

“Moses’ Mistake”
Exodus 2:11-15
(Preached at Trinity, July 16, 2006)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Chapter 1** we found God’s people living under great hardship.
Exodus 1:14 – “And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour.”
2. In addition, Pharaoh had commanded the midwives to kill the newborn male babies. Having failed in this evil command Pharaoh made a decree that all of the newborn male babies be thrown into the river. How many hundreds of babies drowned we do not know but it could have been thousands.
3. **Chapter 2** opens with the birth of Moses whom God had ordained as the deliverer of His people. God was working mightily on behalf of His people. He is mighty to accomplish His purposes.
4. We’ve seen that Moses was a great man. He is a type of Christ.
 1. He was God’s deliverer.
 2. He was chosen as mediator to God’s people
 3. He was intercessor for God’s people
 4. He was prophet, priest, and king
A.W. Pink – “All of God’s early dealings with Israel were transacted through Moses. He was a prophet, priest, and king on one person, and so united all the great and important functions which later were distributed among a plurality of persons.”
 - a. He is declared the great prophet whom the Messiah would follow
Acts 3:22 – “For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.”
 - b. He served as priest in ministering to God’s people.
Exodus 19:14 And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people
Exodus 24:4-6 – “And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. ⁶ And Moses took half of the blood, and put *it* in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar.”
 - c. He served a kingly role before Israel.
Matthew Henry – “The years of the life of Moses are remarkably divided into three forties: the first forty he spent as a prince in Pharaoh’s court, the second a shepherd in Midian, the third a king in Jeshurun”

Deuteronomy 33:4-5 – “Moses commanded us a law, even the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob. ⁵ And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people *and* the tribes of Israel were gathered together.”

Matthew Henry – “*He was king in Jeshurun. Having commanded them the law, as long as he lived he took care to see it observed and put in execution; and they were very happy in having such a king, who ruled them, and went in and out before them at all times.*”

5. Moses was a great man, yet he was a man and subject to the failures of men.
6. As we come to **Verse 11** forty years have passed. He has been raised up in the customs of Egypt. He has received an Egyptian secular education with all of the learning of the ancient world. He has enjoyed the vast wealth of Pharaoh’s house. But he has not forgotten his heritage. He has not forgotten his people.
 - A. As the years passed it became more and more difficult for him to turn his eyes away from what was happening to his kinsmen.
 - B. As he became an adult he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter who had raised him. Instead, he identified with his true heritage—he was the son of a slave woman.

Hebrews 11 describes it best:
Hebrews 11:24-26 – “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; ²⁵ Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; ²⁶ Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.”
7. When he was about forty years old he went to see the condition of his Hebrew brethren. **Acts 7:23** – “And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.”
8. While among the Hebrew slaves he witnessed a Egyptian taskmaster beating one of them. Becoming infuriated over what he saw he killed the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand.
9. The great question here is did Moses act properly in killing this Egyptian? If he acted wrongly would God have used him to lead Israel out of bondage?
10. Many from Tertullian to Thomas Aquinas have spoken strongly in defense of Moses.
 - A. Some have argued on the legal basis of *lex talionis* – “The law of retaliation.” Among other places it is recorded in **Exodus 21:23-25**
Exodus 21:23-25 – “And if *any* mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, ²⁴ Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵ Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.”
 These were judicial laws given to Israel as a theocracy. The Jewish judicial laws passed with the passing of the theocracy. No individual has the right to retaliation. Jesus made this clear.
Matthew 5:38-39 – “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: ³⁹ But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

- B. Some argue on the basis that Moses was saving the Hebrew servant from death. The word translated “smiting” in **Verse 11** is נָכָה (nakah) which is sometimes translated “kill” or “slay.”
- C. Some argue again on the basis of the same word נָכָה – that when Moses struck the Egyptian he did not mean to kill him. The same word is used in **Verse 12** where it is translated “slew.” They argue that it was an accidental death. His actions seem to rule out this possibility.
- D. Some argue that Moses was acting on order from God. That this was a divinely sanctioned act of judgment against Egypt.
Calvin – “Moses “was armed by God’s command, and, conscious of his legitimate vocation, rightly, and judiciously assumed that character which God had assigned to him.”
- I. What Moses did was wrong because it was against the law of God
- A. Although the law had not yet been given at Sinai, it was written on the heart of Moses. He knew it was wrong. This is evidenced by his own actions
1. He did it in secret
Exodus 2:12 – “And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that *there was no man*”
 2. He tried to cover his actions
Exodus 2:12 – “hid him in the sand”
- B. God’s law commands “Thou shalt not kill” with few exceptions:
1. Self-defense – defending against an armed enemy who has the intent to kill. We are not told that the slave driver attacked Moses. Rather, Moses attacked him with the purpose of killing him.
 2. When it is administered by the lawful authorities in capital punishment. Moses was a private individual, not an officer of the state administering justice. Moses appointed himself judge, jury, and executioner.
 3. The killing of military combatants in a just war. But Moses was not acting as a combatant under the authority of a state. He was acting alone.
- C. We are often enraged over injustices
1. We can almost sympathize with what Moses did
 2. What Moses did was react in anger. His anger led to his beating a man to death.
 3. It is a warning to us against the danger of anger.
Jesus warned against this dangerous passion
Matthew 5:21-22 – “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: ²² But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment:”
 4. Remember, it is because of his anger that Moses was kept from entering into the Promised Land.

