

“The Turning Point” (part 1)

Exodus 2:11-25

If you have your Bible, turn with me to the second chapter of Exodus, where in just a moment we will read from verse 11 through verse 25. You are familiar with the expression, ‘turning point.’ Generally speaking, a turning point refers to a decisive moment in a person’s life where he makes a decision that sets their life on a particular trajectory. It is a decisive situation after which a shift or change occurs, either for the better or for the worse.

Life is full of turning points. They are those rare occasions when you stand at a crossroads. Moments when you have to make a decision, and that decision will forever change your trajectory. Typically, turning points aren’t predictable, nor are they planned. They just come upon us. Yet, these turning points are the moments that often begin significant chapters in our lives.

I’ve had a series of momentous turning points in my life:

- Placing my faith in Jesus Christ when I was a child
- Surrendering to the call of God to preach
- Agreeing to serve on staff at a summer camp
- Working up the courage to ask Anita out on a date
- Sending my resume to a search committee 10 years ago

I read a fascinating article this week by a woman named Anne Whitaker. She’s a former attorney, an executive, and has written for a lot of journals and publications. She says that some turning points occur at predictable times during our adult lives, about one in every 7 to 10 years. Each one is initiated by a crisis, or a time when we feel like our lives are unraveling. She says, “We recognize the gap between how we are living and what we want out of life, and begin to consider alternative directions. So we start looking for answers and try to find something new.” Some of those predictable turning points come our way in seasons of life marked by transition such as:

- High School and College

It is during this time that young people decide whether or not to go to college, which college to attend. Some of the issues we wrestle with at this stage of life include potential relationships, plans for a career, or dreams about the kind of life we want.

- Young Adulthood

It is often here at this stage that we are making plans for marriage, starting a family, buying a home. We establish patterns and routines of stability. Preschool pictures and finger paint artwork adorn our refrigerators.

- Middle Age

We turn an invisible corner sometime around age 40 and realize perhaps half our life is over, so the question “Does what I am doing seem worth doing?” speaks more loudly. This can be one of the most significant times in our lives or it can be a disaster. We often become introspective and evaluate whether or not we are where we thought we’d be when we were just getting started.

- Retirement and Senior Adulthood

Before you know it, you’ve reached retirement age. The kids are grown, you have grandchildren, and you wonder where the time has gone. With so much of life in the rear view mirror, you wonder just how much is still ahead.

The turning points of life are often very educational. We will often learn something vital during the moments of decision that come along in life. Exodus 2 will describe a decisive ‘turning point’ for the people of Israel who are in Egypt, but those suffering under the oppressive hand of Pharaoh didn’t recognize it as such. They would not know it for long time. Unbeknownst to that generation, a baby is born in those days under difficult circumstances. And that baby is Moses, the very one whom God would eventually raise up as the deliverer of His people. Before he will ever be a useful instrument in the hand of God, Moses will have to be enrolled in the school of pain. Through what proves to become a major turning point in his own life, Moses will learn

some very valuable lessons that will remain with him throughout the remainder of his days. You and I know Moses as the man of God that redemptive history shows him to be. However, before God uses a man, He must first make the man. And the making of the man often happens, not in big, flashy, or spectacular ways. It often happens through the rhythms of ordinary life, through the ups and downs, in the turning points of life. So it was for Moses, so it is for me and you.

1—A personal lesson in IDENTITY (2:11)

“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.”

There are a lot of years that go by in Moses' life in Exodus 2. The chapter begins with the story of his birth, tells us virtually nothing about his childhood, and takes us all the way to a scene that happened when he was 40 years old. Though our text doesn't mention his age, Stephen's words in Acts 7 fills us in on some background details. The only thing that is mentioned of those earlier years in Moses' life is a statement which says that he was adopted, educated, and had an impressive resume:

Acts 7:20-22—“At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God's sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house, and when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.”

As the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses grew up as a prince. He received the finest education in the world at the time. Extra biblical sources say that he would have been educated in Heliopolis where Egyptian nobility were known to send their children. As one of the oldest cities in ancient Egypt, it was known to be an urban and religious center of Egyptian culture. The Egyptians were advanced in writing and mathematics. They studied history, music, language, and medicine. Young men were known to have been vigorously trained in the art of warfare. Moses would have been exposed to all of that and more.

So according to the account in Acts 7, when Moses was forty years old, the fact that verse 23 says ‘it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel’ —that is a very significant statement. Exodus 2:11 says it this way, “One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people,” a fact that is mentioned twice in verse 11. The people of Israel are identified as his people, that is, Moses’ people. It doesn’t simply say God’s people, or the people of Abraham. No, it says here two times that Moses went out to ‘his people.’ So there is a sense of solidarity. It is a statement of identity. All of those years that Moses had spent in the palace of Pharaoh and in the schools of Egypt had not eclipsed his knowledge of his origins, for he knew who he was. So that when he decides to visit his brethren, he went out as one of them. He knows he is a Hebrew, he knows he is a descendant of Abraham, he knows he is one who has come to inherit the promised blessing of God. If you go to the New Testament, the writer of Hebrews says:

Hebrews 11:24-26—“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 forward to the reward.”

