Divine Preparation

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[0:00] If you want to follow along in your pew Bibles, we're up to Exodus 2, chapter 11. The words will also be on the screen. Last week we read a larger chunk, all of chapter 1 and into chapter 2, and we kind of saw that turn between chapter 1 and chapter 2 with the birth of Moses and the hope that comes with that, and God intervening and showing up in that way and working through the women in the story to preserve and to care and to move along his work.

And we're going to continue that. We're going to find that work continues, starting at verse 11 this morning in chapter 2. 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 feeding a Hebrew, one of his own people. Glancing 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 saw two Hebrews fighting, and he asked the one and 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 that 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.
[2:00] 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 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 rule 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? He asked his daughter. 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 an alien in a foreign land. During that long period, the king of Egypt died.
[3:11] 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, with Jacob.

So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them. The word of the Lord. Let's try that again.
I'll say the word of the Lord, and everybody together. Thanks be to God. Okay? The word of the Lord. Amen. Amen. I went to college in the southwest suburbs of Chicago, and following graduation, I needed a job.
I was actually offered a job teaching at a small Christian school in the inner city. The students there at the school were mostly Hispanic and mostly from low-income families.
And as a student, a college student, I'd done some volunteering at this school and really enjoyed it. And the kids were a lot of fun. And, well, the school just kind of seemed like a little oasis in the midst of a tough part of the city, a neat place.
[4:25] Come summertime, the school still had need of a teacher in the fall, and I still had need of a job. And I also felt the need to make a difference with my life.

And what better way to make a difference than be a teacher in the inner city? It seemed like a perfect way to make a difference in the kingdom of God. So I sent in my resume.
I went for an interview, and I was offered the job. I can't remember for sure, but I think it was teaching fifth grade, fifth graders. And I was ready to go.

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And a big part of me, when I was offered that job, wanted to say yes. I wanted to do it, but I ended up not taking the job. It really wouldn't have worked.
It was going to be more than an hour's drive each way. It was on the other side of the city from the new apartment that I had just got with my new bride. And it just wasn't going to work. It was too far away.
[5:26] But looking back on that, I've actually come to see how good it was that I didn't take that position. And for more reasons than just the length of the commute, the main reason it wouldn't have worked is that I was totally unprepared to do it.

Totally unprepared to be a fifth grade teacher. My heart was in the right place. I was young. I was full of energy, full of ideas. But I'd majored in philosophy, not education.
I was not trained to be a teacher. I didn't know how to manage a classroom. I'd done a lot of working with kids, but I didn't really know how to manage a classroom for seven hours in a day. And I was just fairly naive in thinking that I could do this and make a difference, a lifelong impact on all these kids. I had good references.
I was willing to work cheap. And so they offered me the job, but I wasn't ready for the job. I wasn't qualified. I wasn't prepared. And that's sort of what we find here, too, at the beginning part of Exodus.
[6:41] We find someone, a someone named Moses, who was still yet unprepared for the job. And the job was leading Israel out of Egypt.

So Exodus 2 here tells of how the Israelites were suffering terribly. The need was great. The matter was urgent. And we talked last week how Moses was born and he got a good start to life, a God-fearing start in his own home for a little while.
And then a world-class education there at the palace. God protected him. It seemed to be going well and quickly.
Hope was springing and Moses, he's growing up and now he's a grown man here in Exodus 2. He's a Hebrew, but he's got all the power of an Egyptian.
So it's go time, right? We're ready for this deliverance. As we read along, we're ready for him to get to work and get going with this deliverance that's so needed.
[7:50] But it doesn't happen. In fact, the work, it won't start for another 40 years. Moses meeting God at that burning bush, it won't happen for another 40 years.

It'll be another 40 years before Moses returns to Egypt to confront Pharaoh. Why? Why? Why so long?
Why does God wait 40 years before appearing to Moses, before initiating, really getting going with his plan of deliverance? And why does he wait until Moses is nearly 80 years old?
Well, in a word, preparation. We don't know the full answer. Rarely do we fully understand God's timing on things.
But we know this is a big part of it. It had something to do with preparation. Moses had some growing up to do, some maturing to do, some learning to do. It's true, like I said, that Moses had a good God-fearing start to his life and he had a world-class education in the palace.
[9:01] But that wasn't enough. Moses' job would require a lot of fortitude, a lot of faith, a lot of wisdom, leadership skills, street smarts, and a mature walk with the Lord.

