

Hope in a Hard Place

The story we have just read comes to us out of a dark time to teach us to hold on to hope. You can hardly overstate the importance of hope. In an article on the *Psychology Today* website an author wrote this:

The power of hope defines the psychological victim and psychological survivor. If I could find a way to package and dispense hope, I would have a pill more powerful than any antidepressant on the market.... As long as a patient, individual or victim has hope, they can recover from anything and everything. However, if they lose hope, unless you can help them get it back, all is lost.

As we look at this story of the birth of Moses in Exodus what we get is a message about finding hope in a hard place. It is how the book of Exodus begins, and Exodus marks a dramatic new beginning in the storyline of the Bible. In Exodus words like *redemption*, and *salvation* and themes like the blood of the lamb all appear for the very first time. And they are given a shape and definition that the rest of the Bible will enhance but not alter. So before we look at this story, I want us to watch a brief, five-minute video from *The Bible Project*. This video will give us a very helpful overview of the first half of the book of **Exodus**.

(Video – 5-6 min: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uf-PgW7rqE>)

One of our goals in this series is to help build our understanding of the larger storyline of the Bible. We also want to relate the story of God to the struggles of life. That is God's purpose also. As we look at the beginning of Exodus and the birth of Moses there are many contemporary themes that we could talk about:

- 1.) Sanctity of human life. After all, it is a story about the brutal killing of innocent babies.
- 2.) Concern for the immigrants. The Egyptians don't like the way the Jews are multiplying. It certainly doesn't lay out a policy that balances compassion with security, but it shows us the danger of losing compassion.
- 3.) Racism. The Egyptians see the Jews as inferior and enslave them.
- 4.) The roles of women. The heroes are all girls or women.
- 5.) Civil disobedience. The heroines in the story disobey unjust laws.

6.) The critical importance of a mother shaping the life and faith of her child. That seems to be a big part of the story of Moses that before he is handed over to the influence of Pharaoh's court he is brought up in the home of his believing parents and that is formative for him.

It's interesting some of these concerns are thought of as more liberal issues (immigrants, racism, the empowerment of women) others as conservative, (sanctity of life and the importance of family.) God doesn't belong to one party or the other. He challenges both. God speaks to all of us in all of this. But in the context of Exodus, the underlying truth without which all of that makes no sense is that God is saying to us in all of life, no matter what: Hold on to your hope in me!"

Romans 15:4 sums it up: *For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope . What God is saying is we need to hold on to our hope...*

I. YOU ARE GOING TO NEED TO HOLD ON TO YOUR HOPE.

There are two reasons: first...

A. We have to hold on to hope because the world can be such a hard, hard place.

Exodus 2:2-3 presents such a contrast, *They had a fine child*, and they hid him. This begs the question why? And the answer is because Moses is born into a world of brutal cruelty. Pharaoh is *at this point* the evillest human being in the Bible's storyline. Pharaoh sees the Israelites multiplying. So he decides to enslave them. They multiply anyway. His next move in **Exodus 1** is that he tells the Hebrew midwives to kill all the male babies as they are born. That fails because of their resistance. He persists in his genocidal persecution by commanding all the boy babies be thrown in the Nile. He doesn't let up. Sometimes life is like that. In **John 16:33** Jesus says, *In the world, you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.* A loving parent has to find the balance between encouraging a child's hopeful, and optimistic dreams and preparing the child for the harder challenges of life. God does that with us in stories and Scriptures. *He tell us we have to hold on to hope because the world can be a hard place.*

Secondly...

B. We have to hold on to our hope because His ways can be *mysterious* to us.

Bible scholars point out that the book of Exodus emphasizes the hiddenness of God in an interesting way. Did you notice that he isn't mentioned at all in the verses we read earlier? This is a brilliant literary technique because it conveys the natural sense that people have when things are hard – God just doesn't seem to be around. Where is he? As we will see – Exodus shows us that actually God, while hidden, is not inactive, uninvolved, uncaring or incapable. What is going to unfold is that every bad thing is going to turn out for good because of God. But we have to hold on to hope because the way God works is mysterious.

So how do we do this?

II. HOW DO WE HOLD ON TO HOPE IN A HARD PLACE?

A. You do what you can, but you depend on God.

In **verses 3-4** there is a quite a bit of thought, planning, and effort taking place. *When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank.* ⁴*And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him.* The word for the basket is the Hebrew word for Ark¹, so there is a clear connection to the story of Noah here. She has to build a little ark! When it's built, she doesn't launch it into the current but carefully places it near the river bank in the reeds. She was doing *everything she could do*, and yet we know that she had faith. **Hebrews 11:23** tells us that she had faith. She also had a plan, and she went to work. You are going to suffer if you miss the relationship between faith and works. God tells us our faith in him has to come first, and be the foundation for our works but then, depending on him entirely we do what we can. Get that education, apply for that job, go to the doctor, work on the relationship, make an effort do what you can but depend on God. Put your life, your loves, in his hands and depend on him.