There comes a major turning point in Moses’ life when he knows who he is and then acts upon that knowledge. He is no longer content to live in the lap of Egyptian privilege. He is not satisfied with the passing pleasures of sin. He does not appeal to the name given to him by the world, but embraces the one given to him in Abraham. Rather than choosing the comfort of the palace, he chooses to be mistreated with the people of God. And the reason for his choice according to Hebrews 11 is that he considered the reproach of Christ greater than all the wealth of Egypt. He was looking forward to the reward.

Do you know who you are? You may think that is a silly question for me to ask, but it isn’t. It is one of the most profound questions that you will ever ask yourself. Now, I’m not talking about your last name. I’m not referring to your family history. No, it is a

question of identity. Where do you go to find your identity? You will never know 'who' you are until you know 'Whose' you are. As someone who has faith in Jesus Christ, I've been adopted into the family of God. I'm a born again, blood washed, child of the Most High God. Faith openly identifies with both the promises and the people of God. Moses learns a personal lesson in identity. Notice secondly how he learns:

2—A painful lesson in HUMILITY (2:12-15)

“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.”

Humility is a lesson that all great leaders have to learn at some point in their life, if they are to become truly great leaders. Self-confidence and bravado are character traits we find extolled by the world. But the greatest leaders in redemptive history all learned the lesson of humility, and often that lesson is learned through the pain of failure. It is a painful lesson in humility that Moses has to learn.

A noble intention

Verse 11 says, “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.” In other words, Moses sees an injustice taking place. He sees an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew slave, and Moses knows that it is cruel, oppressive, wasn't just. It causes his blood to boil. He is seething with righteous indignation. This wasn't the first time that Moses had seen such cruelty. For generations, the Egyptians had exalted themselves as ethnically superior to the inferior Hebrews whom they looked down upon, treated cruelly, kept under the heel of their oppressive boot. Moses knows that his people need a savior. They stand in need of deliverance. I am convinced that

he is determined at this point to save his people. As someone who came from a unique position of power and influence, he could make things happen. He would marshal all of his resources, maybe it would result in an uprising. The point is that Moses knew that something needed to be done.

Before I move on, we need to consider the importance of seeing a need and responding to it. All too often, we are prone to be so wrapped up in our own little world, and so consumed by our self-interests that we are blind to all the pressing needs around us. We are more like the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan than we are the man who saw the need and did something in order to address it. Our faith must lead to action, but it begins with seeing the need. Moses has a noble intention here as someone who sees a need, burdened for his people.

A hasty decision

Verse 12 says, “He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.” Moses sees an injustice, and he identifies with the people of God. He has the best of intentions. His resume is loaded with admirable qualities like sympathy, affection, and concern. He is zealous for the cause. However, his zeal is not according to knowledge. Moses’ failure had nothing to do with his motivation, for his heart was in the right place. The issue was his method. Moses was trying to save the people by his own strength.

Chuck Swindoll— *“Without realizing it, Moses entered a vulnerable, dangerous time of life. While I’m convinced he knew he was to redeem Israel, I also believe he grew antsy about it. Anxious. Impatient. And in that state of mind, he launched a premature strike that resulted in disaster...and a forty-year setback. Desiring to carry out the will of God, eager to do great things for God, he forced a situation, which led to personal disaster.”*

How many of you know that it is possible to do the right thing, but in the wrong way? We’re not eating Reese’s cups here. You know their slogan, “There’s no wrong way to eat a Reese’s!” No, it is highly possible for someone to do the right thing, but in the wrong way. We can act in the flesh and not in the Spirit, and get ahead of God through

a rash, hasty decision due to our impatience. Verse 12 says, “He looked this way and that way, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.”

The one direction he didn’t look was up.

I’m reminded of the phrase from one of our hymns that says, “the arm of flesh will fail you.” Stand up, stand up for Jesus! Stand in His strength alone, the arm of flesh will fail you, ye dare not trust your own.” The ‘arm of flesh’ is the tendency we all have to be self-reliant, self-assured. It is the propensity in my life to want to take matters into my own hands when God seems to be taking His time.

Chuck Swindoll—*“I’m convinced Moses was doing more than grandstanding. I believe he was absolutely sincere. He didn’t see himself murdering a cruel slave-driver as much as courageously striking a blow for God’s people. The desire to do something right came over him. His problem? He dedicated himself to the will of God, but not to the God whose will it was.”*

That’s one of the major dangers that can plague our own walk with God. We can become so bothered or burdened by the injustices that we see in the world that we resort to fleshly means in order to address them. We get angry and ugly and lose our moral credibility. We place our hope in political solutions rather than trusting the power the gospel to change hearts. We line up behind men of low character who act as our political sword, convincing ourselves that the ends justify the means. The problems of society will not be solved by power politics.

