

September 13, 2020

Surprise! The Good News According to Moses

Exodus 2:1-10

Sometimes life goes along just great for days, months, even years. But then, in the blink of an eye, things can change. Surprise! Surprises can be good. Or surprises can be not so good. There's an accident. A pandemic. An illness. A job loss. A family crisis. A death. The nice comfortable life we have been enjoying is turned on its head. And it is nothing we can control ...

The Book of Exodus is a book of surprises – some good, some not so good. We'll be looking at some of these unexpected events – good and bad – over the coming weeks.

The story of the Exodus begins generations before Moses, whom we are introduced to in Exodus 2. It begins with the Israelites going down to Egypt a few hundred years earlier (Exodus 12:40-41). Jacob and his family moved to Egypt because there was a famine in Canaan. Jacob's son, Joseph, was the governor in Egypt. With Pharaoh's blessing, they settled in Egypt (Genesis 42-46). It all seemed wonderful! God miraculously was able to make all things work together for good!

But – surprise (nasty surprise) – *"eventually, a new king came to power in Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done. He said to his people, 'Look, the people of Israel now outnumber us and are stronger than we are. We must make a plan to keep them from growing even more. If we don't, and if war breaks out, they will join our enemies and fight against us. Then they will escape from the country.'* So the Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves ..." (Exodus 1:8-11). Not only that, but because the Hebrews were becoming so numerous, every new-born boy was to be thrown into the Nile and drowned. The Israelites went from having a semi-privileged status to being brutally – atrociously – persecuted.

How do I handle those unpleasant surprises?

I can get angry with other people ... In the case of the Israelites they could have gotten as angry as they wanted with Pharaoh, but would that have made a difference? I can get angry about Covid-19 – I can blame other people – but does that change anything? The reality is, I am where I am. Getting angry accomplishes nothing.

I can rationalize it ... The Israelites could convince themselves that they are not really slaves, that their baby boys are not really being drowned. It's just "fake news." Does that change the reality of the situation? In the same way, we can choose to ignore the reality of our crises and claim the issues don't exist. Does that change reality?

I can bottle it up inside ... If I internalize my stress, does that change anything? Yes, it does, actually. It gives me acid reflux, a sore jaw (gritting my teeth), and soaring blood pressure. Eventually, I will have an ulcer and heart trouble. Nothing useful changes.

I can lash out at God ... "Why me! It's not fair! What have I done to deserve this!?!?" As we read through Exodus, we will see the Israelites do this – often. But did God actually cause the Israelites' suffering? Or, instead, was it that a bad person made a cruel decision? When bad things happen, God does NOT usually cause them: accidents just happen; our bodies get diseases; nasty people make choices that impact us ...

The good news is that when bad things happen, we can be totally honest with God about our feelings. He can take our anger. In Jesus' life and on the cross, He knew the full range of human experiences, including the fullest depths of suffering and pain, loneliness and abandonment ... He can empathize with and understand our pain.

The good news is God saves ...

During all the bad news, trauma and suffering of the Israelites, Exodus 2:1-10 tell a surprising (good surprising) story of God's care and provision. A Jewish couple place their baby boy in a basket in the Nile. Pharaoh's daughter – knowing full well it is a Jewish baby and should be killed – has pity on him. Moses' sister ends up recruiting Moses' mother to be his nurse. After all the bad news in Exodus 1, it is a BIG surprise.

Think about it for a moment?

- What could the three-month-old baby do for himself?
- If Pharaoh's daughter had not intervened, what would've been the baby's fate?

The name "Moses" literally means "*One who was lifted out.*" Moses was literally lifted out of the river – out of certain death. And he was lifted into a wonderful life in the royal palace. He was "reborn" – so to speak – with a new name and a new life in a new home – as a prince of Egypt. Isn't it amazing how God works!

Although this is a story of one baby's deliverance thousands of years ago, we can think of it as a picture of God's salvation in each one of our lives ...

To use a metaphor, each and every one of us is floating down the river of life. We have no choice about being in the river. We are where we are. Circumstances are what circumstances are. Anger, denial, and rationalization are not going to help us. We can't get off. We have no choice about the fact that we're floating downstream – we can't paddle upstream. Life is a one-way street: we cannot go back and change the past. We cannot control the hazards along the way: there will be storms, crocodiles, and other hazards we cannot control.

In our journey through life, down the river of life ...

