

Meeting Moses

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[0 : 0 0] Well, friends, if you can turn in your Bibles to the passage we read in Exodus chapter 2. In Exodus chapter 2, and have these words open before you.

We're going to meet Moses tonight as we study this passage. But with any introduction to an Old Testament character, we only meet that individual in order to see Jesus. And so we're meeting Moses, but we're going to be led to Jesus through what we're going to see. I want us to begin tonight by thinking about how you can have two children born at the same time. One in sub-Saharan Africa, one perhaps in Germany. And their life's potential, or as people in that sphere of work would say, their life's chances would be so different because of the social economic environments in which they grew up in. Well, if somebody was to use that sort of analysis of the life chances, and we don't like necessarily the term, but you understand what I'm saying. The life potential of this child that's been born in Exodus chapter 2.

[1 : 1 2] Then we would say his life chances are almost non-existent. Because he's born into a people group who have experienced successive policies at the hand of a regime that were trying to punish them.

So from harsh enslavement to then the policy of infanticide, of killing young children as they're born, it then moved on to the next level by the time Moses was born.

The last verse of chapter 1 tells us that it was now official government policy that genocide was permitted. That anybody, if they saw these young Hebrew boys, could throw them in the Nile, would kill them.

And so here you have this child being born in the context of genocide against his people group. And so he enters a world of cruelty. He enters a world of pain.

He enters a world of slavery, of despair. In many ways, he's under this sentence of death. And so that's where we begin tonight.

[2 : 1 8] As we think of what chapter 2 says to us. As we work our way through this passage and see what God sees, what lessons are drawn out from a chapter like this.

I want us to think as we begin of this young Hebrew family. There's the mother and father. They've got two young children. And the mother is expecting her third child.

The two children, Miriam and Aaron. You can imagine if it was anything like it is today. You know the way the grown-ups engage youngsters. And if they know that the kid, the child knows that their mum's pregnant.

And, oh, what would you like? Would you like a young, a little brother or a little sister? And you can almost imagine the sharp intake of breath if Aaron said, oh, I'd love a younger brother.

And the sharp intake of breath. And the darting eyes as Moses' parents look at each other thinking, what are we going to do?

[3 : 1 5] What are we going to do if God does give us a baby boy? Now, bear in mind it was Moses that wrote these words. So there's very kind of brief information for us.

But it doesn't take too much for us to understand, to imagine that when the first words spoken about Moses, it's a boy, were then met with the reaction of widened eyes and of signs to be quiet.

Because this news had to be kept under wraps. They had to keep this as quiet as they possibly could do. Because this child, now that he's been born, is in mortal danger.

And so begins the roller coaster. The roller coaster of trying to keep a child quiet. I remember when we took our first child home, when she came home from hospital, she literally screamed the whole first night she was with us.

She was trying to get some antibiotics out of her system or whatever it might be. But she literally screamed the whole night. It got so bad, just after three o'clock in the morning, our Labrador at the time came into the room that we were in.

[4 : 21] And uttered the deepest sigh that I've ever heard a dog offering. Because the noise was so piercingly loud. So here you have Moses' parents.

And they've got this newborn child. And how were they supposed to hide the noises? Are they going to say to the neighbours, oh, did you hear all these animals last night making such a noise? Or you may have perhaps overheard Aaron.

Aaron was very distressed through the night. Now Aaron just settled down. Were they blaming it on Aaron who was a mere toddler at the time? They were in a 24-hour nerve jangling process to somehow keep this baby quiet.

If Miriam was making any noise, she'd be told to hush. Aaron, if he's going anywhere near the baby, no, no, no, leave the baby. You'll wake him. You'll wake him. And so their nerves must have been shredded.

And yet it came to a point where it was now just too risky. And so the passage kind of tells us here that when Moses' mother saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months.

[5 : 26] But then she could hide him no longer. Now was there informers for the Egyptian authorities wandering amongst the area that the Hebrews lived?

Were there searches for newborn children? Was Moses' mother's absence being noted and questions being asked? We don't know. But we do know that after three months, it got to the stage that they had to do something about it.

