

Moses: Spiritual Awakening

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[0 : 00] As you know, those of you who were here this morning, I preached on one of the great I am statements in John's Gospel of which there are seven.

And this was the first one that I preached on, I am the bread of life. So there are another six. Originally, it was provisionally agreed that I might do about a total of 10 services here at Glasgow City.

And seven of those I had thought I would do the I am statements and declarations of Jesus. So we'll just see how that unfolds.

So you might get some more sermons on the I am declarations of Jesus. And then in the evening, I thought I would do some sermons about the early life of Moses.

Now, some people might say, is there much mileage in looking at this ancient person who lived so long ago, two and a half thousand or more years ago?

[1 : 21] And I think that I'm hoping that you'll agree with me after I've conducted this sermon that the answer is yes, there is some mileage in doing that.

And C.S. Lewis once used the phrase chronological snobbery. And we are not to think that everything modern is wonderful.

And neither are we to think that everything ancient is not wonderful. So we will be looking at the chapter that has been read already in chapter two.

And I want to explore three things with you in this part of the early life of Moses. I want to explore with you, firstly, the circumstances around the time of Moses' birth.

And secondly, I want to explore with you what I'm calling the spiritual awakening of Moses. And thirdly, I want to explore with you Moses' lack of self-control.

[2 : 32] I'm glad he's not here to confront me about that. But that's what I'm hoping to do. The circumstances of the birth of Moses are almost like a parable of the deliverance of Israel later on in the book.

For example, Moses is delivered from the waters of the Nile, while Israel is delivered from the waters of the Red Sea. The life of Moses is under threat, just like the people of Israel.

God preserves and rescues Moses, just as he preserves and rescues his people. The situation for God's people and Moses at this period is one of dire threat.

It was the end of the Joseph era in Egypt at that time.

And, you know, the thing about the Joseph era, the king or the pharaoh or the leader or the government of Egypt at that time was favorable to the people of God gave them good land and did not enslave them or persecute them.

[4 : 04] But a new era for the people of God begins. You see that now in chapter 1 and verse 8 of Exodus.

Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. And, of course, this is the situation throughout history, isn't it?

And in different countries and in our own history and our own culture. We can perhaps look back romantically and fondly to different eras in the history of Christianity and think it would have been wonderful to live at that time.

But time moves on. History moves on. And there it is. Just as there was the end of the Joseph era and a new era that was very different.

And that's what happened in the time near the birth of Moses. It was the start of a new attitude to God's people.

[5 : 12] The people of God are now seen as a problem. Listen to what verses 9 to 11 say in Exodus 1. Remember, we're looking at the circumstances around the time of the birth of Moses.

And where all this early history is heading is to the call of Moses. But we won't be talking about that tonight. But if I'm allowed back in the pulpit, we should get a chance to talk about it.

So look at verses 8, 9 to 11. This new king said, Look, he said to his people, The Israelites have become far too numerous for us.

Come, we must deal shrewdly with them, or they will become even more numerous. And if war breaks out, we'll join our enemies, fight against us, and leave the country.

And I also want you to take on board this next verse I'm going to read you. It's at verse 7. And you'll see how language is piled on top of one another to emphasize how much the Israelites multiplied at that point in Egypt.

[6 : 33] In verse 7, But the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful. They multiplied greatly, increased in numbers, and became so numerous, and you could put it this way, that the land was teeming with them.

I want you to think of refugees, and I want you to think of asylum seekers. I want you to think of all the stuff that goes on in people's head about this today. So, it's not that different back then.

And this person, this king, said, we can't just sit back and let this happen. We can lose our distinctive culture.

And also, not only can we lose our distinctive culture, but if a war breaks out, this is the government here back then thinking in terms of security, and safety, and the possible safety of the country.

And that's exactly what a man called Vladimir Putin has been thinking about. You see, since the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, many of its former states joined NATO.

[8 : 02] And all these states that joined NATO are right on the border of Russia. It's a massive border of thousands of miles.

And it is, you know, concerned that there are military exercises going on, even though it can be said to them that NATO is not an aggressive entity, but a defensive entity.

But if you look at history, all countries are worried about their own safety and security, and about the safety of their own people.

Even if Vladimir Putin wasn't the president, the government of Russia would still be worried about that. And they worry even more when they think that a country like Ukraine is perhaps going to join NATO.

There was something called the concept of Europe. I can't remember the exact date. It could have been after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the so-called Iron Curtain, called the concept of Europe.

[9 : 19] And that concept of Europe, that concept of Europe had this clause in it, that neither the East nor the West were to allow a proliferation that gave an advantage to the other side.

I might sound as if I'm trying to defend Vladimir Putin. I'm certainly not. I wouldn't defend him for a nanosecond, and I'm horrified at what he's doing in Ukraine, and disgusted with it.