So over the course of 40 years, God takes him to school, grows him up, gives him an education. And the first type of education that God gives is what you might call on-the-job training, on-the-job training.
God's got him training to be a deliverer. So what does God do? He gives him some opportunities to do some delivering. So Moses, one day, he feels compelled to leave the palace grounds.
And so he leaves and he goes out to where the Israelite slaves are working. Now, he could have denied his Jewish heritage. He could have stayed in the palace grounds.
He could have averted his eyes from the suffering of the people, but he doesn't. Already, God's clearly moving in his heart. Verse 11, one day after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and he watched them in their hard labor.
[10:15] However, he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people, glancing this way and that and seeing no one. What did he do? He killed the Egyptian, hit his body in the sand.

Now, Moses, all of his life up to this point, he had everything handed to him. Probably he had very little to worry about. He had the luxury day in and day out of just kind of thinking about himself and

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his own aspirations.
And then God moves him out of the palace. At some point, God moves him out of the palace, confronts him with reality, shows him some suffering.
And Moses, he feels it. He feels for that person being beaten. And he responds. He takes action in response to this evil and this suffering.
Moses, he took action. You could call it a mini deliverance. Moses, our deliverer in training here, engages in a mini deliverance, on-the-job training.
[11:23] As formative as it was, though, it was also pretty tragic. In a lot of ways, that situation that Moses found himself was a test.

And he did learn a lot through this test. But we can't say that exactly past the test. There's been a lot of discussion and debate about what Moses did and whether it was good or bad.
But at the end of the day, he killed a man. The Egyptian beating the Hebrew, he killed him. He saved the Hebrew, but he killed the Egyptian. So would it be defined and classified as murder? Probably not. But manslaughter? Probably. It was poor judgment. Seems Moses' temper got the best of him. It was for a good cause, but still, he went too far.
But can wrong things that we do in our youth, in our past, still serve to grow us and mature us?
[12:30] Yes, they can. And I think that was true for Moses here, too. We also read in Exodus 2 about another opportunity for on-the-job training.

And this time, Moses gets it right. He nails it. It happened at a place called Midian. Moses was in Midian because he had to leave Egypt.
Pharaoh found out about him killing the Hebrew or killing the Egyptian and obviously was not happy about it. Pharaoh threatened to kill Moses, and so Moses had to flee.
He fled to Midian. And when he arrived, he stopped to rest at a well outside of town. And he stopped to rest by a well. And unbeknownst to him, he found himself in the middle of an ongoing conflict there.
The text says that this group of sisters came to draw water, and they were driven away by some shepherds. They were driven away by some shepherds.
[13:30] Now, probably what happened is the shepherds just kind of waited in the wings, waited for these sisters to do all the hard work of drawing all that water. And then, once it was all drawn, they probably just swooped in, chased the women away, stole their water.

These shepherds, they didn't want to draw any for themselves, figured that was women's work. And so, they waited for the women to draw it up, and then drove it off. They drove them off, stole their water, maybe did some violence to them in the process.
And Moses, he sees this. He sees, comes across this happening, and he puts a stop to it. He intervenes. The text literally says that Moses came to their rescue.
Our deliverer in training, he stepped up. He stepped to the plane. He did it. He delivered it. He made things right. And I love what it says in verse 17 here.
It says that Moses went on and watered their flocks. He drew the water. He watered their flocks. These other guys wouldn't do it. He did.
[14:37] Not something you did, especially if you were a person in authority back in that day. But Moses did. He stepped up. He saw an injustice. He stepped in, and he rescued, humbled himself, made himself a servant.

And the story goes on from there. One thing leads to another. He's invited in to the family. He marries one of the daughters.
He marries one of the daughters. He becomes a part of the family. And he continues to learn. Continues to be prepared. And that brings us to Moses.
And that brings us to Moses. Next school. During these 40 years, God schooled Moses in lots of different ways. And another one of them was at home. So Moses, he became a husband there in Midian.
And he became a father there in Midian. And we probably don't talk enough about how marriage and parenthood can shape and form and affect and impact and change a person.
[15:38] The New Testament has high praise for singleness. It talks a fair bit about singleness and how singleness can be a powerful work of God. It's something God uses for shaping people and preparing them and freeing them for service in his kingdom in all different ways.

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Jesus was single. Paul was single. The Bible talks, too, though, about marriage and how marriage also can be the thing that God uses to mold us, to shape us.
In a marriage, you have to learn selflessness. Right? Otherwise, it's not going to work. In a marriage, you have to learn how to depend on each other and forgive one another and fight for the well-being of another.
And those lessons, they can really help you in other areas of life, too. Or at least they should. Same goes for being a parent, if you think about it. Right? The experience of having another human being depend on you.
Really be dependent on you. And then also sort of looking up to you. Following your example. It's a humbling thing and a daunting thing, an experience that has an effect and changes you.
[16:49] It's one reason, it seems, why God didn't want Moses to go straight from young adults to being leader of his people. Moses had some growing up to do. And God used his marriage and God used his experience as a parent to do some of that growing.

