

The Acts of the Holy Spirit and the early church

May 11th, 2014 Stephen's message, Part 7

Stephens Speech: Moses, the rescuer of God's people



Acts 7:23-28 New International Version

“When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?’ ‘But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you

ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’

Moses, the 40 year old Hebrew/Egyptian:

The lessons for us from Moses' early life echo the lessons from Joseph's: God was, step by step, fulfilling prophecy concerning Israel's sojourn in Egypt. In the time of Moses the Jews experienced the mistreatment God predicted. Yet God was again faithful to his eternal covenant and displayed his power. He used Pharaoh's own daughter to rescue the Hebrew baby boy who would grow up to lead God's people out from under Pharaoh's oppression.

The Bible tells us that as Pharaoh's daughter reared Moses for the formidable early part of his life, that his education, family and God of course produced a man powerful in word and deed. This is similar in accounts to that of Jesus. Note the following statements from some after His death and resurrection.

Luke 24:13-19 (NIV)

Now that same day (the day of Jesus Resurrection) two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him,

“Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” “What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied.

“He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.”

Now we don't know much about the actual training or education specifically given to Moses, but from history we can fairly accurately garner a clue. Notice how Stephen who was supposedly blaspheming the name of Moses was the very one who had stated what a true and wonderful man Moses was. Now in anyone's life there are negatives that can be said against them, but notice that Stephen refrains from speaking about them, and only uses the pros not the cons, to this most intelligent but ignorant of audiences, the Sanhedrin.

We most assuredly can say that Moses was an amazing person. Not only exceedingly fair and handsome as a child, not only with all of the ability that was his just by virtue of his birth and his inheritance physically, heredity, but what was his by the education that he got in Egypt. I mean, the Egyptians, they tell us, knew geometry and medicine and astronomy, philosophy, mathematics, and building architecture as well.

Special insight into the life and thoughts of Moses:

What an education to of all things be used by God to bring Israel out of bondage into the promised land.. Now we would be remiss if we did not look at some of the insights of Moses given to us in the book of Hebrews. Here we see some detail of Moses life that is mentioned nowhere else in history:

Hebrews 11:24-27 (NIV)

24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. 25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. 27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.

The choice to obey God by faith will sometimes result in short-term suffering, but will also always result in eternal blessings. When Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and chose to be identified with God's people, he chose to suffer, let's look at a few of the ways:

(1). Moses chose to suffer the pain of alienation and misunderstanding from his adoptive family.

Pharaoh's daughter had rescued Moses from death, adopted him as her own son, and raised him in the splendor of the palace. If he had even survived in his natural family, he would have been doomed to a difficult life as a slave.

Instead, he grew up enjoying the most luxurious living conditions imaginable. Imagine the hurt feelings and misunderstanding that must have swept over Pharaoh's daughter when Moses

chose to walk away from everything that she had provided and identify himself with these slave laborers! Pharaoh must have been outraged when he heard about it: “The ungrateful wretch! After all that we’ve done for him!” Note the following from the pen of **John Calvin who was a French theologian and pastor during the Protestant Reformation**, in thinking about God’s timing in the life of Moses:

The Spirit of God did at length awake Moses’ mind, as it were out of sleep, that he might at length go visit his brethren, whom he had long time neglected. It is to be thought that he was not ignorant of what stock he came, seeing he had some token thereof in his flesh, and seeing the rumor thereof was spread abroad in the court, because the king’s daughter could not adopt him to be her son without some suspicion of wickedness, unless his kindred had been known;

Yet was it long before he was of such courage that he durst make known the love which he bare toward his kindred. And this served not a little to set forth the glory of God, that Moses, being ignorant of his calling, doth remain a long time idle in the king’s court, and is afterward called of the Lord contrary to the hope of all men, and his own also. Therefore, this new care for his brethren which came into his mind, proceeded from a new and unwonted motion of God’s Spirit.

When you choose to follow Jesus Christ, which may involve walking away from the education and comfortable lifestyle that your family has provided for you, you will suffer the pain of alienation and being misunderstood.

(2). Moses chose to suffer the loss of the world’s honors, pleasures, and wealth.

As the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, Moses enjoyed a position of honor higher than almost anyone else in Egypt. When he identified himself with the Jewish slaves, he became the object of contempt and scorn. As a family member in Pharaoh’s court, Moses enjoyed whatever pleasures anyone could seek. He lived in luxury; he ate the best food available.

He wore the nicest, newest clothes. If he had wanted, he could have enjoyed the pleasures of the most beautiful women in Egypt. He had wealth to buy anything he wanted or to live without working for the rest of his life. But when Moses chose to obey God by faith, he lost it all!

Pastor and Teacher Steven Cole notes the following on the choice of Moses:

It’s not necessarily sin to enjoy a position of honor and the comfortable life that wealth provides. Joseph enjoyed both while following God. But when God called Moses to give it up and lead Israel out of bondage, at that point it would have been sin for him to continue living as he was. Also, the Bible does not deny that sin brings passing pleasure. If it didn’t, we would not be tempted by it! But finally, it brings eternal misery. Don’t be deceived!

(3). Moses chose to suffer the world's reproach.

