

Exodus 2 “God Saw and God Knew”
Psalm 102
Hebrews 11

January 22, 2017

Read 1:8-2:25

You can see why the black church resonates with the story of Moses.
They hear echoes of their own story in the story of Israel enslaved in Egypt.
We all need to see how this is *our story*.

All of us have groaned because of our misery and distress.
All of us have groaned because of what *others* have done to us!

All of us need to remember that God hears the groaning of his people.
God heard,
God remembered,
God saw,
And God knew.

Psalm 102 connects the themes of Exodus 2 with a later generation.
Psalm 102 also speaks of how the LORD looked down from heaven
and heard the groaning of the prisoners – of those doomed to die.
Psalm 102 remembers the themes of Exodus 2
and asks God to continue to do what he has promised
throughout all generations.

Psalm 102 is “A prayer of one afflicted,
when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the LORD.”
As we consider the condition of the church in this country – in this city –
we need to sing Psalm 102!

Sing Psalm 102
Read Hebrews 11:17-31

Hebrews invites us to see the story of Moses as the story of *faith*.
How well did Moses understand this in the *middle* of his story?
When Moses was fleeing from Pharaoh –
when Moses was settling down in Midian –
did he think, “Ah, yes, I consider the reproach of the Messiah
to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt!”
The term “Messiah” (Christ, Anointed One) didn’t even exist yet!

There are some things that you don’t *see* when you are in the middle of the story.

Only later – at the end of the story – can you look back and say,
Oh my goodness – it was there all along!!

That's what Hebrews is doing.

Hebrews is not giving us a psychological account
of the state of mind of the heroes of faith.

Hebrews is telling us that *they* walked by faith.

Even in the midst of their doubts and fears and complaints –
they were *characterized* by faith.

We saw last time that there arose a king – a Pharaoh – who did not know Joseph.

He feared the power of the sons of Israel –
and so he put them to forced labor.

They had been an influential and powerful tribe in the previous government,
so it probably took years to marginalize them.

But he succeeded – and so when he moved to enslave them,
there was no one to intercede on behalf of the sons of Israel.

But God had blessed Israel: “be fruitful and multiply” he had said -
and so indeed it took place.

None of Pharaoh's labor policies could slow the growth of the Hebrews.

So Pharaoh takes the next logical step: genocide.

Why does he target baby boys?

Because he needs slave labor.

He will not kill the slave men -
they are too useful.

But so long as he kills the baby boys, he will eradicate the Israelite line.

Baby girls can grow up and become “slave breeders”
integrated into other tribal groups.

Do not ignore the women!

Thomas Jefferson thought that he had witnessed the transformation of America
into a Deist nation – because he had persuaded the *men* to embrace Deism.

But their wives were still at home catechizing their children
with the Westminster Shorter Catechism –

so, as both Pharaoh and Thomas Jefferson learned the hard way,
if you are going to try to take over the world, *don't forget the women!*

Indeed, Pharaoh *starts* with the women!

Introduction: “The Midwives Feared God” (v15-22)

¹⁵ *Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah,*

Pharaoh comes to the midwives and says:

¹⁶ *“When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.”*

“Birthstool” is a poor translation.

Literally it says, “when you look at the stones, if it is a boy, you shall kill him...”
It should be fairly obvious what “stones” refers to!

¹⁷ *But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.*

Whom do you fear?

Do you fear God?

Or do you fear man?

The midwives feared God.

They did not fear the king.

¹⁸ *So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and let the male children live?”* ¹⁹ *The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.”*

There are some questions that many ask here:

Are the midwives lying?

And if so, does God reward them for lying?

The text does not give us enough information to answer the first question.

All we know is that the midwives gave this answer to Pharaoh.

We don’t know *anything* about comparative midwifery
between Egyptian and Hebrew practices.

They may well be telling the truth.

But they are plainly disobeying the king –

and if they are telling the truth,

they are using clever sophistry to get around the king’s command.

But more to the point,

the midwives are rewarded not for lying, but for *fearing God*.

Ordinarily you are supposed to obey the king.

But when the king commands you to kill someone, you must not obey the king.

Children, are you supposed to obey your parents?

But if your father told you to kill your sister, would you do it?

Of course not!

In the same way, when Pharaoh commands the midwives to kill the Hebrew boys
he forfeits the honor and obedience that was due to him.

Over and over throughout the scriptures, when rulers start killing innocent people
you find God blessing the people who resist them:

Rahab lies to the king of Jericho – “They went thataway”

Jeremiah deceives the nobles of Jerusalem.

Jesus himself tells us how to figure out what to do in such situations.

Jesus told us that all the law and the prophets depend on two commandments:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength”;

And “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

The midwives feared God.

