

By Faith, He Left  
Exodus 2:11-25  
CenterPoint Church  
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### **Intro: It's risky business sticking up for someone**

Have you ever been in a situation where someone else was in danger? A situation where you saw someone who needed help? They would be attacked or abused if no one intervened? That's hopefully an easy call if it's a loved one at risk, you would want to protect and defend them. But what about when it's not someone you know? And you are aware that you are putting yourself at risk by intervening? That's a tougher call. I have a friend named Mo Leverett, who used to be the head of an inner-city ministry. He told a story about when he first moved to New Orleans to start that ministry. Mo and his family were driving and passed a man beating a woman. Well, Mo wasn't going to let that happen, so he stopped the car, ran over, and pulled the man off the woman and told him to stop hitting her. He said that the man just smiled and showed his mouth full of gold teeth, but walked away. Mo found out later that the man was a very powerful drug dealer and gang leader in the area, and now Mo was brand new to the area and had made an enemy of someone who could hurt him and his family.

It's risky business sticking up for someone. There could be serious consequences. Thankfully, God protected Mo and his family and gave them many fruitful years with that ministry. But we see this danger of intervening in the life of the main character of our new sermon series on the book of Exodus, Moses. He sees something that troubles him and acts to make it right, but that sets up a chain of events that change the entire course of his life. His instinct to intervene, protect, and deliver reflects the heart of His God.

Up until now, everything in Exodus was when Moses was a baby; things happened to him and around him. Now we're going to see him in action, he is 40 years old as this passage begins. We find out the years of his life Acts 7:22-23 says, "*And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds. When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel.*" Later Acts 7:30 – "*Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush.*" Then Acts 7:36 – "*This man (Moses) led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.*" So what's interesting is that you can chop up Moses' life into three 40 year periods: 1) 40 years of growing up and being educated in Egypt, 2) 40 years of living in Midian and raising a family, 3) 40 years of leading the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land.

But we get ahead of ourselves. In the first two verses of this text, we see that Moses had a heart for **1) Intervening For His People (vv. 11-12)**

**11** *One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. 12 He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.*

Moses was a man who had been living a life of privilege in the palace, having been adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. The movies that have been made about Moses' life (*The Prince of Egypt* and *Exodus*) have made a big deal about him struggling to accept his identity as a Hebrew; he's in denial until Aaron and Miriam convince him. But that's not necessarily true. The text says that Moses "went out to his people." It seems that Moses knew he was a Hebrew not an Egyptian. Most likely his mother, who had nursed him for the first few years of his life, had told him. He identified with the

Hebrews enough to go check on them. The Hebrew word used for “looked” in the phrase “*he went out to his people and looked on their burdens*” means more than simply “watching” or “seeing”; it means “to see with emotion.” To be personally involved and invested; it means having compassion that will move to action. It’s the same word used of God that He “saw the oppression of his people.” The burdens of the enslaved, mistreated Hebrews became Moses’ burdens.<sup>1</sup>

So we see that Moses sticks up for one of his brothers, but probably not in the way that God wanted him to. Moses would eventually be the deliverer of God’s people, but here he tries to deliver God’s people with violence and on a timetable that God had not called him to. Moses looked around before he killed the guy. Now, I think the natural assumption is that Moses was looking to make sure that no one saw him; which makes sense because afterwards it’s clear he had hoped he’d gotten away with it. But some commentators think that Moses looked around to see if anybody would be intervening to get the Egyptian to stop beating the Hebrew (we always assume it’s a slave master beating a slave but the text doesn’t really say that); and it’s only after he saw no one who would stop it that he took matters into his own hands. Either way, it was a tragic mistake, a sin before a holy God. Philip Ryken comments: “For all his admirable qualities – his hatred of injustice, his opposition to slavery, his sympathy with those who suffered, and his deep affection for God’s people – with one rash act Moses threw away forty years of spiritual preparation. Although he had a holy zeal to rescue God’s people, his zeal was not based on knowledge. His failure had nothing to do with his motivation, for his heart was in the right place. Rather, the problem was his method: Moses was trying to save God’s people by his own works rather than letting God save them by his grace.”<sup>2</sup>

Now that Moses has stuck up for his people, he has an opportunity to help them again, this time

## **2) Intervening Between His People (vv. 13-15)**

**13** *When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, “Why do you strike your companion?”* **14** *He answered, “Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?”* Then Moses was afraid, and thought, “Surely the thing is known.” **15** *When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. And he sat down by a well.*

Moses is discredited both among his own people and among the Egyptians. Acts 7:25 tells us that, “*He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand.*” Maybe he thought he would get gratitude from the enslaved Hebrews, but they probably felt that any time one of their oppressors was challenged, that things would be worse for them. And the man that he rebukes has a quick, understandable reaction: “You’re telling me not to hit someone when you killed a guy yesterday? I don’t have to listen to you!” So Moses realizes that his actions are not hidden, word even reaches Pharaoh, who apparently turns on Moses quickly no matter what their past history was. And Moses has to leave.

