

Exodus | The Rise of a Liberator

Moses and Aaron

Rev. T.J. Campo

11.9.14

Exodus 5.22-6.13; 7.1-7

Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why have You brought harm to this people? Why did You ever send me?"²³ "Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done harm to this people, and You have not delivered Your people at all."

6 *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for under compulsion he will let them go, and under compulsion he will drive them out of his land."² God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD;³ and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them."⁴ "I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned."⁵ "Furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant."⁶ "Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments."⁷ "Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."⁸ "I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the LORD."⁹ So Moses spoke thus to the sons of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses on account of their despondency and cruel bondage.¹⁰ Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,¹¹ "Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the sons of Israel go out of his land."¹² But Moses spoke before the LORD, saying, "Behold, the sons of Israel have not listened to me; how then will Pharaoh listen to me, for I am unskilled in speech?"¹³ Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and gave them a charge to the sons of Israel and to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt.*

7 *Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet."² "You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land."³ "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt."⁴ "When Pharaoh does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments."⁵ "The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst."⁶ So Moses and Aaron did it; as the LORD commanded them, thus they did.⁷ Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three, when they spoke to Pharaoh.*

We've been looking at the Book of Exodus and at this point, Moses has met God in the wilderness where he was living as a fugitive and a shepherd and a family man! And God appears

in the Burning Bush that is NOT consumed by the FIRE...just as the man Moses, the murderer is NOT consumed by the Holy, Holy, Holy God (the Burning Bush is an emblem of mercy).

And now Moses returns...with all his doubts and facing his own speech impediments and his fears of public speaking and his inadequacies...He rejoins his older brother, Aaron. And with humble confidence, they tell the Pharaoh that they represent YHWH – the God of the Israelites who commands, “Let My people go...to meet Me and celebrate with Me!”

And, as we saw last week, that first encounter with the King of Egypt didn’t GO so well for Moses and Aaron. In fact the king of Egypt took the unbearable situation he’d imposed on the Israelite slaves and he MADE IT WORSE! Bricks without straw!

And not only did Pharaoh oppose Moses and Aaron but the Israelites deeply resent the brothers and blame them and they call down curse on them.

And now Moses has a second conversation with God and he tells YHWH that it’s not working and complains to God, “Why did you ever send me? YOU have not rescued Your people – YOU harmed them! And I’m taking the blame!

Today, we want to talk about a type/variety of discouragement ... it could be called cynicism...but that’s not what we call it when we’re in the thick of it... THEN we call it “common sense” or being practical or realistic”. There are varieties of discouragement or cynicism but THIS kind comes when we are really trying to DO the right thing, to ANSWER a CALLING and BE obedient and our efforts actually MAKE THINGS WORSE... WE all experience discouragement from time to time...no one is immune...and sometimes when we are apparently punished for doing good...our discouragement turns to cynicism. That’s our topic today: how to deal with cynicism.

Cynicism Explored; Cynicism Managed; Cynicism Redeemed.

‘Hard to know WHAT Moses and Aaron were expecting when they went to Pharaoh. We saw last week that the king of Egypt was being asked to give up his entire work force in the name of a deity he did not recognize. And if Rome wasn’t BUILT in a day then Egypt wouldn’t be UN-BUILT in a day... But the King is angry and he’s SMART...He’s not gonna let these old rabble-rousers look good in the eyes of the slaves... AND when Moses sees his own people, it’s clear that Pharaoh’s ploy really DID divide the people from their rescuers. It’s a HOUSE DIVIDED and Moses is taking the heat!

It seems like whenever we suffer for doing the right thing...discouragement isn’t too far behind. And when it happens more than once, it can quickly turn into that attitude expressed in that little adage, “No good deed goes unpunished”. And if you’ve never FELT that way, maybe you’re just too young...OR maybe you’ve never tried your hand at doing good deeds.

My point is...there does seem to be a cost...and usually a greater cost than is first anticipated whenever we DO step out and try to do good in the world. It may be that our good deed is misinterpreted or unappreciated or we get into a “don’t feed the bears situation”, i.e. we offered our hand but then they wanted our arm...and maybe our head too! “And NEXT TIME, I’ll think twice before I offer ANY help...it’s easy to get IN...hard to get out!”

