

“The Turning Point” (part 2)

Exodus 2:11-25

If you have your Bible, turn with me to the second chapter of Exodus. This passage marks a major ‘turning point’ in the history of Israel who, up until this time, have been in Egypt and are suffering under the heavy hand of Pharaoh. Jacob and his family had gone down to Egypt where they stay for 400 years. Faithful to His promise, God multiplies their number so that they are a mighty nation of people. A new Pharaoh had come to power who did not know what Joseph had done, and he sees the Israelites as a growing threat. He forces them into slavery and tries to control the number. He demands that all sons born to these Hebrews be drowned in the Nile River.

It is in the midst of such dark and difficult circumstances that a son is born to a particular Hebrew man and woman. They hide him for three months, and when he could no longer be hidden, his mother prepares a basket and sets it among the reeds of the riverbank. It just so happened that the daughter of Pharaoh comes down to the river and sees that little basket. She has one of her servants fetch it for her, and when she opens it, she sees a little Hebrew baby crying to the top of his lungs. The baby’s sister asks if she should go find a nurse, and you know the story by now, for she gets the baby’s own mother Jochebed who gets paid by Pharaoh’s daughter to nurse her own son. The baby is Moses, the very one whom God would raise up to deliver His people from their bondage.

The fortunes of Israel are about to change, for Moses’ life is a fulcrum upon which a new chapter of freedom would open. His birth marks a turning point for Israel. And yet, Exodus 2 will also mark a turning point in the life of Moses. If we compare Scripture with Scripture, we will learn that there are 40 years that pass between verses 10-11. We are told virtually nothing about Moses’ childhood, nothing about what it must have been like to grow up in the palace of the Pharaoh, nothing about the wealth and cultural opportunity that Moses was afforded. The New Testament fills in a few of those details in Acts 7 where we’re told by Stephen that, “Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and he was mighty in his words and deeds.” That means

he has an impressive background and a highly credentialed resume as far as Egyptians would have been concerned. Yet none of that is ultimately what will qualify him as Israel's deliverer. We 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. Moses learns some very valuable lessons that will remain with him throughout the remainder of his days.

*The first thing I mentioned from this passage is that Moses learns a personal lesson in **identity**.* Verse 11 reveals that Moses knew who he was. There came a point in his life, when he 40 years old, that it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the people of Israel. Verse 11 says he went out to 'his people.' The fact that Moses sees the Israelites as his people is a thing that is mentioned twice in the verse. It implies a shared sense solidarity with them. Those years he had spent in the palace of Pharaoh and in the schools of Egypt had not diminished his understanding of who he was. So 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. 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 Egypt, but embraces the one given to him in Abraham. Rather than choosing the comfort of the palace, Moses 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.

*Second, we've seen how Moses learns a painful lesson in **humility**.* That's a lesson that all of us must learn at some point or another, even at multiple points throughout our lives. Moses has noble intentions, for when he goes out and identifies with his brothers, he witnesses an Egyptian taskmaster beating one of them. Moses intervenes. He is determined to do something. However, he makes a hasty decision by killing the man and hiding him in the sand. It was an attempt to do the right thing, but he does it in the wrong way. It is an appropriate illustration of what it looks like when we try to serve God in the energy of the flesh. It is a picture of zeal without knowledge, service apart from submission. There are always consequences when we get ahead of God.

The next day when Moses goes out, he sees two Hebrews striving with one another. He steps in and tries to act as a mediator. He says to the man in the wrong, "Why do you strike your companion?" The man responds by saying, "Who made you a prince and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me just as you killed the Egyptian?" Upon realizing that his cover is blown and the thing is known, Moses has a fearful reaction. Verse 15 says that he fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. After a failed attempt at saving his people, he is now running for his life. He is a fugitive on the run, no doubt exhausted, full of emotion, wondering where his life was headed, he sits down by a well. In the Bible, wells are places where things happen, places where people meet, a hub of social activity and interaction, places where random encounters turn out to be providential. It was at a well where Eliezer Abraham's servant, while on a quest to find a bride for Isaac, met Rebekah. It was at a well where Jacob met Rachel.

So it is not surprising that once again, we see the providential hand of God at work in Moses' life. The arid, desolate desert of Midian will be his zip code for the next 40 years of his life, and it is there that Moses learns a third lesson.

3—A patient lesson in OBSCURITY (2:16-22)

“Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came 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.”

Moses had been educated in all the wisdom and learning of the Egyptians. He had received an education from the finest schools of Egypt. Speaking of schools, you may be interested to know that there are some 4,414 institutions of higher learning in our country. Of those, some 2,832 are four-year colleges and universities while another 1,582 are two-year schools. According to the latest data, there is a total of 1,050 community colleges in the U.S. There are a number of places where a person can receive a top notch education. US News and World Report always list the top schools in the nation, and topping their list this past year are #1 Princeton, #2 MIT, with Harvard, Stanford, and Yale all tying at #3. Now, I’m sure that many of you are quite proud of your ‘alma mater.’ You wear your class ring. You go to football games. You have a favorite sweat shirt with the school colors and mascot.

