

The Story of Moses - Faith for the Tough Times Exodus 1 -2

Brothers and sisters, now that we have enjoyed the dramatic presentation of Exodus chapters 1 and 2 in the Story of Moses, let's take a closer look at what is going on in this story and what the Lord wants to say to us through it this morning.

Now, as this story starts, we notice it doesn't start off as "the story of Moses" but rather the sequel to the story of Joseph and we are given an update on what happened to descendants of his family after all his brothers and father had all settled in Egypt.

You may remember from last year's breakfast theatre how Joseph was betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, ended up in Egypt, was wrongly thrown into jail, but through a miraculous turn of events Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt to ensure enough grain was stored up so the country would survive a devastating famine.

As a result of Joseph's wise oversight, all of Egypt and many of the surrounding nations; including Joseph's brothers and his father Israel, survived the famine and were able to prosper – and one might expect the story ends here and "*they lived happily ever after...*" but this morning – we find out that was not the case for Israel's descendants.

Instead, the famine and Joseph's heroic leadership are soon forgotten – because we tend to have short memories don't we...

And sooner rather than later a new ruler came to power, for whom, as it says in Ex 1:8 "*Joseph meant nothing...*" which means this King knew - but did not care who Joseph was... and what he had done for Egypt. And this deliberate disregard gave birth to the long history of oppression, persecution and hatred for God's people that we know, and see expressed, as antisemitism.

And perhaps as a pertinent side note which speaks to the recent antisemitic terrorist attacks, protests, and harassment

going on... its worth recognizing that the root of the antisemitism which we see starting in this story, and continuing today, comes from the deliberate disregard that God promised Abraham his descendants would be a blessing to all nations.

The long history of oppression begins when the new king in Egypt deliberately chooses to disregard Joseph's blessing for Egypt and instead chooses to see the Israelites as a threat.

Pharaoh takes notice that the Israelites are quickly increasing in number. This is a rapidly growing group of immigrants in his country. They have retained some of their own cultural and familial uniqueness and they are not intermarrying with the Egyptian people and they are not being absorbed into the Egyptian culture and as a result the Pharaoh is very concerned about their loyalty to Egypt, and the security risk they pose in a war with Egypt's enemies.

There's no basis to see Israel as a threat in this way, but it highlights how we typically react when God is significantly

blessing someone else... it brings out our sinful nature . In this situation God's blessing is coming to fulfill the promise that Abraham's descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky, and so the people of Israel, the Hebrews, are growing by leaps and bounds. It's God's blessing at work and it triggers a fearful, threatened reaction from Pharaoh who tries to suppress this growth and keep the Israelite population under control.

His first solution is to enact a forced-labor campaign. He might as well make use of this large group of people in his kingdom for his own purposes and plans – have them build his national infrastructure projects for free and work them to death in the process, which will help to bring their numbers down. It's a win-win solution – but Israel's numbers continue to increase.

So, Pharaoh orders that medical infanticide is to be carried out. Eliminate the infant males, take away the future procreative ability, without significantly damaging the current workforce. Create a whole generation of Hebrew women who

will have no other options but to take an Egyptian man for their husband and thus integrate into Egyptian society.

But the God-fearing midwives are not co-operating, they are - as we should be today in such perversions of medical care, conscientious objectors, and medical infanticide is not successful.

So, Pharaoh makes this a civic policy, if the medical system won't do it, let the general public be involved! Make it their civic duty to take any Hebrew baby boy they might see and throw them into the Nile River. This is civic infanticide.

And this horrible policy along with the forced labor caused terrible effects for both the Israelites and the Egyptians.

There's the obvious physical abuse and suffering, along with the mental and emotional abuse and suffering that from comes being enslaved and forced to do the kind of hard labor that will work you to death. Not to mention the trauma of

having your children taken away and murdered in front of you.

And we also see that this oppression caused ordinary, everyday "good" citizens... decent Egyptians who loved their families, to become monsters who willingly committed the atrocity of infanticide, taking Hebrews boys from their mothers and throwing them out into the river to drown.

And we also see how it cause the population of Egypt who had lived in peace and tolerance with one another to turn against each other. We heard how the Egyptians came to detest the Israelites, and it is rightly assumed the Israelites would hate the Egyptians. But it also turned the Egyptians and the Israelites against one other as well. We see how the midwives refused to obey their own king, and also how the Israelites fought with each other.

And lastly, we see this oppression giving rise to activism. The injustice and the abuse inflicted on his fellow Hebrews provokes and enrages Moses and he reacts as a vigilante and

intentionally murders the abusive Egyptian, thinking there is some kind of justice in his action.

