

Moses

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[0 : 01] If you're able, would you like to stand, please? This is no purpose whatsoever, only that was a long reading, and I kind of thought I would try and get you out of a coma before I put you in one.

So you can sit down again now. We read in Exodus chapter 14 that that day, the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians.

As Russ has told you, we're in the middle of a course of messages about great journeys of the Bible, and surely this must rank as one of the greatest journeys ever.

And if you'll allow me for a moment, just a little bit of background to that particular journey. In Exodus chapter 1, we read that the Israelites were in a terrible situation.

They had basically been taken off to Egypt and held in captivity there as slaves. Just to give you a flavor of that, in Exodus chapter 1, we read this, So they put slave masters over them, that is the Israelites, to oppress them with forced labor.

[1 : 27] And they built Pithom and Ramesses as store cities for Pharaoh. The Israelites carried a very strong reputation of being hardy and hardworking people.

Indeed, the women of Israel were envied by the women of Egypt because they clearly found childbirth less of a problem than the Egyptian women did.

They gave birth easily and in numbers. And because of that, Pharaoh, who clearly had a touch of the paranoid about him, decided that he would instigate a rather brutal form of birth control.

And he did that by declaring that any son born to a Hebrew woman would be killed. That is why Moses' mother decided this is very risky business.

And you remember the story. She took him down to the river, River Nile. And she put him in a basket, which she sealed around the edge with tar. And she put a little baby in there and hid him in the rushes.

[2 : 49] And one of Pharaoh's daughter's slave girls found him and took him back. The slave girl wet-nursed him till he grew up and then he was handed over to Pharaoh's daughter.

I imagine that after a slightly sticky start, life was fairly easy for Moses as the daughter of Pharaoh looked after him.

But Moses was a Hebrew and knew himself to be a Hebrew. And what we read about in chapter 2 is an unfortunate incident in the life of Moses.

He saw two Egyptians beating an Israelite. And he took the law into his own hand and killed the Egyptian. This is serious stuff, is it not?

And in these days of identity politics, there's an interesting example of somebody who was found in the rushes, who was brought up amongst the Egyptians, knew himself to be an Israelite.

[3 : 59] And then this amazing story in chapter 3, where God calls Moses to lead his people out of bondage towards the promised land.

You remember that Moses himself would never lead the people into the promised land. It would be Joshua who would do that. And the reason that Moses would not lead them into the, across the Red Sea, sorry, would not lead them into the promised land, was that Moses had been disobedient to the Lord.

And the Lord made it clear, it is because of your sin that you will not enter the promised land. Just as a kind of bonus point this morning, I just want to remind you of something really important.

And that is, God is not looking for spiritual or moral perfection in people before he speaks to them and calls them into his service.

The reason I'm saying that to you is, I just had a real sense to this morning, that some of you need to know, that if you wait till you're spiritually perfect, or morally perfect, before you hear the voice of

God call you, I'm afraid, friends, you'll have a very long wait.

[5 : 34] Just think about Moses. Moses must have had some kind of confusion in his life. Abandoned, in a sense, by his own mother, found by somebody else who was not his mother, brought up in a foreign culture.

There isn't a psychologist living who wouldn't like to get Moses on their couch. And then, he commits murder.

He kills an Egyptian. And some of you, saying to yourself, well, I'm not that bad, you know.

But then when you think about it, what you do is you exclude yourself from the calling that God has for you individually, by worrying about whether you're good enough, whether you're spiritual enough.

Why, I even know saints who won't come to prayer meetings because they're frightened if they prayed aloud, people might judge them. This is important stuff.

[6 : 44] And if you think about it, when Jesus came to choose his disciples, he chose people like insurgents, zealots, as they were called in those days.

He chose tax collectors, hated by their own people. See, if you sit there and preclude yourself on the basis that you're not good enough, that is the tragedy.

of an unopened life. A lot of you sit in church on Sundays. I know this. It's out of a dogged persistence and faithfulness that you come.

And we thank God that you're here. But actually, you're a little frustrated. You might talk with your friends and say stuff like, I didn't get much out of church today.

Maybe God's whispering in your ear and asking you what you put into it today, this past week.

[7 : 58] What are you going to do this coming week? And Moses was not only uncertain when God called him that he'd be the right person. You remember he had this fascinating dialogue with God where he says, I can't go out because I don't even know your name.

And God says, I am. I am. Moses feels the inadequacy of God's call upon him to take on this great task and says, who is going to take any notice of me?

Least of all, Pharaoh. And God empowers Moses by giving the staff that he carried to look after the flocks in Midian as a kind of supernatural tool.

Heard a sermon many years ago where it was referred to as the rod of God. Remember, he threw it on the ground and it turned into a serpent. And at the edge of the Red Sea, he stretched out his arms with his rod.

And the waters divided. And also, Moses said to God, I'm not a speaker.

[9 : 14] I have no eloquence. So God said, well, I'll give you Aaron, your brother, to come alongside you. I mean, as it transpires, Aaron was a bit of a mixed blessing.