Every cell of my being is disgusted with it. But I do understand the concerns the country has with security. So it was the start of a new attitude to God's people.

As I say, the numbers, the geopolitical borders and security, loss of freedom, and covert and overt genocide was happening around the time of the birth of Moses.

Remember when he said that the male babies were to be thrown into the Nile. So these are the circumstances that Moses were born into.

[10 : 40] And you and I also live in a world where there has been a great sea change, has there not? Culturally, morally, spiritually, and ideologically.

We live in a technological, global, and post-modern world with all the challenges that brings of connecting with our fellow men and women.

But what I want you to notice in this seeming threatening to the people of God set of circumstances that they find themselves existing among, what I want you to notice is the providential preservation of Moses following his birth.

Now, sometimes for some people the idea of the providence of God is a challenging idea, especially in the light of things that are happening in the world and especially in the light of perhaps things that may even be happening in your life right now.

But, you know, certainly, if we look at what happened to Moses, perhaps you couldn't get a better illustration of the providence of God.

[12 : 08] It's almost akin to a tragic comedy play. Let me just remind you what happened. I've already said to you that the king said this was genocide.

the king said every male baby is to be thrown into the Nile. After Moses was born and he was a healthy child, that's what the word means.

Some translations say he was a fine child or a good child. It means he was a healthy baby. And after he was born, he was put in the Nile where they were told to put all the male babies he was put in the Nile by his mother but put in a basket.

It's the same word that's used for Noah's Ark that was able to float and able to stay upwards. He was found by Pharaoh's daughter who was along the bank of the Nile bathing with her attendants. She took pity on the baby Pharaoh's daughter, the daughter of the person that had made the rule that all babies should be thrown into the Nile, the daughter of the man whose policy was genocide.

[13 : 36] Moses' sister said to Pharaoh's daughter at the bank of the Nile, would you like me to get someone to nurse the baby for you? She said, yes, she, the sister of Moses, goes and gets Moses' real mother and Pharaoh's daughter says to Moses' real mother, I will pay you for looking after the baby.

After he has been weaned, Pharaoh's daughter legally adopts him and names him Moses.

Now, if that is not an example or an illustration of a divine hand working in a way that is incredible through the acts and policies and will of human beings, I don't know what would be.

this brings me to my second point, the spiritual awakening or early stirrings of Moses.

Moses had two identities. When Pharaoh's daughter discovered Moses in the Nile, in the Nile, she says this and it's in our Bibles that verse 6, this is one of the Hebrew babies.

[15 : 21] This is one of the Hebrew babies. But in verse 10, when the child grew older, Pharaoh's daughter took him and he became her son, she named him Moses, saying, I drew him out of the water.

There's his second identity. He's the son of Pharaoh's daughter. But Moses comes to, I'm not sure what you might call it, some sort of crisis, some sort of awareness that he has to choose, as it were, you could say, between his two identities.

identities. And Hebrews puts it this way, Hebrews tells us he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh.

And there's a sense in which, is there not, that every single one of us in some sense can live their lives out under two identities.

we can live our lives out predicated on our will, or we can live our lives out predicated on the will of God.

[17 : 01] There was an old bishop called Bishop Butler, who once said that the whole of religion is summed up and thy will be done.

Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh. We are by nature sons of Adam.

We are by nature sons in a sense of judgment because of our rebellion against God, because of our insistence not your will but my will be done.

will you like Moses refused to be called the son of Adam? Moses, it tells us in Hebrews, regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as greater treasures than the treasures of Egypt.

Are we ready to take that kind of stand? Do we take that kind of stand in a sense daily? verse 11 says this, one day after Moses had grown up and Ross read from Acts 7 and you notice there the very first verse of Acts 7, Moses is 40.

[18 : 53] So verse 11 is referring to Moses when he was 40. It took him a long time to refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh.

It took him a long time to make that radical choice. Anyway, he made it. And one day after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their harsh labour. Notice he watched them. He really took a good look. He allowed what he was looking at and what he saw to really get into and under his skin.

it wasn't just a quick glance. It wasn't just a look and move on.

It was a look in a sense that changed everything. Do we have a look, a real look, in our minds at the plight of our fellow human beings and especially their spiritual plight.

[20 : 40] He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Notice that the writer here of Exodus is emphasising that he's already changed his identity, Moses.

He's already siding and identifying with the persecuted and enslaved people of God.

he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people, glancing or looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed or murdered the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

and that word in the Hebrew actually has a connotation of striking to kill.

The following day he went back again and this time he saw two Hebrews fighting and they said to those two Hebrews that were fighting, he asked the one in the wrong, why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?

[22 : 16] The man said, ironically, there's great irony in this statement, isn't there? 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. Now you can see from the narrator here isn't terribly judgmental on the slaying of this person but you can see from what he tells us about Moses that Moses knew what he was doing was wrong.