- What can we do for ourselves? We'd like to think we can manage life on our own quite well ... but when we're faced with the rapids and crocodiles of life (everything from cancer to car accidents, the death of a loved one to a pandemic, unemployment to injustices, from questions of loneliness, and mortality), we're actually about as powerless as a baby in a basket.

- What is the meaning of life? Do we simply drift down the river, hoping to survive all the dangers, and then come to oblivion? Is there nothing more? Is this all there is? Is there any meaning? Any purpose? Or is pain just pain? Is suffering just suffering? Is death the ultimate, awful end? From personal experience, I can attest that atheism leads us to a bleak, empty place.

But, like Pharaoh's daughter, God lifts us out of that existential despair. "*I have come,*" says Jesus, "*so you can have real and eternal life, more and better life than you ever dreamed of*" (John 10:10).

Just as Pharaoh's daughter lifted Moses out of the river and gave him a wonderful life in the royal palace as prince of Egypt, God's Son – Jesus – can lift us out of a journey of despair, floating through life at the whim of the current, and give us new status as princes and princesses in the kingdom of God: "*To all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God*" (John 1:12). Quite literally we are "reborn" with a whole new identity into a whole new world, too.

What is this new life like?

Moses is saved from death, placed in a royal family, and will have a profound purpose. He will be called to help set his people free, through the power and presence of God's Spirit. Moses will struggle with this calling – he will fail often enough – but he keeps at it. And – through God's power – he will make a world of difference.

We are saved from death, placed in a royal family – the family of God – and we have a profound purpose. We are called to help set people free, through the power of God's Spirit. We may struggle with this calling. We may feel inadequate. We may fail. But our challenge is to keep at it. Through God's Spirit, we can make a difference.

1. *We have a new identity* – we are no longer "merely human." We are no longer simply a random collection of molecules. We are no longer just a social insurance number. We are no longer only a bit of information in some "big data" data bank. As sons and daughters of the King of Kings, we are princesses and princes in the Kingdom of God. This is not to give us swelled heads, but to help us develop a healthy, humble – but realistic picture of who we are. We matter.
2. *We have a new relationship with the King, God.* Servants – slaves – do what the king orders. There is no discussion. No conversation. As sons and daughters of the king we can come whenever we wish. And we can come – in complete honesty – with all our issues. In Romans 8:15, Paul writes, "*You have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father"*" ("Abba" is the Aramaic word for "Daddy").
3. *We have a (new) purpose* – we are all blessed with abilities, talents, experiences, skills, resources, and gifts. God's great hope is that we all work together – with our blessings complementing one another – so the Kingdom of God really does come on

earth a bit more like it is in heaven! In the Bible, kings – and thus princes and princesses – are servants of their people: they give their lives in service to bless their people and build the kingdom. That is our calling, too.

4. *We have a new way of living* – we are called to live as shining lights, inviting all to think about what is "*true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable, and excellent, and worthy of praise*" (Philippians 4:8) – Jesus!
5. *We have a new security* – bad things can still happen to princes and princesses. But the King is there for you. Just as the host of angels was there for Jesus, God is always there for us. No, that doesn't mean bad things don't happen to us. But when we do walk through those dark valleys, He is ALWAYS with us. Nothing and no one can ever separate us from His love.
6. *We have a new community*. When we make that decision to accept the gift of new life, new identity, new purpose, new relationship, new security ... God doesn't zap us out of this world directly to heaven. He blesses us with community: relationships with our family, friends, colleagues, and neighbours. We live in a dual world of being "citizens of heaven" (Ephesians 2:19, Philippians 1:27, 3:20) right now, and still being citizens of Lethbridge/Canada/this world.

We had some neighbours – an elderly husband and wife – who both eventually died of cancer. Before each passed away, I visited them as each spent time in Palliative Care at St. Mike's. During their time there, despite their suffering and their terminal diagnoses, they modelled a faith, a calm assurance, and a peace that astounded the staff and myself. They were inspirations and challenges to me. When life throws us challenging surprises – in both their cases, stage 4 cancer – they knew God, our loving heavenly Father, our Abba Father, is always with us. He will get us through. Others, who do not yet know this truth, need to hear that good news.

Yes, times are tough these days. But – surprise! – God is always with you. Surprise! – God will get you through. Surprise! – you can be God's good news to people around you who don't share our faith (yet 😊). People desperately need good news, today. Even though we have been scattered, we have never ceased to be God's church, because the church is US, not a building. So be good news. Encourage other people. Model faith for other people. Pray for people. Share God's hope with other people.

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