Think for a minute about how God had used one of his people in an important position in the Egyptian government. Remember Joseph and how God orchestrated all the events in his life to make him become the right hand of Pharaoh, and use that position to save not only the lives of his family but also people all over the place who would have died in the famine? Shouldn’t Moses have been trying to emulate Joseph and stay in the palace and influence Pharaoh’s royal court for good? Is Moses thumbing his nose at the good gift that God has given him? Did he really have to burn the bridge that had him in the good graces of the king of Egypt?

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God’s Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005) p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 63.

Well, listen to the words of Hebrews 11:24-27 - **24** *By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. 27 By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.*

Apparently, there was a lot more going on than just Moses' panicked reaction to the fall-out after he killed the Egyptian. Now, there are some interesting things in the Hebrews account:

-Verse 25 says he chose to be mistreated with the people of God rather than enjoy sin. That answers my earlier question about why Moses shouldn't have just stayed in the palace – he felt God calling him out. Think of all that he gave up! He was part of the royal family, he ate whatever he wanted, he was schooled by the finest teachers, he walked among the privileged, important upper class far from the filthy Hebrews who did the grunt work around the city. But he gave all that up, not just to be an ordinary guy but to eventually be part of the slave class; he knowingly moved towards being mistreated and enduring hardship. How many of us are willing to leave the luxuries of life that we have become accommodated to when God calls us to sacrifice some of that? Could we lay aside our privilege, the easy pleasures, the creature comforts that we're used to? I doubt many of us could. Now God doesn't call many of us to a Moses-level of leadership, not all of us should be missionaries or sell all we have. But He calls all of us to sacrifice something: have you ever thought about the fact that God calls Christians to have 1 fewer day each week and 10% less money than our unbelieving neighbors? If you honor the Sabbath and tithe, you don't have as much time or money because God has called you to set those aside for Him. But those are sacrifices that God often rewards with more energy and better perspective than someone who works 7 days a week and hoards all their money. And God may be calling you to a lot greater sacrifices than that. God has special promises for those who will give up things in this life – He promises to reward us in the life to come – Matthew 6:20 says, *“but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.”* Moses looked ahead to the reward for one who was faithful to God, and so should we.

-Very 26 says that he gave it up because of Jesus. Obviously this is all 3,000 years before Christ's birth, so Moses wasn't literally thinking about Jesus; but the author of Hebrews links faithfulness to God with belief in Christ. And for Old Testament believers, it was faith towards God's promises and His coming Messiah that is credited as righteousness. So even though Moses didn't understand that precisely, the author of Hebrews can attribute motives here and say that he had faith in Christ.

-Verse 27 says that he left Egypt in faith not in fear. Well, that seems pretty inconsistent with what Exodus 2:14-15 says: *“Then Moses was afraid, and thought, “Surely the thing is known.” When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh.”* What do we do with this? Is Scripture contradicting itself? Well, Moses has already been under one of those Pharaoh death warrants before (as a baby). Hebrews also says that Moses' parents were not afraid of the king's edict to kill their son, but I'm pretty sure that fear had to be some motivating factor. I think what Hebrews is trying to say is that their faith was stronger than their fear. So, yes, they hid their baby and later Moses fled because they were afraid that he would die, but the greater motive was obedience to God. Hebrews applauds these as acts of faith. So yes, Moses messed up killing a man, but God was calling him out to the wilderness, to further prepare him for his special role.

So now Moses is done trying to help the Hebrews for a while (put on hold for 40 years), so now we see an incident of his

### **3) Intervening For Strangers (vv. 16-22)**

**16** Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. **17** The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and saved them, and watered their flock. **18** When they came home to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come home so soon today?" **19** They said, "An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds and even drew water for us and watered the flock." **20** He said to his daughters, "Then where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread." **21** And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah. **22** She gave birth to a son, and he called his name Gershom, for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."

Now who are the Midianites? Are they pagans, a secular people that Moses just happens to get involved with? Actually no, they're descendants of Abraham; Midian was one of Abraham's sons with Keturah, his 2<sup>nd</sup> wife that he married after Sarah died. So even though this tribe is not part of the 12 tribes of Israel (the sons of Jacob), they are God-fearing descendants of Abraham. So Moses is among extended family. And the father of these 7 girls is a priest. Moses' father-in-law is called Reuel here, but other times he's called Jethro. He'll play a role in Moses' life later when he is leading the wilderness community.

