
Prayers

To God

Praise God for Creation

All praise be to You, Lord God, for the wonders of Your Creation. You have made all things well, and though we have not always understood its force, its beauty, its majesty, and its the enormous power, and neither have we appreciated the vastness of all You have made, we know that we are an integral part of it all. Bless our worship, that we may always be content to offer You our highest praise: Halleluiah! **AMEN**

For myself

Pray in expectation of what the Lord will do for you this day. Ask the Lord to remind you of the great life affirming things He has done for you in the past, so that you do not fail to trust Him for the present and the future.

For others

Pray for the children who come to your church, and bless the families that are a part of your church, both those that are at the centre of its life and those at the very edges of it.

Meditation

With the click of a button on the internet, you can

- Recall a radio programme you wish to hear again;
- Look up train timetables and plan a journey;
- Download a file of invaluable information;
- Send an email anywhere in the world;
- Order goods from all kinds of shops and services.
- Research information about almost anything;
- Have a conversation with others on the internet.

With a few moments prayer with the Lord, you can

- Recall an incident which can inspire you today;
- Check out whether your plans for the day are His will;
- Access the infinite mind and wisdom of God;
- Offer a prayer for any circumstance in the world;
- Gain access to God's gracious help for anything;
- Ask the Spirit's help for understanding His Word;
- Share the concerns of God's people anywhere.

Try spending more time praying than you do on the internet!

Bible Passage

Exodus 2:11-15

¹¹ One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to visit his own people and saw their hard labour. He saw an Egyptian giving a beating to a Hebrew, one of his own people.

¹² So he looked round about, and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

¹³ The next day, he went out again and saw two Hebrew people fighting. He said to the man in the wrong,

‘why are you striking your fellow Hebrew?’

¹⁴ The man answered,

‘who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you thinking about killing me as well as the Egyptian?’

Moses was afraid, thinking,

‘What I did must surely be known.’

¹⁵ When Pharaoh heard about this, he tried to kill Moses, but he fled from Pharaoh and went to stay in the land of Midian, where he sat down by a well.

Review

The remarkable story of Moses jumps ahead by thirty six years, and his age in this story is forty according to Luke (Acts 7:23). He has been raised as a prince in the court of Pharaoh, but the time has now come for him to have his eyes opened to his own heritage. According to this scripture, he was aware of the fact of his Hebrew ancestry, but had little contact with the people from whom he came. So it was that Moses *‘went out to visit his own people’* (2:11). It was a simple enough thing to do, but as with so many others who have gone in search of their past, the journey he embarked upon would change his life, as he would soon find out!

How did Moses know about his ancestry, or come to realise that he was a Hebrew? We can imagine that in the course of his life he had either been told the wonderful story of his birth and adoption into the royal court (2:1-10), or he must have made enquiry about where he came from and discovered the true story. Certainly, he must have pursued some such leads by the time of his mid-thirties. Perhaps his own name was a trigger for his search?

Moses’ first attempts at identifying with the Hebrew people were chaotic and completely counterproductive, or at least, so it must have seemed. It appears that the sight of the repression of his own people came as a complete shock to him, and his consequent actions can only be described as several degrees more than headstrong. He murdered an Egyptian going about his business of maintaining the Egyptian status quo by attacking an innocent Hebrew man (2:11,12). It was rash foolishness. How could he expect the downtrodden Hebrew people to accept him as one of them by placing the community in danger by murdering an Egyptian. Our passage does not say this, but the implications of Moses’ actions were obvious; the Hebrews would have lived in fear of reprisals from the Egyptian community.

Moses did not yet understand the idiocy of his violence, but it was a lesson he would have to learn if he was ever to be useful to God. Immediately after his evil deed, Moses thought of himself as a hero not an idiot, and he therefore felt he had the right to question the motives of two Hebrew men who were fighting (2:13). No reason is stated for the fight, and we do not need to know. Moses questioned the fighters (2:13), but they did not like being told how to behave by someone who had been brought up in the Egyptian court. Did his royal court clothes give him away, or perhaps his accent or manner? He was certainly not welcomed as a Saviour of Israel for having killed an Egyptian.

The sharp rebuke of the Hebrew men was stinging; *'who made you a prince or judge over us?'* (2:14), yet in the midst of Moses' confusion, we can see something of the moral man who would one day emerge. The question he asked the two Hebrew men was this, *'why are you striking your fellow Hebrew?'* So he was not entirely consumed by his own bravado, rather he was genuinely concerned that his own people were so downtrodden they had lost their moral compass; two men fighting each other was a sign of social decay and degradation.

In addition to this, Moses seems to have lost confidence immediately he was challenged, and he suddenly became fearful (2:14). The Hebrew people may have been concerned about reprisals when an Egyptian was killed, and now Moses became aware that others knew of his deed. He immediately saw the foolishness of his actions and realised that the murder of an Egyptian would not be tolerated. He had compromised every privilege and right he had to the royal court (2:15) and would have to flee an angry Pharaoh!

