

Exodus 2

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[0 : 0 0] Well, as Mike said at the beginning, I've been appointed the intra-moderator for the congregation, not only during David's time of sabbatical, but beyond that when David and Martha will leave at the end of January. Now, obviously, I will be back, God willing, and I think it would be more appropriate for not to say anything about what may or may not happen next year until then. I'm a great believer in crossing bridges when we come to them, and we will cross bridges, God willing, when we come to them. The congregation will be declared vacant in February, the first Sunday of February, and from then on, my position will become a little bit more official, I suppose is the word I'm looking for, official, and at that time, all will be explained very clearly, as clearly as I possibly can. But for the moment, this is a time to reflect on what God has done over the past 12 years during David's ministry here, and for him to wish him and Martha, and to pray for the Lord's blessing on their preparation to leave, and for them, for us to think about, you know, the kind of work that they will be involved in, and to pray that God will bless that work very much indeed. So, that's all I really want to say at the moment. Like I say, more to follow, but in the new year, all being well. Let's return to Exodus, to chapter 2, the chapter that I read, which of course tells the story of the birth of Moses. Moses' life can be divided into three eras. There was the first 40 years, the second 40 years, and the last 40 years, because he lived till the age of 120. The first 40 years can be described as Moses, the prince of Egypt, his upbringing in the Egyptian palace. And then, of course, things went pear-shaped, because he was evicted from, or rather, he had to flee from Egypt, and he had to become an exile, a refugee in Midian, and there he spent the next 40 years as an exile away from Egypt, from prince to refugee. And the third 40 years, of course, describes how God brought him all the way back to Egypt to become the deliverer of his people Israel. And the book of Exodus tells the story of how the plagues happened, and how the Red Sea was parted in two, and how the people of Israel were delivered from Egypt into the wilderness, and eventually through the wilderness into the promised land. And all of that was under the leadership of Moses. Three eras, then, each lasting 40 years.

And chapter 2 covers a whole era. It covers from his birth to his having to flee as an exile. And I want to condense the whole chapter by way of asking three questions, three very simple, practical questions. And I want to suggest that this chapter goes at least some way to answering those questions. These are questions that we've probably reflected on at many times in our lives.

Number one, how do faith and works go together? How does faith combine with our actions? Is faith antithetical to action? Are the two connected, or are they nothing to do with one another? Faith and works. Because Hebrews tells us that it was by faith that Moses' parents hid him. We read about how Moses' parents hid him from the army, from the Egyptian army. How do faith and our actions go together? That's the first question. The second question is, is it possible to stop God's ultimate plan? Is it possible to stop, to prevent God's plan taking place? And of course, we're focusing on Pharaoh and how Pharaoh stood against Moses and against God. He was fighting against God. And the third question is, is it possible for me as a Christian to find myself outside of God's will? Is it possible to do something that puts me outside of God's plan and God's will? And of course, I'm focusing on what

Moses did in killing the Egyptian, which appeared on the outside to leave him in exile, in isolation, out of what God was doing amongst Israel. Is it possible to do something that will place me outside of God's plan? So, these are questions that I believe that all of us have probably asked at some point in various different circumstances. First question then is, how do faith and works go together?

Remember, we read in Hebrews chapter 11 that it was by faith that Moses' parents hid him. But let's look a little bit more closely at why they hid him and what motivated and compelled them to take the action that they did. Three things the New Testament tells, well, or rather two things the New Testament tells us one thing this chapter tells. First of all, when Moses' mother saw that he was a fine child.

[6 : 38] When she saw that he was a fine child. Now, that piece of information is not given for no reason, especially because it's repeated by no less than Stephen on trial in Acts chapter 7. He says, he was beautiful in God's sight. And so, she hid him. He was beautiful in God. So, we've got two pieces of information. One is that Moses' mother saw that he was a fine child, and then Stephen tells us that God, in God's sight, he was beautiful. But there's even more than that. Because Hebrews 11, 23 tells us that because they saw that the child was beautiful, they hid him. Now, that's three times the Bible tells us. The Bible tells us the same apparently ordinary piece of information. I mean, doesn't every parent think that their child is beautiful? Of course they do. Every mother, as soon as she sees her child, she's going to see that that child is the most beautiful thing that she's ever seen in her life. It's natural to believe and to reckon our children to be beautiful. Is that what the Bible is talking about? Well, I want to suggest that that's not what the Bible means at all. We're not talking about the natural affection that there is between parents and their children. Because it says,

Stephen tells us, that he was beautiful in God's sight. This was a recognition of beauty from God's perspective. And that's different. That kind of sets things out on their own. It puts things in a different category. We're not talking about just natural, the natural love between a parent and his or her children. But we're talking about something deeper, something that is divine.