Listen, here's my point. Don't preclude what God might do in your life by wondering if you're worthy enough, spiritual enough, ready enough. God loves people who say yes, not yes, but.

And so we come to this reading in chapter 14, one of the most remarkable pieces of history ever recorded as far as I can see.

and it's a story that reminds us of three fundamental truths which we need today if we are to negotiate this secular world in which we find ourselves.

The first point is this. God shows us in this story that he is a liberator. He is a God who sets people free.

[10 : 22] Someone say amen. Amen. The second thing is this story shows us that God has a particular love for his people. And it also tells us that God has a life for us to live when we have faith in him.

In chapter 14, this is not entirely evident from the text, but what has happened is the Jews, the people of God, have found themselves in this narrow and foreboding valley.

At one end of the valley is the Red Sea and at the other end of the valley is Pharaoh with what sounds to me like a very technologically advanced army ready to capture the Jews and take them back to Israel.

They are trapped. And we thank God today that God is a God who liberates. In Luke's Gospel in chapter 4, we read there this amazing agenda that Jesus sets for himself.

The so-called Nazarene agenda. Jesus is teaching in the synagogue. He picks up the scroll of Isaiah and says this, The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

[11 : 48] He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Don't tell me that God isn't in the business of real liberation, of setting people free. And today, there are lots of people who feel trapped.

Trapped by circumstances around them. Psychology as a discipline has a number of controversies, always had to stun, and probably always will do.

I suppose today a good example of that would be there are some eminent psychologists who really support the idea of ADHD and some who really don't.

Or the treatment of people who have gender dysphoria. At what age do you start to treat children and give them gender-altering drugs?

[13 : 05] These are controversies, but one thing psychology is entirely clear about is that if you are trapped, this feel trapped, this will have awful consequences in your life.

You are likely to suffer from anxiety. You are likely to be depressed. And that stands to reason, I mean, it's generally intuitive, isn't it, that if you're a person who feels trapped in life, you are not going to feel great every day.

What are the kinds of things that trap us? Well, lack of economic resources would be near the top of the list. Or being trapped in an abusive relationship.

Or trapped by illness or disability or addiction or anxiety. God wants to set people free.

And this is, in a sense, a kind of living out live parable of that truth. Here are the Israelites trapped.

[14 : 18] No choice whatsoever as to what to do other than to believe God. Jesus liberates people then.

And he liberates people today. And I just want you to note this strange bit in chapter 14. When the people of God start to, to use a golfing phrase, wobble on the tee, they're starting to wonder whether it was a good idea to follow Moses out of bondage in Egypt.

People have short memories, we say, don't they? And they've clearly forgotten what a brutal and terrible regime they lived under in Egypt. They were given quotas to make bricks but not given enough raw materials to even make the lowest figure of the quota.

And if they didn't make the quota, they were ritually beaten. This was not fun. And so they say to Moses, it says they were terrified and cried out to the Lord, was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?

What have you done to us by bringing us out into Egypt? Leave us alone, let us serve the Egyptians. It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert.

[15 : 42] Amen. Friend, I wonder if you've ever known that terrible desperation, a feeling so trapped that you have no idea which way to turn.

Listen, if that's you, you need to hear what Moses responds to the people. He says this to them, don't be afraid, stand firm, and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today.

The Egyptians you see today, you will never see again. Could we believe that the God who liberates could take our desperation and turn it round?

Interesting little point here. Moses says to them, stand firm. Actually, the Hebrew word there means stand still. You know, when you're in panic mode, you become a bit frenzy, don't you?

I mean, the obvious thing would be in this situation would have been for the people of God to run away. And Moses says, stand still. You know, I couldn't read that verse without thinking of Psalm 46.

[17 : 15] Be still and know that I am God. Maybe those of you who are feeling trapped, those of you who are feeling desperate, before you do something, maybe the wise thing to do would just be to take a deep breath and remember Psalm 46, verse 10.

be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. The God who will be exalted among the nations is the God who knows you intimately.

Psalm 139. Read that. God who will be God. It even says in the New Testament, Jesus says, God even knows how many hairs on your head are counted.

I know that's not a big challenge in my case. Take a breath. Be still and know that I am God.

Second thing is it's a story of God's love for his people. These people had in a sense been in a kind of spiritual vacuum while they had been held in Egypt.

[18 : 42] And at the end of it, in chapter 15, which we didn't read, there is this amazing, poetic song of Moses. You can read it, Exodus chapter 15.

This is what Moses sings to God. In your unfailing love, you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength, you will guide them to your holy dwelling. The nations will hear and tremble. Anguish will grip the people of Philistia. In your unfailing love. I wonder if there are people in the house today who know that truth inside out. They can recite John chapter 3 and verse 16. God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. But actually there's a little voice in the other ear saying, but does he love me? I'm thinking about those of you who feel that life has been very tough and very challenging and very difficult. [20 : 01] And there's a little bit of you that when we sing songs about God's love, when we pray prayers expressing God's love, just feel a few percent resentful.