How much did Pharaoh know about what had happened? Certainly, an investigation would have been instigated after the murder of the Egyptian taskmaster (2:12), and information would be easy to find. The Hebrews were not yet favourable to Moses; he was regarded as a murderous upstart, and would have been happy to lay the finger of blame on this Moses, a man who they did not regard as one of their own.

Yet for Moses, he was learning the first important lesson of leadership. These events taught him that even if you have the right motives and the power or ability to take decisive action, you cannot assume that people will follow your leadership when you take unilateral action. Moses had to wait another forty years until he was eighty (7:7), before God would lead him back to Egypt to begin his work of setting the people of Israel free from their slavery.

Some find it difficult to believe that God wanted to use a man who had murdered someone else to bring liberty to His people. But this is what happened, and Moses was the man God used, with all his faults and failings. It was not a human choice, but God's choice, and if we look back at this incident we can either do this with cynicism or with respect. In truth, Moses knew what it was to murder someone, and by the time he came back to the people of Israel to demand their deliverance from Pharaoh (7:1f.), he was an infinitely more humble man, far more wise and godly, and yet a truly hard negotiator! Many can be violent or threaten violence, but few will allow God to use them for truly great things!

We will eventually discover that Moses was an ideal candidate for the job of being Israel's saviour. He was a Hebrew by birth, and was raised in the court of Pharaoh, yet because of his idiocy he had to wait many years in exile, away from his homeland of Egypt and far from his own people, the Hebrews. God provided him with a haven in the land of Midian (2:15), the desert regions of the Sinai Peninsula inhabited sparsely by the nomadic tribes of Midian; people who were descended from Abraham by his second wife Keturah (Gen 25:1-4).

To conclude, there is something worth remembering about this story. When in later years, Moses delivered God's 'Ten Commandments' including the command *'you shall not kill'* (20:13), the words were delivered not just by a great saint who had prayed and fasted for forty days and nights on a mountain top, but by a penitent sinner who needed the grace of God. This is a detail that is sometimes lost.

Going Deeper

Further Comments

This is a story of life and death, and the rest of the book of Exodus is about life and death. Moses was nearly killed by the actions of Pharaoh when he was a child, and the intriguing story we have read today tells us how Moses came to be on Pharaoh's 'wanted' list as a criminal. The whole story is full of hints about Moses' character and the saving purposes of God, pointing us forwards to the great themes of salvation in the book of Exodus.

Moses's age, and connections with Luke and Acts

In the introduction, I gave the reference of Acts 7:23 for the age of Moses when he killed the Egyptian. It is not clear where this New Testament tradition comes from, as Moses' age at the time of this incident is not mentioned in the Old Testament. However, in comparison to other ages mentioned in the latter part of Genesis and Exodus, it sounds about right. It is worth reading the whole of Stephen's re-telling of this story in Acts 7:23-30, because it is very close to the Exodus story; but Stephen comments on the actions of Moses by saying this:

'he supposed that his kinsfolk would understand that God, through him, was rescuing them, but they did not understand.' (Acts 7:25)

By making this comment, Stephen was turning the screw on his Sanhedrin accusers by insisting that the Israelite people had historically failed to understand what God was doing in their midst! Stephen's comment was part of his accusation that the Jews did not understand Jesus, having previously not understood Moses; but it helps us understand that it was not just Moses who was unprepared for the great works of God in salvation and liberation; it was the people as well. They were oppressed and highly suspicious of anything 'out of order' in their midst and it would be very hard to liberate these people because of their own bondage and suffering. A lesson Moses had to learn in addition to that mentioned above!

Moses and the killing of the Egyptian

It has often been pointed out that Moses failed in leadership because he acted alone and in secret and relying on his own strength and wisdom. However, these are things we can only say in retrospect, for it is doubtful that anyone involved in this incident thought about it that much. We have the impression that Moses took leave of Pharaoh's court and went to see what was happening to his people. He had no contacts there as far as we know, and he cut a lonely figure in the whole story. He was like a man wandering around with no clear direction, responding to events without proper care, and in this state, his anger easily had the better of him, driving him to kill the Egyptian taskmaster (2:12).

However, the story does tell us that Moses was a man whose inner emotions could be easily aroused at the sight of injustice, and when he saw it, he was angry enough to kill. It also appears that Moses had already made the transition of sympathies from the court to the Hebrew people, because verse 11 refers to the Hebrews as Moses' *'own people'* on two occasions. This is only a snapshot picture of an incident, and we only have a few words to gather what information we can about Moses. It appears that he had already made his decision, murder or no murder, there was to be no going back to the court in which he was raised, however much he owed it for his training and education.

Moses and the two fighting Hebrews, in 'Hebrews'.

