

The Birth of Moses

Fall Quarter: God's Exceptional Choice

Unit 2: Out of slavery to nationhood

Lesson 5

Sunday School Lesson for the week of October 2, 2022

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Lesson Scripture: Exodus 1: 15 – 2:10

Key Text: *She became pregnant and gave birth to a son, when she saw that he was a fine child she hid him in the brushes for 3 months. Exodus 2:2*

Lesson Aims:

1. The meaning of prevenient grace as it applies to Moses's life.
2. Recognizing prevenient grace in the life of a parent and family.
3. Prevenient grace can involve risk.
4. The difference between prevenient grace and coincidence.
5. Prevenient grace accomplishing God's sanctified will.

Grace is a foundational, all-important reality in Wesleyan theology. Our Wesleyan theology is founded upon grace:

1. Prevenient Grace – Grace that goes before. This grace is at work even when we are unaware.
2. Justifying Grace – Grace that declares one righteous before God in Christ, though we are guilty.
3. Sanctifying Grace – After being declared righteous, Sanctifying Grace transforms us daily through the indwelling Holy Spirit in our hearts, setting us apart for God.

Of course, I have oversimplified the beauty, wonder and power of these expressions of grace. Far more can be stated about each dynamic of grace. Our lesson especially reveals the love and power of prevenient grace. Prevenient grace is expressed in God's love for us *when we were unaware*. This grace precedes us, leaving its redemptive mark upon each soul though we are oblivious to it. Prevenient grace is given freely, unconditionally by God for the sole purpose of drawing us unto Himself, and into the divine will.

The Narrative of Grace in Moses' Story

Moses' parents were from the tribe of Levi. After the Exodus, the priests of Israel arose from the tribe of Levi. Moses was born during a terrifying time in Hebrew history. The Pharaoh ordered that all male Hebrew babies be drowned. Through Joseph's initial plight and ensuing success, the children of Israel now lived in Egypt. The earlier years in Egypt allowed the Israelites to prosper and fill the land with their children and their children's children. The land was also filling with Israelite livestock. The number of Israelites in Egypt had grown so greatly in number they

threatened Pharaoh. This was an “assumed threat.” We find little material that the Israelites threatened to one day overthrow Pharaoh. Still, Pharaoh’s paranoia reacted by enslaving them for labor and having every male Hebrew baby drowned. Pharaoh concluded he could control the number of Israelites in the land and achieve gain through their forced labor.

As a parent and grandparent, I can only imagine the fear in which Israelite parents lived. Moses’ mother looked upon her new son, as most mothers, as one of the most beautiful sons ever. For her, he was the most beautiful baby in the world! Every loving parent will most likely experience moments when we have to take an action that breaks our hearts, yet is for our child’s good. Yet, what I’ve experienced thus far isn’t close to the painful choice made by the parents of Moses. Our narrative addresses only the mother’s choice. While his father labored for Pharaoh, she nurtured her newborn son for approximately three months. In fear she hid him from the Egyptians. The story doesn’t reveal exactly how she hid him. However, we can imagine trying to hide a newborn who needs to be held and fed. The babe would have cried, been fussy as all new born infants are, cooed, and giggled. Hiding Moses had to be an exhausting task.

Eventually, hiding her son became too difficult. Now the parents of Moses faced one of the most difficult decisions in their life. Parental love would take a risk - a life and death risk. They would place Moses in a small ark of papyri sheaves. Papyri was used to write upon, much like paper in the ancient Egyptian and near-eastern world. However, the sheaves were thicker and stronger. Later, papyri scrolls would be employed for the writing and transmission of holy Scripture. Though the text doesn’t draw attention to this fact, as a Christian, I find it touching to think that papyri would be used to save the one chosen to reveal the Law. The Law would be recorded on papyri and passed for generations.

Can you remember a moment when you had to “let your child go” for their own good? Did it hurt? Did you feel it was best for them?

Moses was placed in the ark and placed among the reeds of the Nile. This location was extremely dangerous. What if the ark capsized? What if animals and reptiles preyed upon the child? The fact that Moses was placed here reveals the dangerous world into which Moses was born. The odds of Moses surviving were better in the shallows of the Nile than on land at the hands of Pharaoh’s servants! Moses’ mother’s desperation and love allowed her to consider perhaps the only hope available. When life offers us little or no opportunity, a glimmer of hope still shines through the darkness. Pharaoh’s daughter bathed regularly in the Nile. The mother of Moses hoped the daughter would find the child, and hoped she would feel compassion and save him. We often forget that other family members experienced the pain of “letting Moses go.” Moses’ sister stood nearby and watched over him. She loved her brother and revealed such love by placing herself at risk standing nearby watching the ark. How thankful she would have been to share with her mother and father the news her brother at last was saved.

Can you identify prevenient grace in the love of your siblings? Can you recall a specific moment when your sibling played a role in saving your life? Can you recognize the touch of your siblings upon your life that was instrumental in your walk with God?

Pharaoh's daughter felt sorry for the child and had her servant remove him from the river. The events that followed are too grand to assign to coincidence. The child would need a wet nurse. Moses' sister was near enough to overhear Pharaoh's daughter express the need for the nurse. Thus, she immediately took a risk of her own. Who was she to approach Pharaoh's daughter? Who was she to make any request? Moses' sister asked Pharaoh's daughter if she would like her to find a Hebrew to nurse the child. Therefore, she knew the best mother to nurse Moses: his true mother! Moses continued to be nursed by his biological mother and by the one who loved him more than anyone in the world. A terrifying story became a story of amazing events, unfolding into a redemptive end.

