

EXODUS

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40

Exodus 2:16-25

The World Changer

We are continuing in Exodus this morning.

This book has begun looking into the life of the main human character, Moses.

And we've already seen his story to be a very human one. Because Moses is a faithful man who also sins greatly, even in his pursuit of faithfulness. Christians are always simultaneously sinners and saints, so we would expect any true portrait of any faithful person to contain both elements.

We know from the book of Hebrews that Moses is a man of faith, and that he willingly chose to leave the treasures in Pharaoh's house to identify with his people the Jews.

But he isn't some sinless savior. His compassion becomes rage at the Egyptian man that he sees beating the Jew, and assuming God would save the people through his strength, Moses sins and kills the Egyptian. He does great evil out of his desire to do great good.

Saint Augustine compares Moses here to Peter, who tried to defend Jesus with a sword and cut off Malchus' ear. Both of them sinned, but they sinned not by loving evil, but by hating evil and going to the extreme, and by loving the Lord (and a brother), but by taking that to an extreme. He writes, "*so great a heart could be as readily cultivated for bearing virtues, as land for bearing fruit.*"¹ Moses' heart was wild and needed to be cultivated to bear the right fruit, but it was oriented in the right direction.

So this is a real guy, whose strength is his weakness. And this is real faithfulness: following God by faith, but stumbling along the way. Being filled with both faith and sin, good motives and bad, compassion and care on the one hand, and arrogance and presumption and anger on the other. He's not a flawless hero, there's only one of those in history and in the Bible.

¹ Augustine, [Reply to Faustus the Manichaean](#), 22.70.

So things don't go according to Moses' plan at all, because the Jews don't want Moses to lead them yet. When Moses steps in and starts trying to lead the people by sorting out their conflicts, one Jew asks him, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us?" (Exodus 2:14). At that moment, Moses' answer could have been, "I did." Moses seemed to assume that his education, strength, and power qualified him to be their leader. "Of course I'm the guy." He called himself into the position.

And he would certainly be called to lead them, but God had to do that calling. And would only do so after some breaking and after leaving Moses with nothing left to boast in except God.

So at age 40, Moses flees Egypt, goes into the nearby land of Midian, on the edge of the promised land, and sits by a well. In 48 hours he has gone from one of the richest and most powerful people in the land to an exile in a land that was strange to him.

He willingly gave up the future that could have been his, but thought it would pay off if he could lead and rescue his people. But shockingly, they didn't want it. So it was all, it seemed, for nothing.

Moses' life has taken a terrible turn. He gambled it all on a vision of a better future for God's people, and lost big-time. He followed God by faith, but screwed it all up, murdered a man, miscalculated his following, and now had absolutely nothing.

So here, sitting by a well in Midian, Moses begins what probably would have seemed to him like 40 useless years in Midian. Years of wondering if he was wrong about God's calling. Years when he would be tempted to wonder if he had ever heard from God at all. Years of not knowing what to do - this wasn't the life he envisioned as a teenager growing up and being educated in Pharaoh's house, or as an adult deciding to leave that house and lead his people. For the next 40 years he would live with no known future or direction.

He set out to change the world, and now here he was. The great worldchanger, without a penny or a direction or a friend in the world.

But in the little that we learn about those 40 lost years in Midian, we see how to faithfully live when you don't know where life is going, when the dreams of changing the world die. And more importantly we are pointed to the one who really does change the world by changing people.

So the story picks up with Moses sitting by the well:

Exodus 2:16 Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock.

There was one main well in this land, so it was probably a busy place at times.

And there's a priest living in Midian. This was before Moses established a formal priesthood, but there were always people who knew the Lord and offered sacrifices and spoke wisdom from the Lord. The midianites were descendants of Abraham, but through his concubine Keturah. So they would have learned about the God of Abraham and passed his stories on and been worshippers of the same God that Moses worshipped.

