

## God In The Shadows

Exodus 2:1-25

Series: Exodus [#02]

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### Introduction

Today we return to the book of Exodus. Before Palm Sunday we looked at chapter one with the people of Israel going *From Paradise To Prison* in Egypt. They had multiplied and prospered because of Joseph and God's blessing. But some time after Joseph died "a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph." That is, he was from a different group, did not respect Joseph and what he had done for Egypt, and so had no sense of obligation to his descendants who were multiplying and prospering. This Pharaoh began a campaign first to minimize the Hebrews' numbers and maximize their efforts for his projects, and ended with an attempted genocide.

We learned in chapter 1 that God always keeps His word, that God's blessings do not *put us on easy street*, that God rewards faithfulness, and that God's promises are seen more clearly looking back than when watching them unfold.

As we look at chapter two we find God at work, caring for His people, unfolding His plan but not in ways the people could easily see. *God is in the Shadows*, but He *is* at work. Let's pick up the account which portrays...

### God Working In The Shadows Through A Series Of Unlikely Events.

We begin with God preserving one little Hebrew baby boy. A very common, natural event starts this chain of unlikely events—a couple had a baby, a baby boy. It was not their first child, they already had a boy and girl, Aaron and Miriam. What normally brings celebration now brought a test of faith to these parents, as it did to so many others at that time who were under the order to kill their baby boys.

God preserved this little baby boy. We could ask, "Why this one and not another?" "Why not all?" God does not go into details. We know that God is sovereign. In chapter 33 God told Moses "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion" (verse 19). No, this in itself would not quell the questions and sorrows of so many parents who lost their sons. It does show that God not only is sovereign, but is gracious and compassionate even through He does not prevent or right every wrong in the present moment.

We have read the account, many of us know it well. Mom and Dad (Jochabed and Amram) kept their baby a secret as long as they thought they could without people finding out this baby was a boy. Mom then made a wicker or parchment basket, covered it with layers of tar and pitch, placed her boy into it and had her daughter carefully place it in the reeds by the bank of the Nile, where it would stay and not be carried away by the currents. Miriam kept watch over it from a distance.

Jochabed, I believe, carefully chose this place and, most likely, the time of day as well. For, in a little while, the Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe there as a part of her normal routine. She saw the basket, had her servants retrieve it, found this crying little Hebrew baby boy and "had pity on him." She decided to keep him, defying her father's edict.

Miriam arrived, seemingly on cue, and asked if she should find a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby, it being a foregone conclusion that no Egyptian woman at this time would want to nurse a Hebrew baby boy. The princess said yes. Miriam ran and brought her mother. The princess told her to nurse the baby and she would pay her — pay Jochabed for caring for her own son!

There is a commentary on this in Hebrews 11 where Jochabed and Amram are listed as two of the heroes of faith, "*By faith* Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict" (23). They acted in faith, trusting God to provide. It was not a blind faith. While we don't know how God led them to hide the baby and come up with this plan, God, *in the shadows*, led them. He was working. *He* preserved this little Hebrew baby boy.

The next evidence of God working in the shadows is His preparing that baby boy to become Israel's deliverer. The narrative jumps forty years from verse 10 to verse 11. Acts 7:23 tells us that Moses was about forty years old when these events took place.

Scripture is silent on the details of his first forty years, but God gives us a few glimpses, important glimpses. The first is in verse 10. "The child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son." It is often suggested that Jochabed had her son until he was weaned at perhaps age two or three. But when Moses wrote "The child grew," it is possible, even likely, that Jochabed had her son until the court began his training as a prince, which could have been at age eight, nine or ten. Think of those valuable years with his mother of faith telling him about the history of his people, about his own deliverance and, above all else, about God. God used this time to *prepare* Moses, the one He had chosen to deliver Israel.

The second glimpse is in Acts 7:22. "Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds." Beyond the *three Rs*, as a prince he would have been trained in philosophy, other languages, military strategies, administration and organization.

A third glimpse is in the years Moses spent in Midian tending sheep, raising a family (16-22). God used all these circumstances, all this time, *working in the shadows*, to *prepare* Moses to deliver Israel.

Next we see God working in the shadows persevering with His servant though impulsive, sinful behavior. Hebrews 11, verses 24-26 tell us

*"By faith* Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering

the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.”

Note two things here for the moment. First, Moses made a conscious choice to identify with his own people, with “the people of God,” rather than enjoy the lavish and powerful life in the Egyptian palace. Secondly, while we are not told, I think he made this choice before his sinful act. He may have already made his break from the royal family and left the palace. That would help explain why the Pharaoh wanted to kill him.

The events are presented in a straightforward manner. Moses, under the Holy Spirit’s guidance, did not retouch them to make himself look better. He had seen the great cruelties toward his people. One day he saw an Egyptian slave master beating a Hebrew. He looked all around, made sure no one was looking, and then intervened. If he had still been in the court he could have simply commanded the slave master to stop. But he struck the slave master, killing him. Then he quickly buried his body in the sand.

