Moses In the Palace and In the Wilderness

Exodus 2:1-25

Key Verse: 2:24: “God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.”

A year ago I attended a seminar about spiritual leadership which was held in a local church. Pastor Min Chung mentioned about the progress of Moses’ character in Exodus like this: First, Moses said, “I am everything.” Next he said, “I am nothing”. Finally he said, “God is everything”. Indeed God changed Moses from a physical man to a spiritual leader who delivered his people out of Egypt. A leader is not born, but made through discipline from God’s viewpoint. In order to raise one leader, God plans, chooses, protects, disciplines, shepherds, and guides. Through God’s such long term plan and preparation, Moses became a leader who brought 1 million people to the promised land.

Today’s passage tells us about the birth of Moses and his education in the palace and in the wilderness. In Moses’ life we see God’s divine plan and his delicate preparation to make him a useful man. Through the story of Moses we may also find God’s presence and his intervention in our lives.

Look at verses 1-4. “***Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him***.” According to chapter 1, there was Pharaoh’s edict to kill every Hebrew baby boy. (1:22) Pharaoh wanted to control the growing population of the Hebrews by killing their newborn baby boys. Disobedience to the king’s edict meant death. Nevertheless, Moses’ parents hid their son for three months, defying the king’s edict. Hebrews 11:23 says, “*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*.” To all parents their new born babies are extraordinary. I called my twin children ‘the miracle babies’ because they were very special to me. I believe other children are the same to their parents. But to Moses’ parents their baby was really special because they saw God’s presence in him. I believe that the Holy Spirit opened their spiritual eyes to see the deliverer-to-be in their baby. This reminds us of Simeon in Luke 2, who saw the consolation of Israel through the baby Jesus, who was brought to the temple. (Lk 2:25-32) Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying, “*Sovereign Lord,…For my eyes have seen your salvation*…” (Lk 2:29-30)

Moses’ parents were both Levites, whose names were **Amram** and J**ochebed**. (Ex 6:20) They lived by faith despite the unfavorable situation. They feared God more than Pharaoh. By faith they hid their baby for three months by defying the king’s edict. By faith they put their baby into the basket and sent it into the Nile River. There were dangers for the baby to be drowned in the river or be eaten by crocodiles or be killed by the Egyptian soldiers. But they trusted in God and put the baby’s life into God’s hands. Through Moses’ parents we learn that parents must live by faith for their children. Parents must provide a spiritual environment for their children to grow as people of God. When we fear God and live by faith, our children grow as men of faith and as people of God.

It is interesting to know that in verse 3 the papyrus basket which contained Moses is the same word in Hebrew (*tebah*) as Noah’s ark. The ark which saved Noah’s family is parallel to the ark which saved Moses’ life. As Noah’s ark was floating down from Mount Ararat, so Moses’ basket was floating down along the Nile River.

Look at verses 5-6. “***Then Pharaoh’s daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. “This is one of the Hebrew babies,” she said***.” The story of Moses was like a well written drama. All things looked as if they happened accidently, but there was God’s divine plan behind the story. God sent Pharaoh’s daughter to the Nile River to bathe that day. She found the basket and saw the crying baby in it. When she saw the baby crying, she had compassion. Suppose the baby had been sleeping when she opened the basket - she might not have compassion on him. The cute baby was crying, so the lady’s heart was broken. She knew that he was one of the Hebrew babies. She knew the king’s edict. But God moved her heart to keep the baby at all costs.

This is the reason why we must not despair in our darkest hour because God is with us. God works in all our situations. As God intervened in Moses’ life, he also intervenes in our lives. He provides a way out for us in our darkest hour. The Bible proves this through Joseph’s story. From a human point of view, Joseph’s life in the Old Testament was one tragedy after another. He was hated by his own brothers, sold as a slave into a foreign land, and imprisoned by false accusation. But in his darkest hour God was with Joseph. God worked for the salvation of many through Joseph’s life.

God juxtaposed Moses’ sister with Pharaoh’s daughter. This was also God’s divine plan for his good purpose. Look at verses 7-10. “***Then his sister asked Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?” “Yes, go,” she answered. So the girl went and got the baby’s mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.” So the woman took the baby and nursed him. When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, “I drew him out of the water***.” The sister who was watching all things from the beginning did not lose the chance. She went to Pharaoh’s daughter to ask about finding a nursing mother for the baby. So the girl went and got the baby’s mother. In this way God protected the baby’s life and provided a job for his mother. In his mother’s bosom Moses grew as a man of God. What was Moses’ mother supposed to do for him? She must have prayed every day for him to grow as a man of God and a deliverer for his suffering people. Young Moses grew spiritually under his mother’s prayers and became strong physically under the Pharaoh’s daughter’s care. Acts 7:22 says, “*Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action*.” God not only saved Moses’ life, but also disciplined him to become a leader through princely education in the palace. In this way God changed Moses’ destiny from a Hebrew slave to a prince of Egypt. When God intervenes in our lives, our destiny changes from death to life; our identity also changes from a slave of sin into a prince of heaven. Amen!