So this one priest of Midian, named Reu-el, or friend of God, is living in the land and has 7 daughters. These daughters bring their father's flock down to the well to water them. And they drew water out of the well, pulling up the buckets, and pouring the water into feeding troughs. Which is certainly exhausting work. But...

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?"

So along come some jerk shepherds, who see the work the women did to draw the water, and then drive the women's flock away so their flock can drink the water the women drew. So these are bad guys, mistreating and using these women. They are entitled and think they are the priority.

And this seemed to have been going on for a long time, just this one time, because when the women get home, their dad is surprised they are home so early. So this has been their lives: bring their flock to the well, try to get in fast and draw some water and get it to their sheep, only to be constantly misused by the shepherds, and then forced to draw water again for their own flock.

But today Moses is there. And he has no tolerance for injustice, and he already proved back in Egypt that he isn't afraid of confrontation, so he stands up to the shepherds, makes sure the women's flock gets the water the women drew, and then even goes so far as to top off the troughs himself by drawing water for them.

So when the women get home and their dad asks how they got off work so early...

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.”

The dad says, “He did this for you, and you let him get away?”

Reuel had seven unmarried daughters. Part of his job as a dad was to help them find good guys to marry. But, judging by the character of the other shepherds in Midian, good guys may have been few and far between. So when he hears about Moses and his character, he says, “Go back and get him!”

So Moses comes over for dinner. Moses is faithful to God, Reuel is a priest, a friend of God, so apparently they hit it off. Moses is a single man and wouldn't mind getting married someday, and he sees that Reuel has seven single daughters, so, not surprisingly:

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.”

(And the book of Acts tells us he had another son there as well².)

So Reuel, impressed with the character of Moses, allows one of his daughters to marry him. And they start a family.

And this is the description of what happened over the course of 40 years of Moses' life. Not a lot! He fought off the bad shepherds, got married and had a couple of kids, and the next passage will tell us that he became a shepherd as part of Reuel's family business. That's 40 years of the life of one of the most influential men in the history of the world. Almost nothing happens from the time Moses leaves Egypt at age 40 until he meets God at the burning bush at age 80.

But there's a lot to learn here, so we will start with the horizontal lessons and what this teaches us about life, and then follow the train of thought into what it tells us about God.

² Acts 7:29

At the beginning of this passage, Moses has blown it all. He probably doesn't know what he is supposed to do with his life now. He has no idea where God is leading him or how his life could ever become something great.

But The fact that he no longer knows who he is supposed to be down the road doesn't keep him from faithfulness now.

Matthew Henry's commentary says, "He loved to be doing good; wherever the providence of God casts us, we should desire and try to be useful; and when we cannot do the good we would, we must be ready to do the good we can."

When we can't do all of the good we would like to do, we do all of the good we can.

Many of us start out as Christians saying, "I want to change the world." But then you hit a wall of reality and responsibility. You follow Jesus for awhile, and rather than every moment being an awesome adventure, you have tuition and bills and kids and car repairs and a normal job and a normal church.

You started out thinking following Jesus would mean chasing your dreams, but suddenly realized life would be very different than that. You lose your expectation of being a world changer.

But, confronted with reality, you may be tempted to throw the baby out with the bath water. To throw out the Christian life all together rather than live the real one (as opposed to the naive dream one.) But if you cling to Jesus but readjust expectations, you can begin to do all the good you can, even though you can't do all the good you would like to.

He shows what the faithful life is like once you come to the realization that you're not going to single-handedly change the world.

1. Justice

So notice first his compassion and concern for justice.

You saw this twisted to a sinful extreme when he killed the Egyptian - he saw a victim of oppression and said, "I'm here, I'm going to do something about it." He wrongly took justice into his own hands, he wrongly carried out as an individual what is only the role

of government and applied the death penalty. But his motivation was justice and compassion for the oppressed.

And now again, these women at the well have been bullied forever by these lazy shepherds who care only for themselves and their own ease. And Moses stands up against the injustice that's right in front of him, shows compassion toward the women that were helpless against them.