He used his wife, Moses' wife, Zipporah, and his son, Gershom. He also used Moses' father-in-law. So Moses' father-in-law is introduced here.
He was a priest, a Midianite priest. The Midianites, like the Israelites, were descendants of Abraham. The Israelites descended from Abraham's first wife, Sarah.
The Midianites descended from Abraham's second wife, Keturah. And apparently some of them carried on worship of the Lord, continued to worship the Lord. And so Moses' father-in-law is one of those.
And he was a priest, a Midianite priest. And God uses him. He comes to be a mentor to Moses. Even years later, we read about his father-in-law giving Moses advice and wisdom and specifically helping Moses to set up a system of judges for the people.
[18:02] So that was another big influence. God gave Moses some good years with a wise man, his father-in-law. God also used a flock of sheep, a flock of sheep to train Moses.

So Moses' father-in-law, in addition to being a priest, he was also the owner of a large flock of sheep. So what does Moses do? Well, he marries into the family and he joins the family business. He becomes a shepherd. Now, maybe we're a little bit more familiar with how God used shepherding to prepare King David for his work and his leadership.
Well, we find out here that God also used shepherding to prepare Moses. One author summarized it like this. Many great leaders got their start as shepherds.
This is because there's a lot to be learned from tending sheep. For starters, sheep are not very bright, which means they need someone to lead them to food and water. They make an easy target for predators.
[19:06] They need someone to protect them. They are prone to wander, so they need someone to bring them back into the fold. There's no better way for Moses to learn how to lead than by spending 40 years with sheep as a shepherd.

So through his work, Moses, through his everyday work, God used that as well. Those everyday things. He was being prepared. God was preparing him in these everyday ways for this big thing that he had for Moses to do coming up.
God put him in that family for a reason. God put him with those sheep for a reason. And there was one other school, too.
One other big influence that God used. God also put Moses through some hardship. He had another school for Moses. You could call it the school of hard knocks. So before the burning bush, before sending Moses off to lead his people out of their suffering, God allowed Moses to experience a little suffering of his own.
It's not a school that Moses would have chosen to attend, and I imagine that's true for all of us. But there's no doubt that hardship does change us, and God often takes the bad and turns it out for our good in some way.
[20:23] To impact us, to change us for the better. So how does he do that with Moses? Well, the Bible here mentions three things. It mentions how Moses was rejected, how he was an alien, and also how he spent a lot of time in the wilderness.

The rejection happened after he intervened on behalf of that Hebrew who was being beaten by the Egyptian slave driver. That intervention, well, it could have been a really good thing if Moses had done it the right way.

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It could have been the start of his work as a deliverer. It could have endeared him to the Israelites and maybe been a warning shot to the Egyptians. But it didn't turn out that way. Instead, as we talked about, Moses, he kind of took things too far, took things into his own hands.
He killed the Egyptian, and suddenly Pharaoh wants him dead, and he's running for his life. And perhaps worse yet, his own brothers at this point reject him.
His own people, the very ones that he was being raised up to help and to save, they don't want him around. One of his fellow Hebrews said this, verse 14, who made you ruler and judge over us?
[21:38] They didn't trust him. They didn't want his help. So Moses got to experience rejection. On top of being afraid for his life and dealing with his guilt and his regrets, he got rejected.

But this, too, would become a part of his preparation and important schooling for him. There's also a note here about Moses suffering in the naming of his son.
When it comes to naming his son, we get another clue here. He names his son Gershom. Gershom literally means alien there. The text says that Moses named him Gershom, saying, I have become an alien in a foreign land.
And if you think about it, that was really the truth. It was the truth really characterized Moses' whole life. He was born a slave. He was raised by Egyptians.
He lived for 40 years among the Midianites. And if you know the end of the story, you know he never made it to the promised land, to his spiritual home, never made it there, died in the desert, just before the Israelites entered the promised land.
[22:53] So really, that was kind of Moses' life, the experience of an alien, always the foreigner, stranger. And it was not easy. But God used that, too. And just overall, God used the wilderness.