And this can be a very simple person-to-person thing (“Tom asked me for a ride to the airport...ended up taking the whole morning”) or an organizational thing (“I showed up to help with the church Fall Festival ...and ended up volunteering for the Work Day!”) or it can even be an INTERNATIONAL thing, the way we think about foreign policy and some of the big issues facing the church, the nation and the world.

If I asked YOU if you were a cynical person you’d probably say NO... but how optimistic ARE you for instance about a lasting PEACE in the Middle East or an swift end to the Ebola crisis or real measurable progress in the struggle to get clean water (748 million people do not have access to safe, clean drinking water. Every day, 1,400 children die from diseases caused by unsafe water or inadequate sanitation. –UNICEF)

And before we ridicule those who are cynical, those who really have TRIED to make a difference, those who have tried to swim upstream, those with (what sociologists now call) “compassion fatigue” maybe we should ask if WE OURSELVES are even attempting to do good in the world...

Because, I THINK...you’ll find that discouragement sets in pretty quickly...and when YOU get burned for doing the right thing, it’s pretty easy to get “realistic” ... at least that’s what you’ll call it... ‘Truth is it’s not hard to become cynical in a hurry.

So... that’s our little foray into cynicism explored; now let’s look at Cynicism MANAGED. You’ve heard me say many times that a crisis is a terrible thing to waste...but maybe I haven’t been so clear on HOW TO waste a crisis. Mostly, when we manage the crisis at a surface level and learn how to cope, how to handle the situation relying on your own resources.

And when we face that level of discouragement that is really nothing but cynicism, rather than really face it and get down to the roots of it in ourselves we will most often manage the apparent surface problem and we usually manage (and thereby WASTE) the crisis by means of flight or fight. We either resign or rebel.

That’s what the Israelites did. They resign when it comes to Pharaoh and they ask him to be nicer. They treat Pharaoh as if HE was their true master (that’s all they’d ever known) and they return to their deeply ingrained identity as slaves. They’d rather tough it out as slaves than walk into the unknown, trusting God.

And when it comes to Moses and Aaron, the Israelites rebel. They forget that they'd begun to worship (4.31). They walk away from their calling and from the liberation God had promised.

And, you also see this flight response in Moses. He questions his calling and all those initial fears and doubts reassert themselves as he tells God, "See! I told You I was the wrong guy for the job. I've obeyed but it didn't work and I've done more harm than good... and YOU, LORD...YOU have NOT freed Your people but only damaged them!"

And in very similar ways, we TOO, when we "get weary in well-doing", when we are really trying to answer what we believe to be God's calling and OUR responsibility and really trying to DO THE RIGHT THING...but it just doesn't seem to be working, seems to be HURTING rather than HELPING, we too often manage the crisis by running away or by TRYING HARDER, flight or fight.

A calling, like marriage, gets crazy. He's trying to answer the call but the harder he tries the worse things seem to get...or a job...or a ministry...or a friendship. So, he JUST tries harder...reads some books about marriage (which is NOT a bad idea – I don't want to discourage that) or attends a seminar (and I don't want to discourage THAT!) But these efforts, this DOING and WILL-POWER are often a surface management and fail to get to the SOURCE OF THE CYNICISM.

Or she simply gives up...says, "Whatever!" ...What's the use...we're slaves and that's all we'll ever be...Maybe I never was called in the first place...maybe God made a mistake.

AND MOSES also complained... in fact...Moses complained to God and you know, you should NEVER, EVER... EVER complain to God...Right?

Well, as it turned out Moses' complaining and his cynicism did not intimidate God. And God actually answers the complaint...and it turns OUT that not simply telling His man how to manage or fix or handle the surface issues but INSTEAD, God will say something that redeems and converts and changes this cynicism/deep stuff into something GOOD.

God honors Moses' honesty and answers his cynicism. Moses can't handle it and Moses is at the end of himself...He can NOT manage and it's at this point of desperation and complete loss of self-confidence that God is pleased to step in.

And the way God ANSWERS/redeems this cynicism is really instructive for our own discouragement and cynicism IF we'll drink it IN.