He wanted to change the world. That didn't work out. It wasn't time, he wasn't ready. He wanted to lead the people to salvation. He wanted to lead a new government. But those dreams got buried in the sand with the Egyptian. But even though he can't do all the good he would like to do, he does the good he can do.

Remember, this is a brilliant man. He wrote the laws that all of the laws in the west have been based on. He wrote the foundations for English Common Law, for our system of government, he wrote the books that would be legal reference books for thousands of years. If anyone had world-changer potential it was Moses.

But he couldn't right now. So he stood up to some evil shepherds and kept them from oppressing 7 women in Midian. *It was something.*

You probably can't solve global poverty, but you can talk to a poor person and take someone to lunch or take somebody in for a night or help out at the Open Door Mission or give to wider relief efforts. You can adopt a Compassion child.

You can't cure all disease, but you can visit someone in the hospital.

You can't solve the problem of widespread isolation and loneliness, but you can have a neighbor over for dinner. You can seek out the person sitting by herself at church and invite her to your Grace Group.

You can't cause a revival, but you can share the good news of Jesus with a coworker or invite a friend to church.

If you have a heart for compassion, justice, or evangelism, you will reach a point of frustration where you say "I can't do all the good I want to do." But that doesn't mean you should do nothing.

We are never commanded to change the world, we are commanded to love our neighbor.

Michael Horton writes, “Everyone wants a revolution. No one wants to do the dishes.”³

He says, “Facing another day, with ordinary callings to ordinary people all around us is much more difficult than chasing my own dreams that I have envisioned for the grand story of my life. Other people — especially those closest to us — can become props. “The Poor” can be instruments of our life project. Or fighting “The Socialists” may animate our otherwise boring autobiography. Changing the world can be a way of actually avoiding the opportunities we have every day, right where God has placed us, to glorify and enjoy him and to enrich the lives of others.”⁴

God has called us to lives of faithful obedience in all of our circumstances. Not to be superheroes. To be faithful where we are, not to set out to change the world.

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells his disciples about a coming day of judgment, when he returns to separate the faithful from the not-faithful. And he describes it as separating sheep from goats like a shepherd does.

The sheep, those that know Jesus, have certain works that characterize them. And the goats have other works:

Matthew 25 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ 37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you

³ Horton, Michael. Ordinary: Sustainable Faith in a Radical, Restless World (pp. 19-20). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

⁴ Horton, Michael. Ordinary: Sustainable Faith in a Radical, Restless World (pp. 15-16). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers,6 you did it to me.'

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44 Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' 45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Notice that the sheep are not world changers. They care for some hungry and thirsty and poor people. They visit the hospital and the prison. And those works are the evidence that they believe. They didn't change the world, they did the good they could, and that was the evidence of their faith.

The goats didn't do those works. And that was evidence that they didn't believe. The problem with the goats wasn't that they failed to change the world, change society. It's that they didn't love the least in small ways. They didn't visit the hospital, they didn't care for people's needs right in front of them.

Notice how simple and small these works are: none of them are flashy, most of them aren't instagram-worthy, none of them change the whole world. But when we can't do all the good we would like to do, we do the good we can. And Jesus calls that the evidence of real faith.

Moses certainly had world-changing potential and world-changing ideas and later would uniquely become a world changer. But when he couldn't, he didn't just daydream, he did something about the injustice he saw right in front of him.

And it seems these quiet virtues are far more important to God, and the big flashy ones don't seem to register with God.

Proverbs 16:32 "Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city."

So Moses is merciful and just, he cares for the oppressed - the ones right in front of him.

2. Contentment

Notice also that he cultivated contentment.

He had lived in the palace. But now he lived at Reuel's place. It was probably a much more humble arrangement. You're downsizing significantly if you're moving from Pharaoh's house to a shepherd/priest's. But he was content to live there.