And the trouble that we see in these first two chapters is still with us today brothers and sisters.

Now, its not the time or the place to examine the all issues surrounding the modern state of Israel – but it would be deliberately ignorant to identify a policy of oppression against Israel in our scripture passage this morning and then fail to mention that antisemitism still occurs in our world today.

But it's easy to overlook such things... not only because we try to avoid contentious political issues, but because most of the genuine oppression that occurs in the world today is so far removed from us. In fact, there are many who come to live in this part of the world for that exact reason.

We do not face political oppression like the Chinese do under the rule of the Communist Party. We do not face religious oppression like those living in Afghanistan, North Korea, or

Somalia where it is forbidden to believe and practice our faith or give someone a bible. We do not face the kind of economic oppression like those suffering in Venezuela or Cuba. We may have our trials and challenges and tragedies here – but we are not oppressed in these ways.

However, this can cause us to overlook the existence of spiritual oppression and its effects on us. You see in the midst of genuine oppression, it's easy to see the kinds of horrific and terrible effects that we see in the scripture passage, and thus conclude that sin and evil are definitely at work.

But as I said our lives are pretty good, and while we may have our trials and challenges and tragedies, the majority of us are unlikely to conclude that these are the effects or the results of spiritual oppression, that it is evidence of sin and evil at work in our lives.

We have more reasonable and acceptable explanations for why we have sickness and disease and death, for why we struggle with mental health, for why we experience conflict

and brokenness in our relationship and marriages, for why we find work and life meaningless, for why people struggle with addiction and turn to violence.

Now it is true that we are able to explain “how” things like sickness and disease occur and “how” conflict occurs, but we must not confuse explaining “how” things occur with “why.”

Ultimately, these trials and challenges and tragedies come into our lives because our world and our lives are still cursed by sin and evil, just as it was when Israel was oppressed in Egypt. We are under the same spiritual oppression now that afflicted Pharaoh back then – whether we realize this or not.

And this spiritual oppression also provokes us to activism. Moses sees what is wrong and he just has to do something about it. And in the same way we can see what is wrong – the trials, the challenges, the tragedies, and we just have to do something about it. o maybe we try harder, maybe we look at self-help, maybe we focus on wellness, adjusting our work-life balance, or maybe we get more educated or educate

others to try and make a difference, whatever it might be, we just have to do something...

Or maybe, deep down we do have a sense that something is oppressing us – but we don’t know what it is, we can’t quite put our finger on it or describe it because we don’t know about spiritual oppression... or we don’t want to believe that sin and evil are at work within us.

So, we say we are oppressed but we’ll call it racial oppression, or gender oppression, or sexual oppression. We’ll play the victim and blame society, or capitalism, or colonialism, or Christianity or whomever we can conveniently label and blame as our oppressors.

But this is nothing more than misguided activism which does not free anyone, or solve any issues. It is as ineffective as the murder Moses committed. In fact, it only creates more problems, causes violence and destruction, reinforces the spiritual oppression and amplifies the terrible effects of sin and evil in our lives.

But there is good news brothers and sisters. In spite of all the oppression that we see going on, in spite of the trials and challenges and tragedies that we experience, there is good news! God is at work... God is on the move... A better day is coming... Freedom is on the horizon!

And its there in the story as well – if we know where to look for it. So let me show you.

Remember how the Israelites were increasing in number, and how when they were enslaved and subject to hard labor they only continued to increase in number – that’s is God at work brothers and sisters and nothing can stop Him from working - not hard labor, not oppression, not even civic infanticide. Israel continues to increase and grow.

Because God was keeping His promise to Abraham that Abraham’s descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky! (Gen 15:5)

But that wasn’t the only thing God had promised to Abraham, there was also the promised land for his descendants, (Gen 15:18-20) and the promise to bless those who blessed him and curse those who cursed him, and that all peoples on earth would be blessed by him. (Gen 12:2-3) And we’ve already noted how Jospeh’s food storage program during the famine was one of the ways that promise of blessing for all peoples had been expressed.

But God had also told Abraham that before his descendants would inherit the promised land, they would end up living in a foreign land for four hundred years, and they would become enslaved and be mistreated there, but at the appointed time God would punish the nation who enslaved them and bring them out with great wealth.

So brothers and sisters, none of what is happening in the story today is catching God by surprise, and putting an obstacle in the way of Him keeping His promises to Abraham. In fact this is part of how God had planned to keep His promises.