Moses was educated, but God is about to enroll Moses in a different school. Chuck Swindoll expresses it this way:

“God has a school...and there isn’t anything usual about it. It doesn’t have dormitories, a science lab, a football field. It isn’t listed in any catalog, magazine, or website. There is no endowment, no pomp and circumstance, or no state of the art facilities and faculty.”

Moses is going to receive an education from Wilderness University. He takes a class and is enrolled in Wilderness 101. In chapter 3, that word ‘wilderness’ or ‘desert’ will be used to describe where he ends up. Moses flees to the land of Midian where he will end up tending sheep in the backcountry wilderness. That is significant, because most of his life is going to be spent in this wilderness. His first forty years are spent in Egypt, his next forty years will be spent in the wilderness of Midian, and his last forty years will be spent leading Israel through the wilderness. One person puts it this way, “Moses was 40 years in Egypt learning to be something, he was 40 years in the desert learning to be nothing, and then he was 40 years in the wilderness proving God to be everything.”

“Wilderness”—*translates the Hebrew word ‘midbar’ which comes from the root word ‘dabar’ which means to speak*

That’s very significant because it suggests the wilderness is a place where God speaks, where He communicates some of His most important words, where He teaches us some of the most important lessons we need to learn.

Spiritually, the wilderness will be an enriching place for Moses. As a man on the run, he ends up in the desert of Midian. It was more than likely located somewhere in the Sinai peninsula, a very arid climate and rugged terrain. It was the perfect place for God to make Moses into the man He wanted him to be. The wilderness is a place where we can meet God, a place with no distractions. Cut off from the rest of civilization and reduced to nothing but his basic necessities, Moses is forced to throw himself on the mercy of God’s gracious providence. When we consider the lives of the Old Testament prophets, we discover that there are times when God would sort of get them off to the side so they could spend time alone with Him. It was critical for him to spend uninterrupted time alone in the presence of God, seeking the will of God and strength

for His work. It was there, often in a wilderness place, that God revealed His truth to them. We find this same pattern replicated all throughout the Bible, don't we? It was in the wilderness that Jacob met God in Genesis 28. It was in a wilderness that Elijah heard the still, small voice of God in 1 Kings 19. It was in the wilderness where John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance according to Matthew. It was in a wilderness where Jesus was triumphant over the devil's temptation according to Matthew 4. It was in a wilderness where Paul spent the first two years of his Christian life while searching the Old Testament scriptures according to Galatians 1. Notice it is in the wilderness of Midian where Moses will come face to face with God in what will prove to be the most formative experience of his spiritual life.

Don't be surprised when you find yourself in a 'midbar' or desolate place in life. And don't assume that you are there because God has put you on a shelf, has nothing else for you, and is done with you. No, the 'midbar' is a place of spiritual development and it is key to our Christian growth. In the dry places of life, we often find ourselves stripped of all those things we cling to for comfort, all the stuff we felt that we could not live without but really didn't need at all. It is there that we discern the still small voice of God.

Relationally, the wilderness will be an eye-opening place for Moses. Notice what happens in verse 16 where we are told about the priest of Midian who had seven daughters. Midian was also a son of Abraham whom he fathered by his second wife, Keturah. That means the Midianites were cousins of the Israelites and eventually would become the bitter enemy of Israel. But here, we read that Moses finds sanctuary in the home of the priest of Midian. His name is mentioned in verse 18 as 'Reuel' which means friend of El. That indicates that at least he and his clan is a worshiper of the true God. This man has seven daughters, and they just so happened to come to the well to water their father's flock. However, verse 17 says 'the shepherds' came and drove them away. The fact that they are referred to as 'the shepherds' both in verse 17 as well as verse 19 indicates that this was a recurring problem. These shepherds were the neighborhood bullies. And by this point, we are well aware that if there is one thing that Moses does not like, it is a bully. Verse 17

says, “But Moses stood up and saved them, and watered their flock.” Once again, he sees the need. Once again, he acts as a deliverer. But this time we don’t read about anyone being buried in the sand.

Let me tell you, character is often forged and proven in the wilderness of life. That’s true of Moses, and later on it will be true of Israel as a nation. Decades later, Moses will be on the threshold of the Promised Land and will remind the Israelites of this. He says to them in:

Deuteronomy 8:2—“And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that He might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.”

The wilderness would be a place where God tested His people, where He taught them something about His own gracious provision. Before that was true of the nation, it will be true of their leader. Moses is going to learn about the faithfulness of God. It is during these years that he will become a husband and father. Verse 21 says that Moses is content to dwell with Reuel, marries the man’s daughter Zipporah, and then they have a son. Moses will name him ‘Gershom’ which means sojourner. His reason is seen in verse 22—“For I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.”