So the Midianites were a nomadic people. They were a wilderness people. Actually, it's interesting. They spent a lot of time in the Sinai wilderness near Mount Sinai, which would be another important preparation for Moses because he was familiar with that region around Mount Sinai.
And God would use his knowledge of that area later on as he led the people there. But we see time and again, right, throughout Scripture, how God uses wilderness to shape people.
Jacob spent time in the wilderness before fathering a nation of people. And the Israelites would go on to spend 40 years in the wilderness before settling down and kind of setting up their new society.
And John the Baptist spent lots of time in the wilderness. And Jesus himself spent 40 days in the wilderness before he began his public ministry. And here we find Moses in the wilderness, 40 years with those sheep in the wilderness before returning to Egypt.
[24:10] And it wasn't easy, I'm sure. But God met him there and walked with him and trained him in that time, in that place. And so I wonder if there's maybe been a time in your life where you found yourself in the wilderness.

And maybe you were in the wilderness, this wilderness time in your life, and you experienced that sweet fellowship with God and that communion with God and God providing for you and meeting you in that place.
Or maybe not. Maybe you were in the wilderness and you just felt really alone. But maybe looking back, you can kind of see now how God was with you and directing you and helping you along, providing that manna, just what you needed each step of the way.
The truth is, our God does some of his best work in the wilderness, in times of change, in times of loss, in times of hardship.
He meets us there. There's a reason that we call him Redeemer and praise him as our great Redeemer, right? Because it's what he does. He redeems things.
[25:20] He brings good out of bad and transforms things. In fact, it's what he did at the very center of history, at the cross. He took and used the very worst thing, and he brought about the very best thing.

He transformed the murder of his son, the Holy Son of God, into the work of salvation for the world, the world he so loves. He transformed death into life, crucifixion, then resurrection, life out of death, redemption.
It's the good news. Through Christ, our God, he single-handedly reached down into our reality and the messiness of our reality and our sin, and he changed it, brought redemption.
A few weeks ago, he sang, Oh, sing hallelujah. Our hope springs eternal. This resurrection hope, Christ our hope in life and death. God's reached into our reality and changed it, brought redemption. And he changes us, too. He changes our reality and he changes us, too.

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[26:33] He changes our eternity and he changes us, too. Just like he did Moses. He does that work with us. So with Moses, he used a job.

He used a father-in-law. He used his marriage, parenting. He used some sheep. He used the school of hard knocks. All these things to mold and shape him into an instrument.
In his hands, in our God, he does the same sort of thing working on us, too. He does the same sorts of things. And he redeems bad things. And he uses everyday things.
And he's just kind of patiently working on us over time. And I think really the call here in Exodus 2 is for us to open our eyes and see that work and just get really curious.
Get curious about what our God is doing. To go beyond just kind of floating through life and being really joyful and happy about the good things that happen and really bemoaning the bad things that happen.
[27:41] How about we go to the next level and really get curious about what our God is, the potter with the clay. What is he doing in us and around us? Our great Redeemer, the potter with the clay.

What's he doing? What's he doing with you through your home life? Whether you're on your own or you have a house full, what's he up to? What's he up to through your work life?
Those everyday moments on the work site or whatever? Because the truth is, whether it's paid work or unpaid work, all of us, we're all shepherds in a sense, right? God's given each one of us a small domain, some small sphere of influence, some area of responsibility, some group of tasks or people or a place or ministry.
And we're learning. He meets us in that place and teaches us through that. So how is he doing that? What's he doing? Get curious about how he might be forming, shaping, molding you through your work and through the hard things, too.
At some point or another, we all get knocked down. And really, the question is, will it become for us a school of hard knocks or an experience that makes us bitter?
[29:06] Hard clay. Maybe we make it our prayer this week, God, make me soft clay in your hands, moldable, able to be shaped, open to be shaped by you.

Our God, he's always at his work. He is our great redeemer, the potter with the clay. Thanks be to God.
Let's pray together. God, you're the potter and we're the clay, and we thank you for that. We thank you for your faithful work on Moses and how you used him.
Thank you for the cross transformation that you brought for us, the cross. We thank you for your persistent, careful, wonderful work in our lives today, too, Lord.
We pray that you would do that. So often we pray for protection, for safety, about the different circumstances in our lives. We want to also pray about our character this morning.
[30:16] And, Lord, what you're doing in us. By your spirit, Lord, get us to a place where we're soft, moldable, being trained, learning those lessons that you have for us in our homes, our workplaces, in the midst of hardship, too.

Lord, it's a tremendous comfort and honor to know that we're held in your hands. And we have you working on us in our lives. Continue that good work, we pray.
In Jesus' name, amen. Thank you.

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