The very next day he saw two Hebrews fighting. He tried to call the instigator off, this time not striking first and thinking later. The offender said, “What are you going to do about it? Are you going to kill me like you killed the Egyptian?” The Hebrew he rescued must have passed the word. Moses knew he was in trouble, and so he took off to Midian—we are not sure precisely where, but it was east, and likely south east of where he was in Egypt. And he was right. He was in trouble. The Pharaoh, his adoptive grandfather, wanted to kill him.

Down through the centuries some Jewish and Christian writers have tried to do what Moses did not do—clean up the picture to make his murder of the Egyptian look justifiable. Moses impulsively, sinfully murdered that man. God had not yet called him to deliver his people, but he was trying to help them—in his anger, not in self-control; in his own way, not God’s way. Even so, God did not discard Moses. He *persevered* with this servant through his impulsive, sinful behavior.

Finally, God was working in the shadows preserving His people in dark, difficult times. Go to verse 23.

“Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God. So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them.” (23-25)

Finally! Finally! Here is God! He has not been seen, He has not been mentioned in the book up to this point. But He has been there *in the shadows*, even as we noticed in His faithfulness and blessing to His people and His protection of them in chapter 1.

The narrative takes another forty year jump from verse 22 to verse 23. Moses was 40 when he fled from Egypt. Chapter 7, verse 7, tells us Moses was 80 years old when he went to the new Pharaoh on behalf of his people. What happened in those forty years of tending

sheep and raising a family in the arid desert area among nomadic people? Again, God does not give us the details, but He kept preparing Moses.

Meanwhile, back in Egypt, the Hebrews' oppression became more and more severe. They were crying out to God. While they could not see God's intervention, He *was* working as they kept growing in spite of the ongoing attempts at genocide. God heard their cries. He remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—He had not forgotten. Unlike us, God never forgets anything. He saw their intense suffering. The phrase He “took notice of them,” or “was concerned about them” could be translated “He made Himself known to them.” He revealed Himself and His care to them in their intense suffering as He kept on preserving them.

Yes, God was working in the shadows. The king who wanted to kill Moses was now dead. Moses had been prepared for 80 years. In this story, in the lives of those Hebrews, God was getting ready to step out of the shadows and deliver them in a way they could never have imagined.

Now let's step back and see how these events of...

### **God Working In The Shadows Display Clear, Practical Lessons For Us.**

The first lesson is that God prepares us for the work He wants us to do. It goes without saying that Moses' preparation was unique. After all, no one before or after him was called by God to do what he did. The Bible tells us his life fell into three forty-year periods. Birth to 40—preparation at home and in the court. Age 40 to 80—preparation in the wilderness of Midian. Age 80 to 120—leading his people out of Egypt and through the wilderness wanderings. These are not metaphorical constructions. God prepared Moses for eighty years to perform His most important service in his last forty years.

God also prepares us for the work He wants us to do. He gives every believer spiritual abilities for serving Him. He weaves all the events and experiences of our lives into preparation for the opportunities He gives us. We don't know what lies ahead. We don't see or understand all of how God is preparing us, but He is.

None of us can sit back and say, “I'm a Christian, but I don't have enough preparation, I'm not ready to serve yet.” God has prepared you for any and every opportunity He brings your way. And, however prepared or not prepared you may feel, God will lead you in and through every task He gives you. What was true for Moses was true for Paul. 2 Corinthians 3:4-6,

“Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

This is also true for each one of us. It doesn't take 80 years to start serving God! And, on the flip side, we can't *retire* from serving God at 80 either. Make the most of your opportunities to learn, grow and serve God. God will be faithful to keep on preparing you for what is at hand and what lies ahead.

Lesson #2 from Exodus 2 is that doing it my way instead of God's way has consequences. The song Frank Sinatra made popular, "I Did It My Way," is not an example for Christians to follow. The last lines, "For what is a man, what has he got? If not himself, then he has naught. To say the things he truly feels; and not the words of one who kneels. The record shows I took the blows—and did it my way!" Yes, each of us are unique individuals with different personalities, ways of thinking. We are not clones or robots. But coming to know God and living for God cannot be done "My way." It must be done "God's way."

Moses' rash, impulsive, sinful killing of the Egyptian had the consequence of forty years tending sheep with nomadic people in Midian. Did God use this in his preparation? Yes. We've already seen that. What would have happened if he had not struck that blow for the Hebrews in his own way? We don't know that.

Jumping ahead in Moses' story to Numbers 20, when the people in the wilderness for a second time complained to and about Moses because they did not have water. As in the earlier, similar time, God told Moses He would provide water for them. That earlier time, Exodus 17, God told Moses to strike a rock with his staff and water came out.

This time God said,

"Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink" (verse 8).

But, Moses confesses, this is what he did,

"So Moses took the rod from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him; and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, 'Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?' Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank" (verses 9-11).

He did it his way, not God's way. He did not obey God. He drew attention to himself. He took glory for himself that was God's. The consequence,

"But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you have not believed Me [*note: disobedience is equated with unbelief*], to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them'" (12).