Look at verses 11-15. ***“One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, “Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?” The man said, “Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian? Then Moses was afraid and thought, “What I did must have become known.” When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well.”*** According to verse 11, we learn that Moses was aware of his identity as a Hebrew and kept it even though he was a prince of Egypt. He had compassion on his suffering people who worked miserably as slaves. When he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. His murder could not be vindicated because he had done it in his anger. After his act was exposed, he ran into the wilderness, escaping from the Pharaoh who tried to kill him. From Goshen in Egypt to Midian in Saudi Arabia, Moses walked around 300 miles on foot to escape with his life. Moses went into the wilderness for the sake of his life, but behind the story there was God’s divine purpose for him and for his people.

Look at verses 16-21. “***Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father’s flock. Some the shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock. When the girls returned to Reuel their father, he asked them, “Why have you returned so early today?” They answered, “An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock.” “And where is he?” Reuel asked his daughters. “Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat.” Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, saying, “I have become a foreigner in a foreign land.***” Moses was in the wilderness, but he was not alone. God was with him. God provided seven women who needed Moses’ help. The seven daughters of Reuel, the priest of Midian, were harassed by local shepherds. Moses defeated all of the shepherds with his awesome martial arts skills, which he had learned in the palace, and rescued the women. His heroic act was rewarded by the father of these women. Moses had a place to stay in the desert plus a beautiful wife Zipporah and a son Gershom. God not only protected Moses’ life but also provided all necessary things for him to live in the wilderness. Moses lived in the wilderness for 40 years until he was called by God at the age 80.

In the wilderness God disciplined Moses to be equipped as a deliverer for his people. In the palace Moses received the highest education for a prince. He was proud, ambitious, and eloquent. In his anger he killed an Egyptian with one blow. But now in the wilderness he became humble as a shepherd. Among the 6 talkative sister-in-laws Moses became a man of few words. He learned how to control his emotions in all situations and how to manage people and animals as a shepherd. By feeding sheep and taking care of them, he learned compassion and patience. A prince of Egypt became a shepherd in the wilderness. But through this wilderness training God molded Moses to be a humble and faithful shepherd and a spiritual leader for his people.

Through Moses’ life in the palace and in the wilderness we learn that our God prepare all things for us in advance according to his time schedule. God does not work at random, but according to his plan. Can you see order and rules in God’s creation? God commanded Noah to build the ark of salvation in advance. God planned for world salvation through Noah’s family 120 years before he punished the world with water. God called Abraham and disciplined him for 25 years until Abraham became a man of faith. God waited for more than 40 years until the ambitious Jacob was changed into the prayerful Israel. In order to make the Israelites into a great nation, God sent Joseph to Egypt ahead of Jacob’s family and multiplied them greatly in Egypt for 430 years. In order to save the Israelites from the hand of Pharaoh, God chose Moses, saved him from the Pharaoh, and made him to be a son of Pharaoh’s daughter in order for him to receive a prince’s education. In his best time God sent Moses to the wilderness for humbleness and shepherd training, so that he might learn how to depend on God, not on himself, as a spiritual leader. Do not think that you are born by chance or by accident. By God’s long-term plan and his delicate preparation you are here. Do not think that you are here at random. God had planned long ago before you existed. Paul said in Ephesians 2:10, “*For we are God’s handiwork (workmanship), created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*.” God sent all of us here to do good works. For this God prepared in advance for us to do. What are good works God wants us to do? 1 Peter 2:9 says. “*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light*.” God wants us to preach the gospel to all people of all nations. Amen!

Look at verses 23-25. “***During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.***” In these verses we have to pay attention to the verbs, “*God* *heard,…remembered,…looked on,… and was concerned about*…” Do you think that God didn’t hear their cries before? Do you think that God didn’t remember the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Yes! God had heard and looked on their cries for the last 430 years, but it was not his time for them to be liberated. It was not God’s time for them to become a great nation. God had waited until his time, which is the best time, came. Our God is faithful to keep his covenant with his people. We forget, but he never forgets. He hears our prayers, remembers us, and takes care of us. We are not alone, but God is with us. Amen!