Practically, the wilderness will be an equipping place for Moses. One of the things he learns there is geography, for later on when he leads God’s people out of Egypt, he will know his way around. Vocationally, it is in the wilderness that Moses becomes a shepherd. It would hardly be the profession that he would have chosen for himself in Egypt! Do you remember that small cultural detail from Genesis 46? Shepherds were loathsome to the Egyptians. So consider the humility of the situation as this once proud man who was reared in the place of the pharaohs is now a shepherd. Moses may well have been educated in all the wisdom and learning of the Egyptians, but God is going to enroll him in ‘Wilderness 101’ and make him a shepherd, a thing that will teach him valuable lessons for much later on when he leads the flock of God.

Philip Ryken—*“For starters, sheep are not very bright, which means they need someone to lead them to food and water. They make an easy target for predators; so they need someone to protect them. They are prone to wander; so they need someone to bring them back into the fold. In short, sheep are completely dependent on shepherds for their care, which is why the Bible so often compares God’s people to sheep.”*

Psalm 100:3—**“Know that the Lord, He is God! It is He who made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.”**

We are sheep who need a Shepherd! The hymnwriter said:

*Savior, like a shepherd lead us,
Much we need Thy tender care;
In Thy pleasant pastures feed us,
For our use Thy folds prepare.*

Moses stooped to serve, and by learning to serve he was learning to lead, for all God’s leaders are servants before they are anything else. The perfect example is Jesus, who did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. As the Servant of Isaiah 53, He suffered for our sins and laid down His life in sacrifice. He is the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep!

Those years spent in the wilderness of Midian will be very practical for Moses. But beyond the practical side is the much greater spiritual education that he will receive. For before he will lead Israel out of Egypt, God is going to get Egypt out of Moses. And before Moses gives God’s Word to His people, Moses will first receive it. Moses learns a personal lesson in identity, a painful lesson in humility, and a patient lesson in obscurity. Last of all, notice he learns:

4—A practical lesson in DIVINITY (2:23-25)

“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 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.”

There in the place of obscurity, the years go by for Moses, and verse 23 says, “During those many days the king of Egypt died.” Political transitions happen yet once again. It was the same story for the Israelites, however, and they ‘groaned’ because of their slavery. The scene shifts back to the Israelites in Egypt who are still in bondage, who are still under the heavy yoke of oppression. Their suffering is emphasized using four separate Hebrew words—groaned (‘anach’), cried out (‘zawaq’), cry for rescue (‘shavah’), and groaning (‘neaqah’).

Christoper Wright—*“The Israelites may think [that] their suffering is forgotten. The Egyptians may think their crimes are committed with impunity. Moses may think he can never help his people again after his first failed attempt. But God is on the case.”*

God hears us when we cry out to Him in the midst of our pain. God remembers the promises He has made. When the Scripture says that God ‘remembers’ something, it is not implying that He had forgotten. Instead, it means that He is now preparing to take action in relation to what or who is remembered. When God remembers, it refers to God acting in faithfulness to His covenant promises.

God sees us in our deepest affliction. God knows what we feel and need, and He will respond in time. Isn’t that just a wonderful word for us in the wildernesses of life?

F.B. Meyer—*“Every blow of the hand that buffets you, every cut of the scourge, every scorching hour under the noon tide sun, every lonely hour when lovers and friends stand aloof, every step into the valley of the shadow, every moment of sleep beneath the juniper tree, is watched by the eyes that never slumber nor sleep.”*

The sweet psalmist of Israel wrote:

Psalm 121:1-8—**“I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel**

will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.”

The writer of Hebrews says that Moses was faithful in all of God’s house, yet in Jesus Christ, we have someone who is far better than Moses. Hebrews 3:3 says, “For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.” Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a Son. He is the Captain of our salvation, a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens.

Hebrews 4:15—“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

To be sure, Moses was a faithful servant, but his record was not perfect. He was a man who needed a Savior, just like we need a Savior. Why does God lead us through the wilderness places of life? Beloved, we find an answer in the life of Moses. It is so that He humble us, that He might test us, so that the true condition of our heart might be revealed. It isn’t that God might come to know you, but that you might come to know you. There is nothing like a wilderness to help open your eyes to the real you, to focus your attention on the grace you stand in need of each day.

*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word
What more can He say than to you He hath said
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled*

*Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed
For I am thy God and will still give thee aid
I’ll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand*

*When through the deep waters I call thee to go
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress*

*When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie
My grace all sufficient shall be thy supply
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine*

*The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose
I will not, I will not desert to its foes
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake
I'll never, no never, no never forsake*