B. As you depend on God, expect to be surprised.

Verse 5 introduces a series of surprises with the words, *“Now, the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe...”* She came to the right place at just the right time. She saw the basket. What would happen next? This is the entitled daughter of a brutal ruler in a racist culture. But when she opened, it and the baby was crying curiosity turned to compassion. Immediately the sister, Miriam, is there: brave and clever she offers a suggestion.

God’s outcomes are surprising. The mother of Moses ends up being paid wages to nurse and raise him in his most formative years, and baby Moses is under royal protection. So in the plan of God, Moses' earliest years are spent with his own family of faith, but then later he is uniquely equipped to lead them by the lessons he learns and the life he lives in the court of Pharaoh.

To hope in God is to believe that when your story is surrendered to God even the sad and scary parts will lead to a surprise ending and it will be good. We often see that in this lifetime but sometimes it has to wait for our ultimate hope. **1 Peter 1:13** says, *Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.* The crucifixion leads to the resurrection, at the end of Revelation every tear is wiped away. God works all things into ending that are as beautiful as they are surprising. Hold on to your hope in God!

And it is not just that God’s outcomes are surprising.

God’s methods are surprising. God uses the weak to conquer the powerful. On the one hand, you have Pharaoh, all the power of his empire and his slave masters. On the other hand, you have a handful of women. The women are at the forefront of this story. You have Moses' mother and sister, who at this point in the story are not even named, and then, of course, you have Pharaoh's daughter. God works in surprising ways. He raises up help from unexpected places. He defeats the seemingly strong with what the world might call weak. It takes courage to see past the way things seem and desperately depend on God’s mysterious ways.

In his commentary on Exodus, Leland Ryken writes this:

At one moment in history, God's entire plan for triumphing over evil was riding down the Nile River in a little papyrus basket....His mother made it as safe as she could of course, but ultimately it was

God who protected the precious cargo of redemption. However frightening an experience it was for Moses himself, who was crying when they found him, *he was never safer than he was in that basket*. God was right there working out his salvation. ²

God was weaving good things out of all the strange threads. That's the way it is in our lives when we belong to God and hold on to our hope.

CONCLUSION

Jesus is the ultimate proof of that. The key themes in the story of Moses reach their ultimate expression in the story of Jesus. We're going to see that Moses embodied a sort of preview of the ultimate liberator, Jesus. Where else in the Bible do you find the story of a king who orders all the male children murdered, yet a child is born who escapes the clutches of the king and grows up to save his people from bondage? In both stories God uses the seemingly weak to defeat the powerful. God works in surprising ways to turn evil into good. The ultimate evil was the crucifixion of Jesus. But in the plan of God the sacrifice of Jesus is the means by which God sets his people free.

We all need to be set free. One of the most often-quoted moments in the Exodus is when God speaks through Moses to Pharaoh and says, *"Let my people go!"* That's how it is most often quoted, but that leaves something essential out. God doesn't just say let my people go. He says, *Let my people go so that they can serve me*. There is a profound truth in that. God tells us that we all serve something: ego, fame, pleasure, comfort. Our only hope for true freedom is to be set free in order to know and serve God. Apart from God's grace in Jesus we are all under a sentence of death and we are all enslaved to something. He wants to set you free.

What do you have to do? You have to realise you can no more save yourself than baby Moses could roll out of his basket and breaststroke his way to the palace of Pharaoh. As long as you are trying to save yourself by your own powers or efforts you will be enslaved to your insecurities. You have to accept your need for someone other than yourself, bigger than you to lift you up. Every story of salvation and deliverance in the Bible ultimately leads us to Him as the one true Savior. Moses will risk his life to save his people. Jesus gave his life to save us all. Put your hope in him. Only then can your story have the surprising and stunning ending that only grace can bring. Only then do

you find yourself lifted out of the water, and adopted by the one true and good king. Trust Jesus as your Savior and place all your hope in God and the hard places will, in the end, prove to have been the very places where God revealed his surprising grace. Hold on to your hope in God you will see the beautifully surprising ending of grace and redemption when Jesus makes all things new.

Amen

¹ Leland Ryken, *Exodus*, p 47. The only other place in the Hebrew bible where this word is used is in relation to Noah's Ark (Genesis 6:14-9:18. Moses' mother build him a baby ark so God can perhaps save him as he saved Noah.

² Leland Ryken, *Exodus*, p 47