5. The Westminster Larger Catechism

Q. 136. What are the sins forbidden in the sixth commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the sixth commandment are, all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defence; the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life; sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge; all excessive passions, distracting cares; immoderate use of meat, drink, labor, and recreations; provoking words, oppression, quarreling, striking, wounding, and whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.

II. Moses sinned by taking an office not yet appointed to him

A. Moses was poised to become Israel's deliverer

1. He had been raised up under the Egyptian education – the best in the world at that time
2. He had been raised up in riches, power, and influence
Acts 7:22 – “And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.”
3. He also knew his heritage – he was a Hebrew. They were his people. His heart was moved in compassion toward them. And God was at work in his heart in other ways:
Hebrews 11:24 – “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; ²⁵ Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; ²⁶ Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.”
4. Everything was in place – except he had not yet received the call of God as Israel's deliverer.

B. God had not yet called Moses to lead his people out of Egypt

1. God did not call Moses to take up arms against this oppressor.
2. From the human perspective it made perfect sense for Moses to come forth at this time – but this was not God's time.
3. God would later smite the Egyptians, but that would be His work.
4. Moses genuinely believed he could stir the nation of Israel to action. He sincerely believed by God's help he could be their deliverer.
Acts 7:25 – “For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.”
5. But this was Moses thinking. It was not God's plan.
6. The ultimate proof that it was not God's plan is in Moses fleeing before Pharaoh. When God commands our work we can be bold as a lion.

C. When God led Israel out of their bondage it was all His work

1. God would use Moses, but it was not the work of Moses
2. We are God's instruments in the Gospel, salvation is not our work.
1 Corinthians 1:31 – “That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

III. God would spend forty years humbling Moses

A. Moses was bold and proud

1. The Egyptian educational system taught all of the wisdom of the ancient world – science, mathematics, astronomy
2. Another goal of the Egyptian educational system was to reinforce the pride of those in power.
 - a. He would have been taught to show contempt for the slaves
 - b. One writer notes: The curriculum expressed “a deep contempt of manual labor while stressing the value of study. Studies lead to a life far away from dust, dirt, and toil under harsh taskmasters. These texts emphasize the extremely low status of the working class in ancient Egyptian society.” (Göran Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, p.21)
 - c. It was truly a work of grace for Moses to cast his lot with the slaves – he had been taught from a child to show contempt for them.
 - d. A study of Exodus is a Christological study with many types and foreshadows of Christ. Moses identified himself with God’s people. Like Christ, he left his place of wealth, riches, and position to become like the lowly. Like Christ, he entered into their condition that he might deliver them.
Hebrews 2 speaks of Christ:
Hebrews 2:11 – “he is not ashamed to call them brethren,”
3. But his Egyptian training had done something else. Moses had also been taught to be proud, confident, and self-assured
 - a. In **Verse 13** Moses again steps forward with confidence to intervene in the dispute between two Hebrews
 - b. In **Verse 14** one of the servants says in essence, “And who do you think you are?”
4. God wants His servants, humble, meek, and dependent upon Him

B. Moses was about to go through God’s school of training

1. He was about to go from the luxury of Pharaoh’s house to the emptiness of the wilderness
2. He was about to become a lowly shepherd
3. God’s school would last 40 years. It would be 40 years before God would call Moses from the burning bush. Then Moses was a different man.

Conclusion:

1. Moses is an example of God's great patience with man. The surest testimony that what Moses did was wrong can be seen in his 40 years in Midian.
God raises up and uses weak sinful men. When we are proud, God humbles us.
1 Peter 5:5-6 – “. . . God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. ⁶
Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:”
2. This text should also be a warning to us. No matter how great your abilities or how lofty your position, you can throw it all away with one rash act.
One rash act can ruin a lifelong good reputation.
One rash act can ruin years of preparation for God's service.
3. Remember, Moses motives were good. He had right intentions, and still he was judged for his sins.
4. Another thing we must also see in this passage is our sins will find us out.
 - A. Moses looked this way and that before committing his sin.
Then to make doubly sure, he hid the body in the sand. All was well. No one knew.
 - B. This was the mind of Achan when he took the treasures of Jericho for himself.
He buried them carefully under his tent. No one would know – but God knew.
 - C. Moses told the Reubenites and the Gadites:
Numbers 32:23 – “But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out.”
5. Finally, we must wait upon God's timing. Moses had to wait almost a lifetime. Our duty before God is to be useful and obedient. Before we start out on some high plan we must first seek if it is the will of God.