If we are not careful and discerning, we can attempt to do the right thing in the wrong way. It is right and good for a student to graduate, but it is wrong for him to cheat his way through school. It is good for your child to succeed in team sports, but it is wrong to sacrifice their spiritual lives on the altar of athletic success. It is good for you to be a successful entrepreneur, to succeed at your work, but it is always wrong to burn the candle at both ends and forfeit your family in the process. Jesus said, “What does it profit a man to gain the world and lose his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Don’t think that it is always something bad that catches our eye,

because more often than not, it is something good. We want good things, even right things, but we go about getting them in the wrong way.

We sense the will of God in a particular direction, but it is moving much too slow in our estimation, so we decide to speed up the process. You hurry the process along, just like Abraham and Sarah did, you take matters into your own hands, and end up with an Ishmael who only mocks the son of promise. God is moving at a snail's pace, so you step in to handle things, and then find yourself in a mess of a situation. Like Moses, you're left with a corpse in a shallow grave and a shovel in your hands, and it won't be long before the sand yields its secrets.

A fearful reaction

Moses sees an injustice which speaks of his right motive, but he kills an Egyptian in relying on his own strength and wisdom. Verse 13 says that when he went out the next day, Moses saw two Hebrews who were fighting with one another. He comes between them and says to the man in the wrong, "Why do you strike your companion?" Once more his intentions are noble. He takes up for the victim and intervenes. Acts 7:26 says that he was attempting to reconcile them, thereby acting as a mediator, and he had the assumption that his fellow Hebrews would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand. But that is not what happens. Verse 14 says the man answered by saying, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" In other words, "Who do you think you are? Who died and left you in charge?" It was a legitimate question. Who had given Moses authority over Israel? The answer was no one, at least not yet. It would be another 40 years before that day would come. And so for the time being, Moses was acting as a self-appointed savior, taking it upon himself to lead in the strength of his own flesh, and the Israelites wanted no part of it. He knows that his act of killing the Egyptian has been made known, he becomes afraid, and he then makes a run for it as "Egypt's Most Wanted."

The adversary of your soul will prod you to act in the flesh, to do the right thing in the wrong way at the wrong time. It is for this reason that you and I must be men and

women of prayer, who spend time on our knees, who treasure up the Word of God in our hearts and so live by the wisdom of the Spirit. Moses had acted in the flesh. He is reduced to fear and makes a run for it. And yet the sovereign, guiding hand of God was working in his life, bringing him right to the place He wanted him to be. Moses had deliverance on his mind, and he was the right man for the job, but it would be done only in a way that brought glory to God. Looking on his life at this point, we might be tempted to say, “Man, Moses has the right upbringing, the right connections, the right attitude and strength.” He has the qualifications that God is looking for. But we can’t look at the surface, which we are so prone to do.

Isaiah 55:8-9—“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

Moses is a work of grace, just as we all are. God is going to bring him through the fire to refine him, enroll him in school to educate him, bring him to nothing so that God and God alone is his sufficiency. It is the grace of God and not the strength of Egypt that will fit him for the task. Moses needed to learn three major lessons, and as those who are so prone to rely upon self, we need to learn them too:

- We need the wisdom of God to accomplish the right thing in the right way and at the right time.

We are so prone to be attracted to strength, to resumes, to what some call the ‘it’ factor. We can be caught up with a person’s charisma more than their character. While I am not disparaging those who are exceptionally gifted, I think we’d all agree that they are few and far between. What about the rest of us? Wisdom recognizes that heaven’s credentialing committee seldom if ever abides by man’s standards. No, God isn’t impressed with the stuff that we are often impressed by.

Psalm 147:10-11—“He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man. The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy.”

Zechariah 4:6—“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts.”

John 15:4-5—“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

The timing of God is just as important as His overall will!

- We always go the wrong way when we choose to go our own way.

The wisdom of the world says, “Go with your gut! Follow your heart! Speak your truth!” Yet the Word of God tells me that there is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. To be self-led rather than Spirit-led will prove disastrous.

Galatians 5:16-17—“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”

Galatians 6:7-9—“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”

- We can be forgiven and still used by God even when we’ve gone our own way in life.

No one will ever stand before God and be able to say, “I did it my way!” We come to Him on His terms, His way, in Christ. The fact of the matter is that we will always deal with the consequences when we get ahead of God and walk in the flesh and not by the

Spirit. Maybe you've had the best of intentions. Your track record has reflected a pattern of real ambition, but little knowledge. Great desire but little in the area of discernment. Great aspirations but little humility. Great zeal and energy but little wisdom. Such is the folly of youth and immaturity. When we are young, we are often full of ambition but lacking in wisdom. When we are old, we may be full of wisdom but lacking in ambition. Thus, we need the proper balance of ambition and wisdom that only God's Spirit can provide. The good news is that we have a Savior who has rescued us from the failure and folly of sin. He was perfect in every way, and unlike Moses who took a life to try to rescue his people, Jesus laid down His life to rescue His people. And if you are weighed down by your failure and shame, there is no need for you to despair. No matter what you've done in life, there is mercy and grace in Jesus Christ.