And what I mean is this, that by faith, Moses' mother and his father, they saw things from God's perspective. They were looking at life from God's perspective, not just life as a series of events from day to day, but as a series of events that take place in the divine overarching plan of God.

Why? Because they are men and women of faith. They've come to yield their lives to God. They don't not only know that God is there, but they have submitted themselves to God. They know God. God is personal to them. That's what faith is. Faith is walking with God, living in the light of God, living from the perspective of God. You know Him as your Lord, your God. And the Bible tells us that that relationship is offered to every single one of us through the Lord Jesus Christ. We too can know God for ourselves.

The way to come to know God is through Jesus. And that invitation is given to all of us. If you don't know God this morning, God Himself invites you freely and lovingly to come close to Him and to discover what He has done in Jesus so that you can come to know Him as your own personal Savior.

[10 : 23] That's the good news of the gospel. And in that relationship, God promises that our sin is forgiven because of what Jesus has done. And the life that He gives us is a new life and an eternal life and an abundant life, life as you've never known it before. That's what the gospel offers us.

That's what God offers us in His Word and through His Son, Jesus Christ. But don't imagine that people in the Old Testament didn't know God for themselves the same way as we do. They may not have known the same information as we do because we have the New Testament. But these men and women, they were men and women of faith. And they lived in faith and they spoke in faith and they walked and related to God in faith. And it was a faith that affected every decision that they make. So, when they have a baby, they see this in the light of God. That's what happens when you're a man or a woman of faith.

You see things from a different perspective. You see things from God's perspective, from the big picture. What's God doing in this? And when this man and this woman had their baby, they realized that God was doing something and that it included them having a baby. This was a gift from God, something that God had graciously given to them. And so, they went into action. Why? Because there was danger. Pharaoh had given the order that every male child amongst the Israelites had to be put to death. That was because he was paranoid. It was because he was freaked out by the rapid growth in the population of Israel. He felt threatened by that. And when you feel threatened, you take drastic, unreasonable, irrational action. Many dictators do the same thing today. They do all kinds of awful things in order to suppress any kind of threat. That's what he was doing. And here was a family, an ordinary family. I'm sure that this had happened to their neighbors. Their kids had been taken away from them and drowned in the Nile. This was an atrocity that Pharaoh was committing day in, day out. So, what were they going to do? Here's a man and a woman of faith. They know God. They believe in God. They're worshipers. What are they going to do? Are they going to say, well, it's up to God. He's sovereign. He's on the throne. We just need to wait and see what happens.

Not a chance. Faith went into action because faith always does go into action. Faith does not sit back and see what God does. Sometimes it does that. But in this case, because there was an opportunity to put measures in place to hide their child from Pharaoh, they took that opportunity and they used it and they used every possible instrument and occasion and gift and skill that they had. When it says that Moses' mother made a basket, the language tells us that a huge amount of thought and skill and planning went into it. She knew what she was doing. She used her skill and her abilities in order to effect this plan. You see, the plan wasn't contradictory to faith. It went along with faith. God uses means to bring about His purpose. And the means that He uses often involve our gifts and the abilities that

He has given us, the skills, the particular skills that He has given us. So, don't imagine for a moment if you're a man or a woman who believes and trusts and loves the Lord, that your life is simply one of sitting back and letting God do it in His own miraculous way. He's not going to do that. What He is going to do is He's going to use your personality, your opportunities, your gifts, and your abilities to bring about His plan. You see, here was a woman who was deeply convicted. There is no way that I am going to allow these soldiers to come in and it would have been criminal to do otherwise.

[15:24] There is no way. I am so convicted. I'm even more convicted than if I just loved my child with a natural motherly love. I have ten times more conviction because I believe that God is doing something. And so, I'm going to put my conviction into action. That's what faith is, putting our conviction, as long as it's rightly placed, into action so that God can do His work through our means.

The same is true for every generation, including where we are today and the time that we live in today. It begins by being moved by God's Word. Are you moved by God's Word? Are you affected by the gospel? Does God's Word convict you to the point where your faith goes into action and that you apply all the gifts that God has given you for His glory? So, that's the first thing. How do faith and works go together? And then the second thing is this. And here we're looking at the big picture here, the political landscape in Egypt. And we're asking, is it possible to stop God's plan? I believe that a chapter like this gives us a huge amount of encouragement because we know the end of the story.