And so a plan kicked in at that point. And surveillance was done so that they might try and figure out the pattern of Pharaoh's daughter as to when she would come to the Nile to bathe.

And so this plan was concocted. And the day came for this plan to be enacted. And we have this given to us in verse 3. Moses' mother, she'd made this papyrus basket, coated in tar and pitch, placed a child in it, put it in the reeds along the bank of the Nile.

The sister's standing guard. And here comes Pharaoh's daughter's entourage. Let's not underestimate, however, the emotional agony that Moses' mother must have gone through.

[6 : 38] The emotional agony of placing her beautiful child in this basket, covering him over, putting him in the water and walking away.

And not knowing is she ever going to see her child again. It's by no means a comparison. But some of you, like we have over the years, have had to leave our children to go under a general anaesthetic in a hospital.

And if you've been in that situation, you know that it's a very emotional situation. You're going along and you're trying to reassure and you see the anaesthetic going in and then you see them falling asleep and then you've got to go.

And you've gone through the plan and you know it's necessary and you know the risks are minimal. But you still have to walk away and the what-ifs go through your minds. And that's nothing compared to Moses' mother here.

Because for her, the risks weren't minimal. They were maximum. Unless there was some divine intervention, there was absolutely no way she was going to see her son alive again.

[7 : 47] And so when this favourite childhood story is illustrated in these kids' books, you don't see anything in the graphics about the emotions of what's taking place here.

Nor do you see anything in these books about the faith that is also on show. And you may say, but Alistair, where is the faith element here? It doesn't say anything about faith.

Well, it does later on in the Bible. Because Hebrews chapter 11 is effectively another beam of light onto this passage. And Hebrews chapter 11 says in verse 23, By faith, Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child.

And they were not afraid of the king's edict. So it tells us that they have faith. It tells us that they have an understanding of who to fear.

That they're not going to fear man. They actually fear God. And that God has given them this gift. And this is no ordinary child. This is a fine child. Well, every mother sees their child as fine and not being ordinary in any way.

[8 : 59] They're precious. But they're conscious that this child is a gift from God. And so they're exercising faith and trust in God through what's taking place here.

But you may say, well, how would they know to have faith or to trust in God? And the answer to that is given to us in the book of Genesis. Because in Genesis, we're told in a number of places, but I can illustrate two in chapter 46 and verse 4.

That the promise of God is given, I will go down to Egypt with you and I will bring you back again. That's a promise that's repeated again later on in chapter 48.

God will be with you, but then God's going to take you back to the land of your fathers. So they knew that their time in Egypt was temporary. They'd been there some 400 years by now.

And they say, well, that seems a pretty permanent period of time, but it's not. It's a temporary period of time. And the fact they'd been there some 400 years would also point them to something that was revealed to Abraham as well.

[10:10] And so they knew that the time was in God's hands. They knew that this was a temporary residency that they had. And now they know that God has given them this particular child that even though they've had two before, there's something distinct about Moses.

And so they have a faith in God, not a faith that's been somehow summoned up from inside of them, because we can't do that, because faith is a gift of God. But they have faith.

And so this plan that has been put in place is not a plan that's been merely concocted through human reasoning. God has obviously led them down a particular route.

And it's not a remarkably happy ending of a story, how lucky everything has just worked out and everything falling into place. That's not how we see it at all.

That's not how they would have seen it, because they would have seen the sovereign hand of God in control of everything that was happening. And so there's almost as if it were a degree of humour here as you read the passage.

[11:15] And the plan works so perfectly that Moses is not simply spared, but he is back at home and his mother is now paid to bring him up. It's almost too good to be true.

It is true because of the sovereign hand of God. Now, Moses was only there for a number of years, but he was crucially, he was there long enough for him to have established within his heart the Hebrew roots.

He was there long enough to learn of his people, but more importantly, to learn of his people's God. And so he was one who is almost an example, genuinely, of how the future of a nation can be shaped on the lap of a mother and father teaching their child about who God is and what God has done.

And I suppose there's an obvious application for those of us tonight who are parents or grandparents as we think of the impact that we can have on our families.