Notice this, Moses, in your unfailing love, you will lead the people you have redeemed. God still loves you even though you may not feel it right now.

There's a children's book just come out. I haven't read it myself but I read, I heard a brother give a very moving analysis.

It's a children's book which adults love to read. And it's called The Moon Is Round. And the point is, the example that the writer uses is that we look into the sky 30 days, 29 days of a month and we see a different shape than a round moon.

And the month starts with the moon which is a crescent. The point being, when we look at the moon and only see the crescent, it doesn't mean that the moon isn't round anymore.

[21 : 17] it means we only see a little bit of the moon through the sun's light. We need to remember those of us who are feeling a little resentful, maybe a little questioning as to whether God loves us, that our experience of life is like looking at the moon and only seeing a little bit, but the moon is round.

God loves you. And the evidence for that we shall be bringing to mind in this service of Holy Communion. And thirdly and finally, it's a story about God's gift of life.

It was after the people of Israel had crossed over the Red Sea in that remarkable way that God gave them the Ten Commandments.

You remember the story where Moses climbs up Mount Sinai. Has anybody in the house been at Mount Sinai? It is a terrible climb at the end of it. I mean, goodness knows how he staggered down with tablets of stone.

I think the last bit of climbing it, I've done it, is nearly 800 steps, uneven steps. I went halfway up on a camel, I'll never do that again.

[22 : 37] It's a good job Anthony and I decided we didn't want any more children. and we walked to the top and Moses goes up Mount Sinai and comes down with the Ten Commandments.

If you're unaware of this, and you certainly would have been taught it if you've been to university in the last 25 years, these Ten Commandments form the basis of our legal system, to some extent our culture, both here and in the wider Western world.

You might like to try an experiment, go home and look at Exodus chapter 20 and look at all those Ten Commandments and ask yourself, who in this world in which we live today believes in any of these?

your answer might be, well, you know, we don't think that murdering people is a good idea. Let me tell you that we still live in a world, although violence is diminishing, violence against women and girls in 2023, there are over a million reported crimes, 20% of all reported crime was violence against women and girls.

Why did God give the Israelites Ten Commandments and subsequently, of course, the rabbis added loads and loads of extra laws to them?

[24 : 19] Why would the God who's here to set us free tie us down with laws? That's a great question. Theologically, philosophically.

And the answer is that in God's mind, we will live lives to the full when we live how he wants us to live.

That's not just a kind of out-there theory. That is where it depends on you. God will do. It flies completely in the face of the current idea of freedom.

I can do what the heck I want as long as it doesn't harm anybody else. No. God elucidates through the Ten Commandments a really important reality about our nature.

And it's this, that to live a life with God, you have to limit your options. If you claim to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, adultery is no longer an option.

[25 : 30] If you claim to follow Jesus Christ, idolatry is not a problem. Sorry, it's not an option. If you claim to follow Jesus Christ, coveting your neighbor's ox, well, maybe it's BMW, is not an option.

God thinks that if we live as he wants us to live, our life will have some limitations. Surely, that is self-evidently true.

Moses was one man who stood up and saved a nation. And we're here at Holy Communion this morning to worship the man Jesus, the Son of God, who will save and set free anyone who trusts in him.

John 8, verse 36, if the Son shall set you free, you should be free indeed. John 6, verse 37, Jesus said, I will never, never turn away anyone who turns to me.

I think today, friends, we have some thinking to do. What about those of you whom God has whispered in your ear and told you, no more precluding myself for what I want for you by believing you're not good enough, not spiritual enough.

[27 : 08] Stop that now. two is, for those of you who are trapped, never believe that there isn't a way out.

But there's only one way, and that is to reorientate your life around following God in Jesus Christ our Lord. It's a story that reminds us that God's love for us, even though he knows us intimately, is profound.

It is unending, it is never ceasing, it is relentless. Maybe God's whispering in the ear of those of you who come to church, but actually the truth is, you're just a little bit resentful.

You know, I know God loves most people, I don't know if he loves me. And it's a story about God's gift of life.

Life in its fullness, but life with a difference. Life that willingly lays down some options in our lives in order that we might live holy lives.

[28 : 21] And, listen, if you're frightened about that, if you're frightened by the idea that there is a habit in your life which you know is wrong, which you would love to be released from, then don't forget that God sent his Holy Spirit to help us, to set us free from those things that disrupt our relationship with God.

On that day, God delivered Israel from the hands of Egypt. Maybe on this day, God will deliver you from whatever is trapping you.

Let's pray. our God and Father, this is such an amazing story.

A story of freedom, a story about your amazing and relentless love, and a story about the life you have for each of us, provided, provided, we trust you.

And Father, I want to pray this morning that for anybody who has been spoken to by you, Lord, they wouldn't just go home and eat lunch, but Lord, today they might do something, tell a friend, join the prayer team, go to the prayer team and be prayed with.

[30 : 14] Lord, we know this is too important for us just to mildly let your voice pass us by.

Speak, Lord, in the stillness as we wait on thee. be still and know that I am God.

Even so, come Lord Jesus and the people who agreed said together, said together, Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.