They loved God and neighbor.

Therefore, they could not obey Pharaoh –

and so they used nonviolent civil disobedience
to protest against Pharaoh’s unjust decree.

It would be wrong to say that God *blessed their lie* –

it would be better to say that God *blessed their faith* – and their fear of him.

²⁰ *So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong.* ²¹ *And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.*

And because they feared God, he gave them families.

Why is this story here?

Why are Shiprah and Puah *named* in this story?

Think of what Jesus said of Mary Magdalene – the woman who anointed his feet?

Wherever the gospel is preached, this story shall be told in memory of her.

Shiprah and Puah will be remembered and celebrated for all time
because they feared God.

They understood – “we must obey God, not man.”

Pharaoh realizes that he cannot trust the midwives to accomplish his goals,
so he commands all the Egyptians to take over.

²² *Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every son that is born to the Hebrews^[a] you shall*

cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.”

Undoubtedly there were many Egyptians who obeyed the king.

It may seem unthinkable –

but such policies are often designed to make it thinkable.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn tells the story of the Soviet prison system –

The Gulag Archipelago –

in a way that explains how ordinary decent people

can be drawn into a monstrous system.

If you have been convinced that your enemy is a monster –

then you can be persuaded to do monstrous things.

In the American South slaveholders knew that blacks were human –

but they went to great lengths to argue that blacks were an inferior race of humans

Slavery – it was said – was a step *up* from the barbarism of African society.

But when you view the “other” in that way

it is much easier to say, “kill all the baby boys.”

You would never do that to your friends – you would never do that even to a stranger!

Why should I kill your baby?

But when the “other” is an inferior and dangerous group –

then we are willing to harm them – and yes, even to kill them.

What do you do in a world where people engage in such destructive behavior?

What do you do in a world where people are willing to attack you –

and even kill your children?

What is the faithful thing to do?

You get married and you make babies.

1. The Birth and Adoption of Moses (2:1-10)

a. “And She Saw That He Was Good” – The Birth of Moses (v1-2)

Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. ² The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months.

Notice that we do not hear their names.

So far, the only names that we have heard are the twelve sons of Israel

and the two midwives.

The Pharaoh has not been named.

And the child’s parents have not been named.

Indeed, in chapter two, *no one* is named until the naming of Moses.

But here the Levite woman conceives and bears a son.

It may seem strange that we are told “when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him.”

But the Hebrew simply says, “and she saw that he was good.”

It is a direct echo of Genesis 1 –

when God creates things, “and he saw that it was good.”

The opening story of Exodus is designed to recapitulate the story of Genesis.

The birth of Moses is told in a way that parallels the creation and the flood.

When the world is going to hell in a handbasket,

the faithful remember what God did –

God made man in his own image and likeness – and he saw that it was good.

Now, this faithful woman bears a child in her own image and likeness –

and she saw that he was good.

But hiding a baby won’t last long.

b. Moses and the Flood – The Ark of Moses (v3-4)

³ *When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes^[a] 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.*

And so she remembers the flood of Noah’s day – and so she makes an Ark.

Because while the ESV translates it “basket” – the word is the word translated “ark” in Gen 6-8.

It would be silly to say that Noah built a basket.

But it is equally problematic to say that Moses’ mother made a basket.

The *point of the text* is that Moses’ mother made something that resembled Noah’s ark.

It was much smaller.

It was made of bulrushes – rather than gopher wood.

But it was also covered with bitumen and pitch (like Noah’s ark).

And it was designed to save Moses through water –

just like Noah was saved through water back in Genesis.

Some people think that she was sending her son down the Nile to die.

But then why did she make an *ark* – the instrument of salvation for Noah!?

And why would she send her young daughter to watch?

Well, keep reading!

c. Pharaoh’s Daughter Blesses the Seed of Abraham – The Adoption of Moses (v5-10)

⁵ *Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river.*

What is Pharaoh's daughter doing here?

Well, as we have seen, the Hebrew slaves are building Ramesses' great city.

So it would not be surprising for Pharaoh's daughter to be in the vicinity.

But verse 5 causes us to reconsider what was going on in verses 3-4.

What was Moses' mother doing by building an ark?

The Nile River is not exactly a safe place for a three-month old!

But Moses' mother has a plan.

She *knows* that this is the section of the river where Pharaoh's daughter bathes.

(That's why Moses' sister will stay by the ark –

and that's why she is ready for the conversation that follows!)

She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. ⁶ When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." ⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" ⁸ And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. ⁹ And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him.

Our story is told in a way that highlights the role of women.