And for modern parents in particular, where there is this rat race that we're all involved in and it seems to be so chaotic. And we realise that, yes, school is important and all the extracurricular activities have their place, but there's actually nothing that's going to last into eternity.

[12:44] Then taking the time to ensure that we teach our children these gifts from God, to teach them about God, about the God who has come into this world, clearly communicating himself in Jesus Christ.

In many ways, he is now the language in which God communicates to us in Jesus Christ, the one who was similarly born into a world of cruelty and pain. He was born into a world of slavery and despair.

He too was born under a sentence of death, so that as soon as news of his birth was given, that despot Herod was trying to exterminate him from day one.

And so our children need to learn from their earliest days. They need to have roots embedded into their very souls from their earliest days about the words of God and about the work of God toward them.

And so that is Moses' birth. And so we have that obvious application as to the impact that we can have upon the generation growing up, teaching them of the wonder of God.

[13:57] And so we then move on in verse 11, where some 40 years have elapsed. And it's almost 40 years since Moses' life was turned upside down.

And he was taken from a slum to a palace. And he began that process of education in the finest educational establishment the history of the world had known up until that point.

And so Moses, that's the arena in which he grew up. And yet here we are 40 years later, and Moses is now at a decision point in his life.

He now has a decision to make. Is he going to be an Egyptian prince? Potentially even a future pharaoh? Or is he going to be an Israelite slave?

The time for pondering for Moses is now coming to a conclusion. Now, the very fact that we find him out one day when his people were watching them at their hard labour is reminding us that God was at work in his life, stirring things within him.

[15:07] And Moses, no doubt, would have heard within the palace some of the stories about how the Israelites were being dealt with, how these pesky Hebrews were being dealt with, and how they couldn't cope with these new regulations under which they were operating, and how they were being beaten.

Perhaps he would have seen over the years various different Hebrews cowering as they passed him, with various bruises and cuts from beatings that they'd had at the hands of the Egyptians. But this day, it was different. Because this day, it was right before his very eyes. There's an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people.

And the decision time for Moses came. Am I going to be an Egyptian prince, or am I going to be an Israelite slave?

And again, we go to the torch of the New Testament. And the beam of light from that same chapter, Hebrews chapter 11, tells us what was going on in Moses' heart at that point.

[16:15] It says, verse 24 of Hebrews 11, Because he was looking ahead to his reward.

So Moses' dilemma is a dilemma that we almost think, how did he come up with that decision? So he's literally going to relinquish his rank and all the pleasures that his rank brings, all the privileges. He's going to relinquish all of that and be mistreated with the people of God. Why would anybody do that? And that's a question that lots of people would ask.

And those who understand anything of the Christian faith might look at you or they might look at me and think, Well, their lives could have been so different. They could have achieved so many other things. Why on earth have their lives been so restricted by this faith in this God that they follow?

And those who think like that don't understand the promises of God. They don't understand the work of God. But Moses, even in its embryonic form, understood the promises of God that he was going to hold on to.

[17:45] Because he, in the words of somebody who lived thousands of years later, he who is no fool, who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

Moses realized that rank and pleasure and riches, it's actually nothing in comparison with knowing God and being found in him.

Moses knew from experience that pleasures and possessions and places and peoples in this world cannot deal with the deepest yearnings of his own heart.

And just as they couldn't deal with Moses' deepest yearnings, he can't deal with those either. That it doesn't matter what we have, we want more. And there's a constant dissatisfaction until we encounter the living God as he's presented to us in the person of his son, Jesus Christ.

And so let's go to an application point on this. Moses reached a decision point. It had taken him to age 40 to get to that decision point. But now was a time of decision because somebody's life depended on it.

[18:55] What was he going to do? Well, similarly, tonight can very well be a decision point for you too. And somebody's life does depend on it.

It's your own life that depends on it. Jesus spoke in the Gospel of Matthew, spoke words that were applicable in his day, but they're even more so now.

He said, Life lived to the full.

The promise of forgiveness. The promise of that burden of guilt being taken from you. The promise of his cleansing. Of his acceptance. The reality of the hope that he offers.