God preserved and prepared him for freeing Israel and bringing them into the promised land. Eighty years of preparation and forty years leading the people in the wilderness by the time it was done, 120 years! But he did not get to set foot into the land.

Make no mistake about this, doing things my way instead of God's way always has consequences. Some consequences may be immediate, visible, painful. Others may be difficult or impossible for us to see as God, for example, works certain things through others rather than through us.

There is an old Irish proverb, "All sin casts long shadows." The late Dr. William Cuthbertson, who served as President of Moody Bible Institute, often prayed, "Lord, help us bear the consequences of forgiven sin." Yes, it can be hard to live with the scars of forgiven sin. Let each of us determine in all our thoughts, dreams, motives, words and actions, *to do it God's way*.

A third lesson here is that nothing can derail or sidetrack God's purposes. The enemies of God and His people cannot do that. We saw this clearly in chapter 1 with the Pharaoh.

- Plan #1—work the Hebrews so hard they will not reproduce. It failed.
- Plan #2—"Okay, ratch it up a few notches! Work them even harder." This plan also failed.
- Plan #3—Genocide. The midwives were to kill all the baby boys right after they were delivered. Failed.
- Plan #4—Enlist everyone in the genocide, Egyptians as well as the Hebrews. Throw all the Hebrew baby boys into the Nile River. That failed.

Here in chapter 2 the Pharaoh tried to kill Moses. God protected Moses.

Then remember, as I said last time, beneath the surface of this great battle of the Egyptians represented by the Pharaohs against Israel represented by Moses, is the cosmic battle of Satan and his forces against God and His people. Satan and his forces could not, cannot derail or sidetrack God's purposes. None of, all of God's enemies cannot do that. As Martin Luther's hymn states, "And tho this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us." Again, "That word [God's word] above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth."

But we also need to note that we, God's people cannot derail or sidetrack God's purposes. "What? What do you mean? Why would we? We would never want to let alone try to do that!" My point is that while our faithfulness is important, even our greatest failures individually and collectively will not divert or stop God's purposes.

Moses' sin of murder did not thwart God's purpose of bringing His people out of slavery into the promised land. Israel's sins of repeated complaining, lack of faith and lack of faithfulness could not do it. We can live with confidence knowing that no one, nothing can derail or sidetrack God's purposes.

The fourth and last lesson from this chapter this morning is that God is always working. He knows, cares and responds to our cries for help even when we cannot see or hear Him. In chapter one as the people went *From Paradise To Prison*, God is not mentioned in the text, He is not seen or heard. Here in chapter two that continues until God announces His presence and care at the end of the chapter. God may not have been seen or heard, but His fingerprints are all over the events in these two chapters. *God is in the shadows*. He is neither absent nor passive.

Drop down to verse 23 again.

“Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God. So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them” (23-25).

It was true for them then, and it is just as true for you now. In your darkest, deepest, longest nights of sorrow, God is there with you, listening, caring and working, even though it feels that He is a million miles away. When it seems that “nothing is happening,” God is at work. When you are frustrated and, yes, even angry that God is not doing something you think He should be doing, that you want Him to do, He is listening, caring and working.

God does not take vacations. He never slumbers or sleeps. He never, ever forsakes His children. He never, ever will leave you alone or forsake you. He is always with you, even though it be *in the shadows*.

## **Conclusion.**

*God in the Shadows*. All of us have experienced this in one way or another and, yes, perhaps in many ways at many times. Some of us can look back to before we came to Christ and now see in the days and even years before that, how God was reaching out to us, drawing us to Himself, *working in the Shadows*.

Then there are the unique experiences and situations where we have not felt the richness and closeness of God’s presence we wanted, that we desperately sought; where we had questions God did not seem to answer; where our problems remained and even got worse. “Where are you, God?” “Why aren’t you doing something about this?” are common, frequently asked questions. Again, in those times one thing you can be certain of is that God is with you and He is working *in the shadows*.

For perspective, it is good to remember God’s priorities and purposes for us. It has been said that Christ did not come to make life easy, but to make us strong. Yes, strong in His strength, His holiness, purity and wisdom infused into our character.

As you struggle with God working in the shadows, remember Jochabed and Amram and all the Hebrew people in that terrible time 3,500 years ago. Remember that God in His

sovereignty and mercy led some heroes of faith to conquer kingdoms, shut the mouths of lions, escape death, be transformed from weakness to strength and to receive their dead back by resurrection.

*But also remember* many other heroes of faith were tortured, mocked, beaten, imprisoned, stoned, destitute, wandering in deserts and mountains, seeking shelter in caves and holes in the ground, and were killed (*cf.* Hebrews 11:32-38). In each and every circumstance God was there and working—sometimes with the clear, blazing brilliance of His glory and at other times... *in the shadows*.

As you reflect on this with God now, thank Him that He never leaves you and never stops working in you and for you. Bring yourself, all of your questions, disappointments, struggles and, yes, even your anger to Him. Ask God to quiet the winds and waves of anxiety and to enable you to patiently allow Him to order your steps and provide for your needs until the day you see Him face to face.

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