His mother – his sister – Pharaoh's daughter – Shiphrah and Puah –

the seven daughters of the priest of Midian –

there are 12 faithful women in the first two chapters of Exodus –

almost certainly intended as a parallel to the 12 sons of Israel.

God had promised Eve that her seed – the Seed of the Woman –

would crush the head of the serpent.

Here in Exodus 1-2, Pharaoh is acting like the serpent – seeking to destroy the holy seed.

(Later, in Ezekiel 29-32, Pharaoh will be depicted as a great sea monster –

“a dragon in the seas” that lurks in the Nile River).

And Pharaoh's daughter is protecting the seed of the woman.

We live in a day when “women's rights”

have often centered on a woman's right to murder her unborn children.

Just yesterday, the Women's March on Washington

explicitly rejected all pro-life women's groups.

In such a day, it is only right to celebrate Pharaoh's daughter

who refused to kill another woman's child –
but instead took it to raise up as her own.

¹⁰ *When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."*

Our text gives us the Hebrew meaning of the name "Moses" –
but it is worth noting that in Egyptian, "Mose" means "born,"
and was a common name.

It does not require speculation to reflect on what Moses learned from his adoptive mother.
He learned compassion for the weak –
and also, perhaps, an impulsive tendency to act on his sense of injustice,
and worry about the consequences later!

I said last week that I expect to see the Pharaoh of Joseph's day in glory.
I also expect to see *this* Pharaoh's daughter.
After all, she blesses the Seed of Abraham –
at considerable risk to herself.
Yes, she is Pharaoh's daughter – and she can get away with things!
But from what we know about the Pharaohs of those days,
the Pharaohs had many mistresses – and many, many children.
Ramesses, for instance, had around 40-50 daughters.

Ignoring a royal decree was hardly a minor thing for Pharaoh's daughter!

But her independent spirit seems to have influenced Moses as well!

2. "A Prince and a Judge": The Flight of Moses (2:11-15)

a. Moses and the Egyptian (v11-12)

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.* ^[c] ¹² *He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.*

Okay, now what do we do with this?

Again, we are not given much information.

Was Moses simply *rescuing* a Hebrew from an unjust attack?

(it doesn't say that the Egyptian was an officer of the king –
so it is entirely possible that Moses was simply acting to defend the innocent)

But Moses had learned from his adoptive mother the instinct to protect the weak –
and perhaps also her impetuous nature! –
and so he acts to save the Hebrew from the Egyptian.

It is interesting to reflect on the way that Hebrews comments on this.

In Hebrews 11:25, we hear that:

“By faith, Moses, when he was grown up,
refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter,
choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God
than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.”

The only event recorded in the book of Exodus from that time period
is here – when he killed the Egyptian.

By faith, Moses chose to identify with his people.

Indeed, it would be accurate to say, by faith Moses struck down the Egyptian.

I realize that we don’t usually talk that way –

but if you are acting to protect the weak and helpless,
then it is possible to kill by faith.

(Just look a few verses later – 11:32-34 – “who through faith conquered kingdoms...
became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight...”)

Stephen understands it the same way in his sermon in Acts 7:24-25:

“And seeing one of them being wronged,
he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian.
He supposed that his brothers would understand
that God was giving them salvation by his hand,
but they did not understand.”

Stephen says that this act of vengeance symbolized what Moses will do for all the Hebrews.

He will rescue them from the Egyptians.

Except Moses is not able to rescue them from the Egyptians.

Yes, God’s judgment upon Egypt will result in many deaths –
but Moses is not called to lead a violent insurrection.

Moses must first learn the way of the cross.

Because there is no way to glory except the cross –
no way to the Promised Land, except through the wilderness.

There is another way in which this one act shows the dead-end of violent resistance.

If the slaves rise up and rebel against their masters,
they will be slaughtered.

We are helpless against Pharaoh.

We cannot rise up and overthrow the yoke of slavery.

There are many stories in the ancient world

of the abandoned, adopted son who rises to power and saves his people.

But verses 13-15 put an abrupt halt to that story.

No sooner does Moses begin to emerge as the potential savior of his people
then he is chased out of Egypt entirely.

The salvation of Israel will not come by the hand of man.

Salvation belongs to the LORD.

And Moses begins to learn this the very next day:

b. Moses Was Afraid (v13-15) but Not of the Anger of the King (Heb. 11:27)

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.”

Moses (as an adoptive grandson of Pharaoh) is a prince and judge.

But the Israelites do not take kindly to him

(think of the 40 years in the wilderness –

when they grumbled against Moses over and over again!)

After all, there are doubtless a dozen sons of Pharaoh with a better claim to the throne.