The workings of God often involve risk. Abram and Sarai risked leaving home. Elijah risked confronting Ahab. Deborah risked doing battle in the Jezreel Valley. Paul risked everything to become a Christian. All of the disciples risked their life to follow Jesus.

The narrative records the events in Moses' early life, but it cannot convey all of the emotion: the loving, the fretting, the worry and the hope. The text asks us personally to make a prayerful, personal connection with the story. How would we have felt? What emotions would we have felt? Where would we have looked for hope? Can you identify the prevenient grace of God in this story? Can you share the specific places in the narrative where God's grace is at work in Moses' parents, in the decisions of the parents, in the love of the sister, and in the compassion of Pharaoh's daughter? Can you recognize the movement of grace that transcends the very idea of coincidence?

Application of the Narrative to Our Life

It is important to realize that Moses was unaware of the grace that saved and nurtured him. God determined a purpose for Moses' life and was at work in Moses' life from the earliest moments. There are many faces and voices in our pasts. Some of those faces we have forgotten, or perhaps never personally knew. We have been shaped by words and actions to which we were oblivious at the time. A group of men chose to take their elementary aged sons to watch Dr. Martin Luther King march in Albany, Ga. A parking lot was chosen and we, the sons, sat on the hoods of the car. As Dr. King and the others passed by I began hearing loud, vile curses. I looked at my father. He stood silently and looked extremely uncomfortable. He was embarrassed and embarrassed that he had exposed me to such hate. God has never allowed me to forget that moment. I was a young, innocent boy who had no idea what was occurring. Yet, that moment has shaped my understanding of the evil of racism to this day. All of us have such moments. Perhaps we were never placed in the reeds of a river and left to nothing but hope. Yet, there are moments God has used to save us. We have been saved from apathy, hatred, selfishness, etc.

As I've stated in previous lessons, formerly I shared, "I gave my life to Jesus." Now I state, "I surrendered to Jesus." We did not attend church regularly in our family. Truthfully, attendance was rare and sporadic. However, I attended Bible Schools in the summer. I didn't know how pictures and stories of the cross were related to my life. I learned the words of hymns, and the images of Jesus remained embedded in my consciousness. I actually began attending church when I met the love of my life, my spouse Gail. I began to hear those hymns and actually listened to the words of a preacher. One day everything came together. All of the stories, prayers,

hymns, and lessons God has used to draw me conquered my resistance. As Christians, we have been “conquered” by prevenient grace.

Though I have used the name “Moses” in all that is written above, it was Pharoah’s daughter who named the child Moses. It is interesting to note that when transforming events occur in the Bible, they are often accompanied by a change of name. Abram and Sarai become Abraham and Sarah. Saul becomes Paul. Simon becomes Peter. What is the significance of the child being named Moses? Each of us received a new name when yielding to God’s grace. That name is “Christian.” It is a name of meaning and purpose. It is a name that declares the life I am living. It is a name that places me in relationship with hundreds, if not thousands, of others. It is a name that transcends every culture and distinction. When I ministered on the Yucatan, I could not speak Spanish, and most of the residents did not speak English. Yet, we worshipped together. We laughed, and, yes, we cried. The name “Christian” is the most powerful name in the world.

Can you share the moments in your life that dramatically changed you? Can you share the moments that saved you? Can you share how God used the significant, and often “common,” events in your life to draw you to Christ? What does the name “Christian” mean to you? How does this name define our ministry as individuals and the church?

The Divine Will

We commonly think of God’s will as it applies to us. We might ask the question, “What is God’s will for my life.” In Colossians 1:9 Paul greets the church. He reminds them of his prayers and his desire that they be filled with “the knowledge of God’s will.” Notice, he did not ask that each individual possess that knowledge. Paul wanted the “Church,” the body of Christ, to be filled with the knowledge of God’s divine will. What about our need to know God’s will? We discover God’s will for our life most often in and through the Church. Each of us can discover our place in the body of Christ. We can become awakened to the gifts and graces God has given us through the Holy Spirit as we worship and serve together in the Church.

I heard my call to pastoral ministry as I worshipped in the body of Christ. The Church illuminated and encouraged me. The Church educated me and helped me to always strive to serve God as best as I can. I have little doubt I would be a clergyperson today apart from the body of Christ.

When a particular church understands God’s will for them, they then in turn are to involve every member in that will. God’s will is to bring the world unto Himself through Christ. God’s will is to care for one another as Jesus would. Every act of love and compassion is used of God to draw people to Himself. We are the voices, prayers, and people God is using right now as instruments of prevenient grace in the life of another.

It is obvious the inspired author, believed to be Moses, believed God’s greater will was at work above, in and through human affairs. The story of Moses is not presented as haphazard events or wonderful coincidence. God is present in every moment, using every moment to draw the world unto Himself.

Prayer

Almighty God, we have been the recipients of grace upon grace. We are the recipients of so many prayers, so many lessons, and have been touched by so many people that have left their eternal mark upon our hearts. It is our prayer that you use us likewise, that we might become the indentations upon another's heart for the goodness of Jesus. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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