The first thing to see is that CYNICISM must be allowed to work its WORK. Moses has to see that HE HAS NOTHING...nothing but God! And we too! We have to see that we DO NOT HAVE IT IN US to live the holy life that pleases God. It's why Jesus Christ said, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing!" We have to see that that MY GIVING...MY OBEDIENCE...MY EFFORTS...MY PERSUASIVE

WORDS...MY TENACITY none of these will really accomplish what God wants. If anything, I'm NOT cynical ENOUGH.

Then, at this place of discouragement, when I'm stung for doing the right thing and it hurts, I'm offended and hurting and seeing how really weak and flimsy my compassion and resolve and obedience IS...THEN I have to hear "THE I AM" and His "I WILLS" - "THE I AM" and His "I WILLS".

God again identifies Himself... v.2 "I am the LORD" and He connects the present to the past, "I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", i.e. I am the God who is present with My people BECAUSE I SWORE an unbreakable oath, a COVENANT. I will sooner cease to exist than to break this promise."

And third, "I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel", i.e. I FEEL FOR YOU. I love you. I am involved with your pain and I will not allow it to go on – I will respond to you on the basis of the PROMISE I MADE.

Isaiah would look back on this moment and reflect (quote) "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them; In His love and in His mercy He redeemed them, and He lifted them and carried them all the days of old." (Isa 63.9)

And then God says, "all this is happening so that YOU and My people can KNOW Me, you'll see that I AM YHWH, the saving God"...And THEN the I AM issues SEVEN "I WILLS". In vv.6-8, the core of the passage, God is telling Moses, "My son, you think that I'm like one of the gods that the Egyptians have to carry around...but soon you'll see: I WILL CARRY YOU!...I will...I will...I will..." Seven times!

And this – for US and in our weariness in well-doing – in our "obedience fatigue" when we wonder if we can STAY IN this marriage and actually LOVE...if I can DO this job...care for these children...continue in this church...give my hard-earned money generously... tell my friends about the Gospel... can I do this when I have been burned in the past... and GOD IS SAYING "I WILL...I WILL...I WILL..."

But how do I KNOW HE will?...Well, listen, (v. 6) "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments..." See, the God who was about to enter into history in a way unimagined by the Patriarchs... the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would soon stretch out His arm and show His power to save... But eventually, this same God, YHWH, Lord of the Promise, would once again "*bare His holy arm in the sight of all the nations that all the ends of the earth might see the salvation of our God*". (Isa 52.10)

Jesus Christ IS that holy Arm...bared...and pinned to a Cross. He IS the answer to all those "I Will" promises. He fulfills them. WE are weak and our resolve, our compassion, our

motives/obedience is weak but HE has DONE IT. God the Father said "I WILL" and God the Son has answered "I DID" and IT IS FINISHED.

That's what Moses needed to hear and what the Israelites needed to hear again and again (see how repetitive these passages seem to be!) "Rely on My promises. The promise made to Abraham...I will do it NOT on the strength of YOUR willpower but on the basis of My commitment to MY OWN WORD and My commitment to YOU!"

When we preach this to our own hearts... when God's resolve and His intention and His finished work through Jesus Christ, when that becomes our theme and we receive it by faith...quite often things will get worse (they were about to get even worse for Moses and the Israelites) but within...in the QUIET...HOPE is born and we begin to see that IT'S really all about HIM.

HE will finish what He started in us and He will renew the whole world and reclaim it and beautify it beyond our imagining. He will...He will...He will...

Meantime, we LIVE in that HOPE AND as God provided that friend, Aaron, for Moses... we also are surrounded by friends in the church... *"Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day"* (Heb 3.12-13)

Moses had a big calling – to represent God – and that too in a different way is OUR calling: representing God in the home, the workplace, the classroom, the neighborhood. St. Paul asked, "WHO is adequate for this calling?" ...how can we help but be cynical? And Paul's response: "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God" (2 Cor 3.5)

We go back into our callings...our audacious callings (How dare we?!)...we represent God...because Jesus Christ represented US before God...our adequacy is from Him.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. (1Corinthians 15.58)