Moses may be able to live as a privileged member of Egyptian society,

but he will never be able to do anything substantial

for the well-being of his people.

And so Hebrews 11:26 tells us that “He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.”

The problem is that his fellow Israelites have given up hope in such a reward.

¹⁵ When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian.

Moses, the great deliverer, is afraid – and flees Egypt.

Of course, Hebrews 11:27 says that he was *not* afraid of the anger of Pharaoh.

What does that mean?

Moses is not a coward.

Shiphrah and Puah did not run and hide from Pharaoh.

So why did Moses flee?

Hebrews 11:27 says “By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.”

Sure, he feared the king in the sense that he knew that if he stayed in Egypt,

Pharaoh would kill him.
But the point that Hebrews is making is that there was something deeper that drove him on.
And that something deeper was *faith*.

And you see this in what comes next in our narrative:

And he sat down by a well.

In the book of Genesis, when people sit down by a well
the next thing that happens is that they get married!
(In Genesis 24 and 29, Isaac and Jacob each find wives at wells).

3. “Moses Stood Up and Saved Them”: Moses in Midian (2:16-22)

a. Moses and the Daughters of Reuel (v16-20)

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.”*

Moses has been driven out into the wilderness –
but he remains committed to protecting the weak and helpless,
so he saves the daughters of Reuel from the shepherds who would oppress them.

In one sense, Midian is the natural place to flee.

It is the next country east of Egypt.

The Midianites were also descendants of Abraham through Keturah –
and had intermarried with the Ishmaelites
(who were descended from Abraham through Hagar).

In Genesis we heard that Joseph had been sold to either Ishmaelite or Midianite traders,
and from all we know about them, the two groups were largely intermingled.

b. Gershom – the Sojourner (v21-22)

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^[d] in a foreign land.”*

So Moses marries Zipporah – the daughter of Reuel –
and she gave birth to a son – Gershom – whose name means “a sojourner there.”
Whatever hope he had for saving his people from Egypt is dashed.
He is now a sojourner in Midian –

without any chance of bringing comfort to his family and friends in slavery.

Conclusion: “And God Knew” (v23-25)

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.

In verse 11, Moses had looked on the burdens of his people
and *saw* the Egyptian beating a Hebrew – and took action.
Now, in verses 23-25, God heard the groaning of the people of Israel –
and *God saw* the people of Israel – and *God knew*.

Pharaoh did not *know* Joseph.
But God knew.

Because God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.
God had told Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
that their descendants would be slaves in Egypt for 400 years –
but that after that time, He would bring them back to the Promised Land.

So what do we take away from this story?

How should we respond to injustice in our midst?
When we see others being oppressed – being harmed by those in power?

As we have seen, Hebrews 11 sees Moses as an example for us.
But Hebrews 11 does not draw a straight line from Moses to us.

Hebrews 11 draws a line from the creation through all the heroes of the faith –
to Christ.
And after giving the list of the heroes of faith in chapter 11,
Hebrews says “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,
let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely,
and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,
looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith,
who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross,
despising the shame,
and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (12:1-2)

Moses’ action in killing the Egyptian may have been morally justified (maybe) –
but what good did it do for his people?
In the end, neither the midwives nonviolent resistance, nor Moses’ violent resistance

was able to deliver Israel from Pharaoh's hand.

Only God can save.

Only when God looks down from heaven – only when God remembers his covenant –
will salvation come to those who are oppressed.

But what does that mean for Moses?

What does that mean for Shiphrah and Puah?

What does that mean for Pharaoh's daughter and Moses' mother?

If all I said was "you need to be faithful" – you might misunderstand me.

You might think that I meant – "just be passive."

But *none* of these people were passive!

All of them *actively* opposed the Pharaoh who did not know Joseph.

And how did they do this?

There is a common word in *all of these stories*.

The Midwives *saw* the stones – and let the boys live.

Moses' mother *saw* that the boy was good.

Pharaoh's daughter *saw* the basket – and saw the boy.

And then Moses *saw* an Egyptian beating a helpless Hebrew.

Yes, only God can save.

But the Midwives saved countless little boys.

Moses' mothers – natural and adoptive – saved him.

And Moses saved his fellow-Hebrew (and Reuel's seven daughters).

"Saved" in small way – in the ordinary, everyday way
that you also can *save* someone by your kindness –
by your refusal to follow the surrounding culture.

You are *not* called to be God.

But you are called to be *like* God!

You are called to *see* – and then to act accordingly –

remembering that you are *not* the Savior –

rather, you are called to keep your eyes on Jesus,

"the founder and perfecter of our faith,

who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame,
and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

And when you see those in distress – then, by faith,

you are called to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus –
no matter what it costs.