Life could have been so much better! If he had just controlled his temper in Egypt. If he had just been wiser. But now he is brought low - but instead of bitterness and regret, he cultivates contentment with the life God gave him.

Jeremiah Burroughs (minister in England in the 1630s) wrote a tremendous book called the Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment. There he defines Christian contentment as "that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition."

It's a deep satisfaction and peace about the life God has given you, and a joy in God's will for you. A deep satisfaction in God.

Remember we have a union with Christ, so we expect to see Jesus in us doing the things Jesus does. And Jesus in his lifetime was always content with the Father's will for Him, even when it meant the death on the cross.

And as Jesus lives in us, we can expect Him to keep doing what Jesus does and make us people who are content with the life God has given us. Which really starts with consistent thankfulness for what God is doing in our lives, as opposed to regret and anger and disappointment at what He isn't doing.

We are called to thankfulness with real life as opposed to always ruminating about the life we would have had *if...*

The fundamental problem with the heart that doesn't know Jesus is that it will not honor God as God, and will not give Him thanks:

“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” (Romans 1:21)

But the believing heart honors God as God - he writes the script for life, not me. He determines the times and places of my dwelling according to Acts 17, not me. He put me right here, right now, He knows best, so thank you, Lord. That's contentment. Moses was content to dwell with Reu-el. He isn't embittered by his loss, feeling like his life is a waste. But he is content to live the simple life in Midian.

So he does the good he can do, he is content with the life God's given him, also:

3. Family

He raises a family.

He marries Zipporah and has a couple of kids.

He did the thing that most people throughout history have done. He wasn't going to be the head of a great people right now, maybe ever in his mind. But he could lead a small people in a family. He was rejected by Israel and wouldn't be able to teach them all of God's ways right now. But he could teach Gershom.

And this doesn't sound romantic and unique - having a family is what most people have done throughout history.

But that's a primary place where we can do an awful lot of good by being faithful.

We start our men's ministry Saturday morning, because most of the big problems in church and society come from men who are not fulfilling basic responsibilities. The problem is not that enough men don't try to change the world, it's that not enough fulfill their basic responsibilities first.

93% of prison population is male, and that population has increased 700% since 1972 (Boy Crisis 18).

Local societies do better when fathers are in the neighborhood other kids do better - even when they don't have a dad in their house, if there are dads in the community.

I can't think of any injustices in society that aren't radically improved just by men doing their basic responsibilities of working and being faithful to their wives and families. Poverty, abortion, crime would all plummet.

Moses here just carried out his basic responsibilities. He couldn't do all the good he wanted to do, but he did the good that he could at home.

He started out aiming for authority, assuming that the Jews would want to follow him just because he was such a great guy. But quickly realized that that isn't the path to helpful authority.

Authority flows to those who take responsibility first. Moses, rejected from a role of authority, just started taking responsibility: for the oppression right in front of him, for his own contentment, for a family. It seemed small compared to his dreams, but he did the good he could.

4. Job

Notice also that Moses goes to work as a shepherd. He just worked a job.

This job was certainly beneath one of the most brilliant legal minds in history. I'd imagine when Moses was chasing one of Reu-el's lambs around the hillside in Sinai he had to have thought, "I'm not sure I'm putting my PhD in political science from the University of Memphis to good use."

But he took on responsibility to do something, however small and menial.

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 "9 Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, 10 for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, 11 and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, 12 so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be

dependent on no one.”

Again, it is a call to consistent faithfulness, to taking responsibility, to not being high-minded and seeking greatness, but rather to being responsible, faithful, generous, hard-working, and loving. Those are not insignificant things, and doing our jobs well is a primary way we love our neighbors.

"If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, go out and sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures. Sweep streets like Handel and Beethoven composed music. Sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say, here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well." Martin Luther King, Jr.

So even though we usually can't see the big picture and where life is going, even though we've realized I may not change the world, we are called to faithfulness by doing justly and loving mercy, by cultivating contentment, by raising a family, and by going to work. And these small works matter.