There is a passage of the New Testament which speaks substantially about this incident in Moses' life. It is found in Hebrews:

'By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.' (Hebrews 11:24)

Clearly, Moses had made this choice, but he found out very quickly that following the Lord's will does not bring immediate success. Every move Moses made was one that had to be taken by faith. He had no clear guidelines for what to do and things did not go well. He had to have confidence in the justice of his cause and the God of his ancestors in order to act as he did.

Having made the crucial move to identify with his own people, and followed this with the murder of the unjust Egyptian taskmaster, he found out that other Hebrews did not want anything to do with him. When he intervened in a dispute between two men, they immediately challenged his right to act as a *'prince or a judge over us'* (2:14). Moses may have felt ready to lead God's people, but they were not ready for him to lead. It is highly likely that after the murder of a taskmaster, those who investigated the matter would have exacted cruel revenge on those considered responsible. Moses was right to be afraid, because if revenge was exacted on the people, then they would turn on him; and if the people knew that he had done this deed and reported it to the court officials then there would be no possibility that he could stay in Egypt. He was a wanted man.

The flight to Midian

We are told in this passage that Moses immediately recognised his peril and fled from Pharaoh and from Egypt, taking refuge in the desert lands of Midian. A fascinating story now awaits us as Moses comes to terms with his enforced exile, but the impression we have from this passage is not only that Moses was a strong man capable of murdering another, but also a deeply sensitive man, conscious of issues of justice, and sensitive to when he was not wanted! In future years, Moses' leadership and his attempts to set his own people free would be misunderstood by the people of Israel on many occasions (5:19-21; 17:3; Num 14:2; Deut 1:27), but this first rejection gave Moses much to think about, and when he returned later, he was ready to deal with it, having learnt from what happened in this first incident.

Moses was asked the question *'who made you a prince or a judge over us?'* (2:13) and it was a question he could not answer. We do not know how much Moses knew of the God of his forefathers as a Hebrew and as an Israelite, but it would have been surprising if something of the history of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had not been passed on through the Hebrew people in order for them to maintain their identity. But Moses still had no answer to this penetrating question; he could not say that God had called him to set the people free, he only knew that it was right that the people should be free, and he was willing to lead them. He was missing the personal call and authority of God for a mission of this nature. Slowly but surely, however, Exodus will lead us towards this important point in his life.

Discipleship

Application

Dealing with difficult matters of justice in our world, 'Now or later?'

Today's story is that of a young capable man becoming caught up in the difficult realities of life in this world. The issues of justice to which Moses responded are very similar to many we see in the world today, and there are many godly people who feel the need to respond immediately to them. Surely, we say, we should become involved with the fighting, the wars, and the political and cultural problems which beset every injustice we see around us.

However, Moses thought the same, acted, and then discovered that he had to wait for God's time and his own maturity before he could fulfil his God-given calling as a 'prince and leader'. Today's passage is a message from God to warn any of us who might tend to be rather hot-headed to 'stop', and await instructions. This is a hard message, particularly at times of difficulty and injustice. But justice is never done in the instances of time we would like, and we always do best to wait for God's timing and not our own. This requires both patience and supreme trust.

Waiting on God

The task of waiting on God is essential if God's Kingdom is to be strengthened in our own day. There are many potential leaders, but few who are prepared to wait on the Lord until He gives them the right platform and the personal authority to act. It is too easy for people to claim authority and leadership in our own day because the church is relatively weak in many parts of the world, and people are looking for leadership. However, not all potential leaders are anointed by God for the task of mission, and there are also many churches which need to hear God's Word and receive His blessing before they can go forward in His power and strength. The good thing is that if our eyes are on the Lord, as Moses' were, then we will learn through our waiting as well as our calling, what we should do in the Lord's strength, and how.

I say this, by the way, believing that there is not much time before God will act in power in our midst to bring a revival and renewal that is quite different to anything we have ever seen in Christendom. Many have waited, and I believe the time is ripe for a salvation of many souls. In this study we are looking at an early part of God's story of salvation, but at the time you read this, we will be closer to the end.

Ideas for what to do

- What serious mistakes have you made that have helped you in your Christian life? Have you properly atoned for such sins? It can be easy to assume that some things are so far in the past they do not matter, but they do if we do not deal with them. Search out these questions, carefully.
- Pray for the leaders of your church, that they might be people who are honest and sincere in their dealings with people both inside and outside the church.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss in your group why Moses may have been tempted to identify with his people rather than stay in the court of Pharaoh.
2. Moses was a murderer. Do you think this should disbar him from leadership of God's people?
3. This story clearly relates what would have felt like a disaster to Moses. Do we need to experience failure before we can fulfil our potential?

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, I give You all my thoughts and feelings about what I have done, or will do, this day. Judge them all according to Your will and Your Word, and help me face the

consequences. Receive my repentance, deal with my sin; and daily transform my mind, my feelings and my heart, so that I may grow in holiness through faith and action. AMEN