Moses had tried to protect people in the first part of the passage but did it poorly, and was separated from his family as a result. Moses protects people in the second part of the passage, this time much better, and gains a family because of it! He's invited into the priest's home, he ends up staying and marrying one of the daughters. Moses is exercising his role as a deliverer – the daughters run back to their dad and say, "we were delivered by an Egyptian." Moses was naturally gifted at protecting and delivering the weak, and God would use that in a mighty way later in his life.

Moses and Zipporah have a son whose name is Gershom, which means "Sojourner" or "Alien there." Is this referring to Moses' time in Egypt? Or his time with the Midianites? It's vague, it could be either one, though one commentator<sup>3</sup> said that maybe it reflects his entire life. That Moses never felt that he was in the land where he was supposed to be. So whether he was in Egypt with the wrong family in the wrong land, or in Midian where he finds family but is not either where he's from or where he's going, he feels out of place. Ultimately, Moses' call is to the promised land, and God has planted a seed of discontent in him until he gets his people up and moving towards there.

I'm trying hard to love Delaware. I bought some books, I've driven around and visited some of the tourist spots. I already like it a lot better than South Florida where I lived for a few years after college. But I have only lived there for a week, so I don't love it quite as much as when I lived in Pennsylvania, Texas, or Virginia. Yet! Some of you are natives, love Delaware, and never want to move away. I met someone who is very disappointed living here. It would be good to remember that none of us should love where we live too much because we are just strangers and aliens in this world. We are Gershom. We were made for a different world, a heavenly kingdom, where when we arrive we will find the desires of our hearts filled; we will never feel like foreigners there, we will feel that we were made for that place. C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* said, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world... I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that country and to help others to do the same." You are like Moses, a sojourner in a foreign land. Live and live well there, but never forget that you are headed for the promised land of heaven.

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<sup>3</sup> John Goldingay, *Exodus & Leviticus for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010) p. 13.

The final three verses in these chapters show us that Moses isn't the only one ready to intervene.

#### **4) God Is Ready To Intervene (vv. 23-25)**

*<sup>23</sup> During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. <sup>24</sup> And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. <sup>25</sup> God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.*

If you know your history, you know that America was resolved to stay out of World War II. After all, the war was happening over in Europe and there was no threat to American soil. Why send a bunch of our young men over to be killed when maybe Hitler would run out of steam at some point? That all changed on the morning of December 7, 1941, "a day which will live in infamy." You know the story: Japan sent planes to bomb the American aircraft fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor in order to both demoralize America and keep them out of the war, and also to destroy their ability to enter into it, particularly on the Pacific side. But it did the opposite, and the common phrase attached to the aftermath of Pearl Harbor is that Japan had "awakened a sleeping giant." America entered the war, fighting both the Nazis in Europe and sending atomic bombs to decimate two of Japan's cities. The Japanese had picked a fight with a more powerful force and paid the consequences.<sup>4</sup>

Neither the Pharaoh who just died nor the new Pharaoh realize that they have picked a fight with the strongest enemy in the universe. When chapter 1 said that a Pharaoh arose who did not know Joseph, it could have added, "and did not know Joseph's powerful God." His son, the new Pharaoh, certainly doesn't see it now as he looks out at what he sees as an inferior race of people - how could they be connected to the strongest power in the universe? Egypt had tons of gods, surely they had plenty of protection and firepower if they needed it. And Pharaoh won't believe that Yahweh God is powerful later on in the book, despite the mounting evidence that God sends in the form of plagues later on. But in trying to build his kingdom on the backs of God's people, he has picked a fight that he can't win. And these verses tell us that God had decided that enough was enough, He heard and would respond in His timing and through His instrument of deliverance. Come back in the following weeks to continue the story.

#### **Conclusion: The Ultimate Divine Intervention**

And God's intervention and deliverance continue for His people. 2 Corinthians 8:9 says, "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*" Or Philippians 2:6-7 - "*who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*" Jesus became a servant, a nothing; just like Moses. Jesus left the palace of heaven and all the riches there to become one of His people, just as Moses left Pharaoh's courts to identify with his people. Jesus did that to lead us out of the slavery of sin, to provide the rescue and release to freedom for His people.

I've called attention to the different ways that Moses intervened for others, but with Jesus we get the ultimate divine intervention. Without Jesus, we are under the dominion of a harsh slave master: our adversary the Devil and our own sin rule over us. We have a sentence of a lifetime of slavery and eternal condemnation hanging over our heads, and we need someone to deliver us. God has sent His Son on the ultimate rescue mission, intervening on our behalf, taking our sins on Himself so that death, hell, and sin have no claim on us anymore. Beloved, hear the great promise of the Gospel, believe it, and embrace it!

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<sup>4</sup> Ligon Duncan's sermon "A New King, Who Knew Not Joseph" from September 24, 2000, found at [fpcjackson.org](http://fpcjackson.org).