And if the Israelites knew their family history – the story of their father Jacob, and Isaac and Abraham – and the Covenant promises God had given to their family, and I believe they did, because of Pharaoh’s statement that he was worried they would all leave Egypt.

Then they were not completely caught off guard and devastated by what was happening to them either! They had a promise waiting on the horizon, a promise of justice, wealth, freedom and their own land! There was a better day coming... it had been promised, and that promise would help to sustain them.

And God also provided some unexpected help from some unlikely sources. Who expected God-fearing mid-wives to show such courage and refuse to commit infanticide and find a clever excuse for their resistance? Who expected the daughter of the cruel and oppressive Pharaoh to be so kind-hearted and generous and accepting of the Hebrews? Yet there they are, quiet, unassuming, as far from being an activist

as you can get – but yet used by God to protect and provide help for the Hebrews.

And even the most atrocious act of civic infanticide is used by God to identify a particular child that He has chosen, and arranging the circumstances that will see this child is protected, and provided for, and prepared for God has in store for him.

So, do you see it? Now that you know where to look – God is at work, God is on the move, a better day is coming!

And if you can see it in this story brothers and sisters, then you’ll be prepared to look for it today – in the midst of all the oppression and atrocities in the world, and in the midst of the trials and challenges and tragedies that we face.

So when it comes to dealing with spiritual oppression in our lives, we must believe that God’s has fulfilled the promise to bless all peoples through Abraham by setting us free from sin

and evil through Abraham's descendant, and God's son – Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3:14 specifically confirms this for us. It says *“God redeemed us [freed us from spiritual oppression] in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles [us] through Christ Jesus [whose death and resurrection breaks the oppressive power of sin and evil over us], so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”*

So just like the Israelites – we have a promise of God in the past, that was made to us and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and Jesus has also poured out the Holy Spirit upon us, that happened at Pentecost – which means that we now have a future promise waiting on the horizon.

Ephesians 1:13 explains this to us, it says *“When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession.”*

There is still something yet to come, and the Holy Spirit's work in our lives, producing repentance, leading us to faith in Christ, showing us how He will change us to become more like Christ, healing us, changing what we think and believe to line up with God's word in scripture, giving us desires to obey God in all areas of our lives, causing us to hate our own sin...

This is the proof that something better is still coming, a new day, the promise of justice, wealth, freedom and land – the kingdom of Heaven, this world made new! As Romans 8:18 says *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”*

And this verse brothers and sisters, reveals what we need to hear this morning. The word the Lord has for us about how to persevere in our present reality with the residue of spiritual oppression still in our lives. Where we still struggle against our sin and against evil. Where we still go through trials and challenges and tragedies.

The reality we deal with brothers and sisters is sandwiched between God's ultimate promise fulfilled in the past, and His ultimate promise of His Kingdom still on the horizon. And that is the Christian's struggle is it not? Living in the time between times, in the tough times.

Brothers and sisters, the word is faith this morning, we need faith for the tough times.

God gives us faith as a means of help, unexpected help from unlikely sources, like a story about oppression and how God is working behind the scenes... Faith is not flashy, or sensational, or miraculous, and it's certainly not like activism. It's quiet and unassuming, but very strong and courageous – like the mid-wives and Pharaoh's daughter in the story, like Moses mother and his sister.

And the faith that the Lord wants to put in your hearts this morning consists of three things.

First trust. Look at all that God has done in the past. We've just looked at one story this morning. Scripture is full of testimony, examples, and stories that prove you can trust God to keep His promises. Promises to bless, promises to forgive, promises to provide, promises to heal, promises to save... the scripture is full of God's promises, and you can trust them.

Then expect God to act. Tell God what you expect Him to do, not in a bossy way but in a confident trusting way. Jesus teaches us to pray, asking Him for whatever we need and He says He will do it to glorify His father. Be expectant brothers and sisters – don't treat God like that person who always disappoints you, have high expectations of God! He can go above and beyond what you expect of Him.

And last, here's the rub - be patient. Remember that He is God, you are not. Your ways are not His ways this is why you must be patient. Because when God doesn't meet our timeline or fulfill a promise in the way we want or expect we are tempted to let go of our trust, or lower our expectation or abandon both. Patience means that you continue to hold on

to trust and expectation until God acts. And in order to have patience – God has to have us wait...

Heb 6:11- 12 encourages us in this. Listen, *“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for [trust & expectation] may be fully realized. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.”*

So brothers and sisters, be encouraged, God is at work, God is on the move, whatever you see going on in the world around you, whatever you might be going through right now, may you receive faith for the tough times.

Trust the Lord, Expect His promises, Wait patiently.

Amen.