But if you read this chapter, it appears that everything is lost. Things look really bleak for the Israelites. It's 400 years since the Israelites moved into Egypt because of Joseph. Remember, there was a famine and Joseph asked Pharaoh if he would give them a piece of land where his family would come in.

70. There were only 70 of them. Well, that's a big family, but not anything like what it became in the fullness of time. But these 70 people over time, they grew into 2 million people. There were 2 million Israelites. Now, I would imagine politically and economically, I would imagine that that is an inconvenience for any ruler to have that kind of situation on my hands. But instead, of course, of continuing the friendship that there had been between Egypt and Israel, Pharaoh decided that he would suppress and oppress these people in order to stop them becoming a threat to them. But Pharaoh was, of course, able to do that because he was on the throne. He was the ruler. He was the king.

And it appeared for all the world as if he was utterly invincible. As far as the known world of that time was concerned, he was the superpower. And what he said went... Remember, we're living in the days of tyrants and dictators. And so, this was his word. And when he sent his army out to put to death the babies, then that was it. You had to live with that. You had to decide to suffer if you happened to be in the unfortunate position of being an Israelite at that time. It appeared as if nothing could stop Pharaoh's power.

[19 : 02] And yet, all the time, because we know the end of the story, we know that his days are numbered. We know that whilst in Exodus chapter 2, it appears that nothing's going to stop Pharaoh and that he is invincible. He can do what he likes with whom he likes. We know that by chapter 12, his cities are destroyed. His cattle are destroyed. His fields are destroyed. His firstborn out of every home has been put to death. And his army is going to be destroyed by chapter 12. He is yesterday's man in chapter 12.

12. Because power is only transient. It's only temporary. And the history of humankind plays this out time after time, era after era, century after century. The power that is at the moment one day will be yesterday's power. And it will be defeated or diminished or demoralized. His country was in ruins by chapter 12.

And why? And it didn't need to be like that because he had a golden opportunity of listening to God and surrendering to God is because he refused to surrender to the simple command of God, God, let my people go. And he became utterly ruined. Of course, there's a great lesson in this for all of us, that fighting against God is never going to ultimately win because God is ultimately on the throne.

You think of it. The ultimate irony in this chapter was that while Pharaoh was putting effective and powerful measures into suppressing the people of Israel into suppressing the people of Israel because he imagined them to be a threat to him, under his very nose, in his very palace, the person who is going to defeat him and his kingdom and who is going to ultimately deliver the people of Israel is eating his dinner at Pharaoh's expense.

Pharaoh's paying for his upbringing and he doesn't even know it. Pharaoh's paying for his money. God is working behind the scenes. He's working under the radar.

[21 : 52] And nothing, nothing can stop God doing his work. And it's always been the same way and it is today as well.

Whatever the prevailing mood of society is, it will not last forever. Whatever the conflicts, whatever the opposition that there is, however unpopular the Christian faith may be right now, whatever the received wisdom of the world is, even if it appears as if everyone's going along with it.

And it appears as if God is dead past his sell-by date. The Bible is no more. It's dead. It's finished as far as the outside world is concerned because the prevailing opinion is secular.

God is working. God is doing his own, fulfilling his own plan under the radar, perhaps at the moment.

Invisibly to us, he will bring about his purpose. And this is why I believe it's so essential to study history because history tells us time and time again how transient and changeable and unpredictable the mood of the world in many eras has been.

[23 : 26] God will win at the end of the day as he did in this chapter. And he tells us, he promises that in the New Testament.

I am coming. One day, this whole world, of course, will come to an end. And God won't consult with the powers that be as to when that will be.

He will do it in his own time. And Jesus will return. And he asks us and commands us to be ready for that moment. And Moses, of course, is in the middle of all of this.

This power struggle. This dictatorship. And meanwhile, Moses is having to make some very interesting personal decisions.

Because as he is growing up, Hebrews tells us that there came a crisis point in Moses. Now, here's what Moses is having to put up with. He is, remember, remember the deal that Moses' mother came to with the princess at that time.

[24 : 33] And the princess said, right, we're going to take him to the palace. But his mother said, well, I'll look after him. So, what that meant was that Moses was brought up under two influences.