But how is someone as brilliant and gifted as Moses able to spend what he probably assumed will be the rest of his life working a job that is beneath him, living this ordinary life, chasing sheep, changing diapers, living in obscurity?

According to Hebrews 11, he was a man of faith. He believed in God.

And to believe in God is to believe you are not Him.

If I believe that I'm history's hero, that I'm my community's hero, that everything rides and falls on me becoming great, I'll be filled with angst. But if Jesus is the hero, then I don't have to be.

If I'm not the main character, I can be freed up to just play a small supporting role. If the goal isn't my glory, then I can be content to just be one more contributor to His.

Moses was like Jesus in a lot of ways, but Jesus far surpassed him.

Moses fought off a few bad shepherds to rescue some women.

Jesus came and certainly confronted the bad shepherds in Israel. But he went farther, He was the good shepherd:

John 10:11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

Moses became a great shepherd in Israel, giving them the law to guide their lives.

But the law came up short. Because everybody broke it.

Jesus came and gave his life by dying for us.

That act purchases our forgiveness, it provides power that penetrates into our hard hearts and softens them toward God so that we can delight in Him. It gives us far more than guidance, it changes us and promises us eternity with God. The Gospel is better than the law, Jesus is better than Moses.

Moses came and drew water for some women.

Jesus sat with the woman at the well, and gave her living water that would quench her deep inner thirst for true life:

John 4:13-14 “Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

Jesus comes and in every way is the true and better Moses, who though like Moses in some ways, does far more, is far more, and accomplishes what Moses never could.

And Moses had gotten himself into a mess, but he got himself into a mess by faith. So I wonder if he wasn't able to be content knowing that God was the real hero of this story. That God cared more for the Jews than Moses did. That God had a better plan than Moses did. And whether or not God would use Moses, who knows, but it wasn't a question of whether God cared and God would act.

If God is the real world-changer, then the pressure is off of us to try to be. Then we're free to very simply and in small ways communicate our faith, invite people to church,

serve where we can, meet a need we see, right the wrongs in front of us, work hard at a job, invest in family, all knowing God is perfectly capable of being God.

And God proved that:

Exodus 2:23 “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. 24 And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. 25 God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.”

Moses was just going to work, driving the kids around in the minivan, serving and loving. But God was remembering His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and preparing to save.

That long boring season in Midian wasn't wasted. Chasing those sheep around made him a pretty good shepherd of Israel. Raising some kids gave him some great experience for writing chapters like Deuteronomy 6, one of the most foundational chapters about child-raising. Seeing the injustices made him a great author of the law for very practical situations. Going to work gave him a sense of fairness and right and wrong. Being poor gave him compassion so his laws would protect the poor.

God was doing far more than Moses knew, and working behind the scenes in ways Moses wasn't in control of.

But God keeps all of His promises. And He's completely in control, so we don't have to be. Jesus is the world-changer, so we can just be faithful.

PPT:

Call to worship: Psalm 18:1-3

Exodus 2:16

Exodus 2:17-18

Exodus 2:19-20

Exodus 2:21-22

Matthew 25:31-46

Proverbs 16:32

Romans 1:21
1 Thessalonians 4:9-12
Exodus 2:23-25
done

Exodus 2:16-25
The World Changer

I. Moses in Midian

- A. Justice
- B. Contentment
- C. Family
- D. Job

II. God in Heaven

- A. Working and Preparing
- B. Beginning to Save

Questions for Small Group Discussion:

1. Discuss this phrase from Ellicott's commentary: "when we cannot do the good we would, we must be ready to do the good we can."

2. Discuss this quote from Michael Horton: "Changing the world can be a way of actually avoiding the opportunities we have every day, right where God has placed us, to glorify and enjoy him and to enrich the lives of others." When is this true? When isn't it?
3. How does faith in God free us to do more good locally?
4. Discuss this phrase from the sermon: "We are never commanded to change the world, we are commanded to love our neighbor."