer in Jesus Christ. He has proven that He is faithful to His promises, and so as you cry out to Him, bolster and garrison your faith with a glance at the cross, with a look at the empty tomb, lifting your eyes to see who sits on the throne - your sufficient Savior whom God has prepared and provided to deliver you.

The lessons God teaches. The covenant that God remembers. Let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank You that You are in the business of meddling in our lives. You don't leave us on our own to find our own way. You are working in Your providence to teach us and train us and humble us and change us. We thank You that You are faithful to all Your promises. You remember Your covenant. You hear us when we cry and groan. You see us in our sufferings and You know. And we can be sure of it because You have provided for us the Lord Jesus Christ, a High Priest able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses, one who meets our need, a perfect and sufficient Deliverer. We flee again together to Him and rest on Him. And we ask that You would meet us as we do and have mercy on us, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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