The influence of Egypt, which, of course, was pagan. And the influence of his mother, his home, which, of course, was the living and true God.

Now, can you imagine that? Can you imagine the contradiction that there would be? Can you imagine the conflict that there would be? At some point in his life, he would have seen that.

He would have come face to face. He would have had to face the fact that both of these cannot be true at the same time. Either the Egyptians are true in their pagan ideology and their pagan religion, whether it was Ra or whoever they worshipped, or what my mother is telling me is true, that there is a living and true God who has covenant relationship with my people Israel.

So, it's got to be one or the other. And Hebrews tells us that he came to a crisis point in his thinking where he had to choose. It could not be both.

[25 : 47] And his choice was to serve the living God, even if that meant throwing away all of the opportunities and the riches that there were in Egypt as a prince.

And that's what he did. Because you can't have both. And so, Moses came to that point of surrender and commitment to the God of Israel, to the living and the true God.

But at first, he made a mistake. Or what appears to have made a mistake, I think it was a mistake. It was a rash decision.

Because he saw, as he came to that conclusion, as he came to that decision to serve God, he then saw this Egyptian beating up an Israelite.

And he did what came natural, but unwisely to him. He killed the Egyptian. Mistake.

[27 : 02] Bad move. Impulsive mistake. And it was a mistake that was to cost him the next 40 years, or so he imagined.

Because as a result of his killing the Egyptian, eventually, once it became known, he had to flee. But Stephen tells us, Acts chapter 7, and he tells us that the reason he killed the Egyptian was because he was trying to assert himself as a leader.

But that wasn't God's time, and it wasn't God's method. And as a result of that, he had to leave, and had to spend the next 40 years in Midian.

Now, I often try and imagine what it must have been like for Moses, what it must have been like for him to have to leave Egypt and to go into exile in Midian.

It must have appeared as if that's me, finished. For the rest of my life, I'm going to have to live in Midian for the rest of my days.

[28 : 07] I'll serve out my days. And it appears as if he became quite comfortable in that life. He married. He had two sons. He had a good job. A job that didn't require a great deal of stress.

Looking after his father-in-law's sheep. All the appearances are that life was going pretty well for him. I guess that once his father-in-law passed away, he would inherit the father-in-law's estate, and life looked very rosy for him.

But he could not have been more wrong if he imagined that God had finished with him because God had not finished with him. Because no matter what our mistakes are in this world, as God's people, God is able to make all things work together for good to those who love him and those who are called according to his purpose.

God is able to transform our errors, our errors of judgment, what we say, what we do. I'm not giving us an excuse to live any way we want. Of course we don't have that excuse, and we need to be careful to apply what we know, God's word, into our daily lives.

But here is an example of God transforming this man's failure and weaving it into his perfect plan, the result of which was Moses came back.

[29 : 36] He was commanded to come back and to begin the third phase of his life, which of course was the deliverer of Israel.

And God is victorious through, even through, the failure of his people.

That should be an encouragement to all of us. God knows who you are. He knows where you are. He knows the strength of your faith.

He knows your weaknesses and your abilities. He knows everything about you. And he is able to do in us and for us more than we can ask or even think.

Don't ever write yourself off as a child of God. Even if things appear for the moment as if you're outside of God's radar, you are never outside of God's radar because of his covenant love for his people.

[30 : 49] And who knows what God will do through any one of us as time goes on. Somebody said once that Moses spent the first 40 years as the prince of Egypt.

He was a somebody. He spent the next 40 years in exile as a nobody. But he spent the last 40 years discovering what God can do with a nobody.

And God can do that and will do that and will continue to do that. Which means that as we worship him today, we give ourselves afresh to him.

We repent of our wrongs. We ask that we might be cleansed by the blood of Christ afresh and that God will send us out in his name to witness for him as ambassadors for his kingdom.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for what the Lord Jesus Christ did when he gave himself on the cross. And we thank you for the new life that has been given to your people through him.

[32 : 19] We pray that in that new life that you will reign, that you will make us obedient, that you will work within us through your spirit, that you will make us repentant of what we do that is wrong.

And we pray that in your own time that you will fulfill your plan. And we pray that we will be part of that plan, even a small part.

Our Father in heaven, sometimes we feel that our lives are so insignificant. We may not be a Moses. We may not be leaders. Our names might never be written in the history books, but that doesn't matter because they are known to you and you know who we are.

And we pray that through our obedience to you that we will simply glorify you in our own small corner.

In Jesus' name, amen.