The joy that he gives that transcends circumstances. The peace that's indescribable. Because of all of these things. That's what opens to us. When we bow before Jesus Christ.

[20:19] And acknowledge him as Lord and King. And in case you're somehow wondering and thinking, well, listen, the time for decision has passed. I should have made that decision a month ago. Weeks ago. Decades ago. The time for decision has not passed.

Because you're here tonight. And you're listening to this message. Tonight is decision time. It's time to make it. Make sure it's the right one. As you repent.

As you believe. As you turn and trust. In Jesus. Moving on. We see that as we are introduced to Moses. When he's making this decision that's going to impact the rest of his life. We encounter Moses in almost his first grown-up experience. That we're given any knowledge of. And we see him failing. And that's really quite interesting. We see him failing. So he joins a list of people. Well, he joins two lists in effect. But one list could be of famous people who knew failure early in life. So if he was in today's kind of conversation. [21 : 21] We would think of him along the lines of Steve Jobs. And we think of him along the lines of people like Bill Gates and J.K. Rowling. All of whom knew failure early on in life.

I mean, famously, one publisher wrote back to J.K. Rowling. And advised her to enroll in a writing course. Well, that shows how discerning they were. But here's Moses. He sees a need in front of him.

He realizes that he has been trained. He has this. He's been trained in the ways of Egypt. Yet he has a heart for the people of God. Because that's his people. He understands both his people. And he understands the people that are enslaving them. And he's got a vision. And he has a passion for trying to secure a better life for them.

And he also has an impatience. And so he tries to deal with the situation as he saw it. And somebody ends up losing their life. We could argue whether or not the guy he was hitting may have lost his life.

[22 : 28] But either way, Moses made a big mistake. And so he joins a list of people who knew failure early on in life. He joins a list of people in the Bible who had to learn patience.

We can think of Abraham and Sarah. And they're promised this child that's going to come. And they're going to have offspring more than the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. And it's taking a while before this promise is being fulfilled.

So like Moses, they take matters into their own hands and think of the consequences that come from it. Or we can think of Joseph. 22 years from the time he was given these dreams by God to the time these dreams actually came true.

We can think of the disciples after Jesus has been with them for 40 days following his resurrection. He's now with them. And we have this incident recorded in the opening verses of the book of Acts. And they've loved being with Jesus. The hopeless despair that they were in. Well, they're rejoicing in a way that they could never think possible. And they're coming to Jesus in Acts. And they're saying, are you going to at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

[23 : 41] Is this going to be the time that your kingdom is going to now come? And all the glimpses that we've had up until this point of a world where pain is dealt with and sorrow is dealt with and demons are banished?

Is now going to be the time? No, says Jesus. It's not yet the time. So Moses is one of another of God's people who have to learn that God's timing is different to our timing.

And so Moses may have the passion. He may have the vision. He may even have some underlying sense of a calling at this point. But he's impatient.

And he's trying to move things on along his timing. And that's never a wise thing. And so today for us, the application would be in some ways quite similar.

And it might be on one of two levels. It might be that you've got this vision, you've got this passion, and you see things that perhaps other people don't necessarily see when it comes to the expanse of the kingdom of God.

[24 : 46] And you want action. And you're having to learn patience. Patience is a good thing for us to learn if it's a lesson that God's teaching us. Or perhaps you're in a situation where you're anxious for a resolution.

Who knows what situation it is, what kind of relationship that's being tense, what kind of circumstance that's being difficult. But you want that resolution, and it's not yet coming. And you long for it, and you pray for it, and it's not yet coming.

And we hold on to the fact that God's timing is always perfect. And may he give us the grace, if we're in that situation tonight, to hold on to that.

His timing is perfect. Let me bring this to a close, however, tonight, by just emphasising this truth about Moses. It's a really important truth.

It's a truth that with Moses, as with you and me, that our failures are not final with God. Some of us live with the reality of scars, of past failures.

[25 : 58] And we struggle to move on from them. And at times, the reminder of this failure comes back into our minds, and it can paralyse us.