He that was to become the lawgiver because look at him looking this way and that to see if anybody is watching and look at him when he is afraid and thought what I did must have become known. And of course when Pharaoh heard of this in verse 15 he tried to kill Moses but Moses fled and went to live in Midian.

Isn't that interesting that here we have this person that's going to be the great leader of the people of God. The one that delivers them out of their slavery.

[23 : 51] The one that gives rise to the nation of Israel. Israel. And here he is and one day he's slaying somebody and the next day he's gripped with fear and he's fleeing for his life.

Moses at least realized where he belonged to whose people he belonged and whose he was. He felt a strong sense of concern for his own people.

There was a side to him that was volatile and could be dangerous and yet here is the person that if I could put it this way God was grooming to lead his own people out of Egypt.

That brings me to my third point Moses' lack of self-control or what we might call his Achilles heel. perhaps you can understand his feeling of outrage at what was happening to his fellow Hebrew. Having actually seen and watched them at their harsh labor because it's one thing isn't it to read about atrocities and it's quite another thing is it not to witness them at first hand.

[25 : 38] we're not told the exact circumstances of the killing but as I've said the word used by the Hebrew is a word that suggests to smite with deadly intent.

The fact that Moses glanced this way and that way was gripped by fear and fled to Midian shows that he knew as I said earlier he acted wrongly.

But I want you to note something as we come near to closing this evening. As he fled to Midian he sat down by a well.

He sat down by a well. And of course a well is a symbol of life.

There's water there obviously. There was Jacob's well. That wasn't the well that Moses was at.

[26 : 56] There was the well that Jesus came to when he met the Samaritan woman. And that is associated with the life and with the salvation.

And I just wonder as the writer includes that little part there that he sat down by a well. because he's in Midian now.

He's some distance away. And as we'll see if we look at more of the early life of Jesus, he spends the next 40 years in Midian, settles down.

And yet he sat down at that well and perhaps that well is a symbol that through Moses life is going to emerge for the people of God.

And certainly Jesus made the same association as he spoke to that Samaritan woman at the well.

[28 : 14] just as we close I want to mention some lessons that are important I think.

It's sometimes very difficult to see ourselves. Our own poet said if only we could see ourselves as others see us.

When I did a counselling course in 2007 one of the important modules or components of that counselling course was training you to understand yourself to give you greater awareness and to understand your own baggage your own weaknesses your own vulnerability ability Moses has still got a lot of self awareness to learn about before God entrusts him with the salvation of his enslaved people in Egypt and then I heard the quote just the other day I think it was on television I heard it and it's this you don't defeat the enemy by becoming the enemy this is something that Moses had to learn you don't defeat the enemy by becoming the enemy and also is it not encouraging and that's one thing that I respect the Bible for it doesn't give us phony saints it paints the saints warts and all and we are in the company of fellow sinners redeemed by grace even in all the greats that are in the Bible I know that there was a psychotherapist that I knew when I was

working in Airdrie

Health Centre and he was well qualified and he used to speak at different conferences and nearly every conference he said this he said different things all the time but he always brought this into it he used to say when the patient enters the room the teacher enters the room and when I used to see patients in Airdrie Health Centre I would say to them this is not a question of you're weak and I am strong this is a question of two weak people meeting together to see if we can support each other thing the other lesson that I want to just leave you with is a determination to act without reference to

[31 : 57] God as a charter for disaster that's what Moses found when he murdered that to Hebrew a determination to act without reference to God as a charter for disaster Moses is now a fearful man a fugitive and he's fled to Midian as we conclude can I ask I was asking it this morning as well have you seen your true identity just as Moses saw his true identity he realized that his identity wasn't among the treasures of Egypt he realized that his identity wasn't among the pleasures of Egypt he realized that his identity wasn't as the son of

Pharaoh's daughter but he realized his identity if I can put it in New Testament terms was beneath the banner of the cross with Christ can I also ask have you been spiritually awakened as Moses became spiritually awakened verse 11 one day after Moses had grown up he went out to where his own people were has that day come for you have you had that spiritual awakening if not you can even have it tonight because Jesus says if you will only believe in him and come to him that awakening that will be your awakening and then

I want to just ask this finally as you look out the window of your mind what do you see as you look into or out of the window of all your thoughts and all your inner moments and all your inner yearnings and longings what do you see I want to ask you to follow the example of a Roman soldier who one day looked at a man hanging on a cross and he really did look he looked with all of his being and there was spiritual awakening at that moment he said surely this is the son of God I ask you to look at Jesus Christ to look not only at his life not only at his words but to look at him hanging on that cross that you might have a spiritual awakening that you might have eternal life that you might have an ultimate point and purpose to your life that you might have a hope not only for this life but the life that is to come may it be so Amen