And we long to move on from it. And sometimes we do pray about it. But perhaps we're struggling to forgive ourselves for this failure. Perhaps we know other people will never forget the failure. Perhaps, you know, we're understanding that the accuser, Satan in the Bible, is called the accuser for a reason, that big long finger reminding us of our faults, of our failings.

But we need to remember that failure is not final with God. So Moses failed here. He failed dramatically. Somebody lost their life. He's going to be a giant of the Old Testament, a giant of history.

And yet this is not a little blip in his career. This is an epic rupture in his life. And yet it's not final.

[26 : 57] And we're sometimes left asking, why does God permit failure to come into our experience? We could ask from a biblical point of view, why would God permit failure to come into Moses' experience, or Noah's experience, or David's experience, the experience of these leaders?

Surely it would be better for them and for God's people if the leaders didn't publicly feel like that. Because Noah had issues with alcohol, the Bible tells us.

We referenced David earlier on today, and the issues he had with lust and ended up with murder. And yet there's things that God can teach us through failure that we'll never learn anywhere else. Because we'll never learn some of these deep lessons if all we know is relative success or relative plain sailing. Well, what are the things that we will learn with failure?

Well, we will learn, one, for instance, that we are nothing without him. We may have vision and we may have passion. We may have gifts. We may have callings. We may have many different things.

[28 : 10] But apart from me, says Jesus, you can do nothing. And many of our failures in life come from us trying to do things on our own.

We perhaps have to remember that it's not by might and not by power, but God promises in a special way he works through his spirit. And that's something to hold on to.

But we don't necessarily learn that we're nothing without him until we fail. Failure also opens up that part of our heart that reminds us that we have the capacity for almost every single sin, that it's there within our hearts.

It's not that we only have a certain selection of sins that we can potentially fall into. We can fall into every single one of them. And failure is one way of us being made aware of what's in our hearts. And yet, when we learn of our failures and we bring ourselves and our failures and our flaws to God, what do we find?

[29 : 16] Do we find a God who has his hand stretched out and say, no, no, no, you don't come anywhere near me because of what you've done? Well, that's not what we find, is it?

We find a God who's there running towards us, welcoming us as the image in the prodigal son speaks of, that wayward son coming home, tail between his legs, the father's running towards him. He's failed on an epic scale, but the father's coming towards him. Because in our failures, when we turn to the father, the father doesn't hold us away. He welcomes us to him.

How can he do that? Well, he can do that on the basis of the one who has never failed. How different it was with Jesus. There was never a moment of failure in Jesus's life.

Not even a split second. There was not any pride that had to be exposed. There was not any questionable motives that had to be addressed.

[30 : 18] There was never a time where Jesus somehow decided to act either a head off or delay in the timeline, the timetable of God that he was operating to.

There was constant, consistent obedience. There was that empathy, that humility, that perfection that summarized his life, that this life that we could not live, he lived.

And he, having lived that perfect life, could only, therefore, be the qualified one to deal with the poison of the penalty of our sin as that sacrifice to take away sin, that sacrifice that would cover all of our flaws and all of our failings before we came to Jesus and since we came to Jesus.

Cover them all because of who he is and what he has done. You see, failure is not final with God. And we praise God for that truth.

And tonight, if that is a truth that in particular you need to hear, then hold on to that and let it sink deeply because it is true. And so in this passage, we've seen that the physical circumstances of our upbringing do not define us.

[31 : 46] Whether we are born under a shadow and live in a slum environment or whether we are born into privilege and live like a palace, our physical circumstances of our upbringing don't define us.

It didn't define Moses, did he? What defined Moses was that spiritual understanding of who he was in the family of God. And if our upbringing doesn't define us in that sense of physical circumstances of it, likewise, failure doesn't define us.

Because what defines us is where we are found this evening. Whether you are found in Jesus, safe, secure, forgiven, accepted.

Or whether you're outside of Jesus. Because that's also defining. And we'll also have a destructive end to it. Don't be defined by failure.

Don't be defined by anything else that somehow you think is so massive, even if it has been hard.

Don't let that define you. Let your identity be found in Jesus Christ, the one who loved you and gave himself for you.

[33 : 05] We'll leave it there this evening. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.