Imagine the gossip in Egyptian high society! "He did what? Unbelievable! What an idiot!" Ridicule is a powerful thing. People go to great lengths to cover up embarrassing mistakes that would cause them shame. But Moses chose a course that he knew would bring him the world's reproach! Why would a man knowingly choose such suffering? Was he a masochist? Was he insane? No, actually he was quite shrewd. Like the man who sold everything he had to buy the pearl of great price, Moses gained something far better. Now let's look at some of the blessings that Moses enjoyed through his choices:

(1). Moses' choice gained the blessing of the company of God's people.

Note that Moses chose "to endure ill-treatment with the people of God." They would later give him a lot of trouble, grumbling about the conditions that he led them into. Some would challenge his leadership. Eventually their grumbling frustrated Moses so much that he sinned by striking the rock in anger, so that the Lord kept him from entering the Promised Land. But in spite of all the problems he experienced with them, they were the people of God.

It was a far greater blessing to endure ill-treatment with them than to live in the worldly, superficial society of Pharaoh's court. Even though the church has some difficult people in it, it's far better to journey toward heaven with God's people than to live among the self-seeking people of the world!, although we should never forget about our obligations to let the world know about our Savior, Jesus.

(2). Moses' choice gained the blessing of the greater riches of Christ.

He considered "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." The reproach of Christ is a startling phrase! It probably means, "reproach" similar to what Christ endured when He was despised and rejected by the world." How much Moses knew about the promised Anointed One, we cannot know for sure, but according to the Bible, Moses knew there was something greater coming:

Deuteronomy 18:15-19 (NIV)

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die." The Lord said to me: "What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name.

As Jesus so often said to people, if they would search the Scriptures, they would find that there were many things said about Him. One of the earliest that both Moses and in Stephen's case,

hopefully the Sanhedrin also knew, was one of the earliest prophecies about the forthcoming Messiah, right after the first transgression of God's law:

Genesis 3:7-15 (NIV)

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

*The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. **And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.**"*

Moses you might think also understood that the sacrificial system pointed ahead to a Redeemer. And so Moses considered that any reproach that he endured for identifying himself with God's Messiah was far more valuable than the worldly treasures he could amass in Egypt.

(3). Moses' choice gained the blessing of the eternal reward in heaven.

Moses "was looking to the reward" Now If this referred to some earthly reward, Moses was badly mistaken. His earthly "reward" after he gave up the treasures of Egypt was to wander in the barren wilderness for 40 years, and then to spend the next 40 years with a bunch of complaining people. The reward that he looked for was, "the better country, that is, a heavenly one"

Notice that Moses did finally get to set foot on the promised land, some 1,700 years later when He appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration with Elijah and Jesus. The rewards of being with Jesus in heaven are far greater than any earthly rewards. What enabled Moses to let go of all the glitter of Egypt and to endure ill-treatment with the people of God was that he was looking to the reward of heaven.

We now see that this choosing of Moses was by faith. Faith was the only thing that enabled Moses to choose God and heaven above the treasures of Egypt. He believed God and His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

But, we would be mistaken if we thought that he just closed his eyes, shut off his brain, and took a giant leap of faith, for Moses apparently had thought long and hard about his choice and his faith in God, since the Bible points out the aspect of faith in the life of Moses, let's look at a few aspects thereof:

(1). Moses' choice of faith was carefully considered.

We see that he made this choice after "he had grown up" or gained maturity, for it is Stephen who tells us that Moses was 40. There are some who believe that the age of maturity is in fact 40, but any who are 21 will often disagree with that assessment. Now it's possible that Moses had lived in Pharaoh's court long enough to become thoroughly nauseated with the superficiality that he saw every day.

Moses carefully weighed in the balance what the world had to offer on one side and what God had to offer on the other side. The world's side was momentarily attractive, but lightweight. God's side was momentarily difficult, but satisfying in the long haul. Moses chose to believe God and reject the world, as must every one of us whether in ages past or here in Colorado today, who wants to go to Heaven:

1 John 2:15-17 (NIV)

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

(2). Moses' choice of faith was a critical choice with far-reaching consequences.

The crisis that pushed Moses over the line to renounce Egypt and choose ill-treatment with God's people was when he saw the Egyptian beating one of the Hebrew slaves, Moses' response was not an impulsive reaction that he later regretted to warrant a charge of Manslaughter, no, this was definitely pre-mediated murder, howbeit in defense of another:

Moses the Murderer:

Exodus 2:11-12 (NIV)

*One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. **Looking this way and that and seeing no one**, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.*

It appears, although I can't be dogmatic, that Moses had been considering, weighing, the greater riches of (God) Christ against the lightweight treasures of Egypt. So when the moment came, he acted decisively by killing the Egyptian and taking his stand with God and His people.

That critical choice affected not only Moses, but generations of Jews after him, and set him on the course that would ultimately lead to the Israelites all two million of them leaving Egypt after 400 years. Now some Jewish commentators gloss over the fact, or even eulogize it as patriotic and deserving, but it was clearly the deed of a hasty and undisciplined spirit, which will also show itself later in the angry outburst of Moses when striking instead of speaking to the rock. Now some believe that this offense of an Egyptian hitting a Hebrew did not deserve death, and if it had, Moses had neither legal office nor Divine call, justifying him in making himself an executioner.

The result was that, by his one wrong act, Moses put it out of his power to do anything towards alleviating the sufferings of his brethren for forty years, for Moses had understood either prior or during this killing that to some extent that God was going to use him to help with the present situation:

Acts 7:25 (NIV)

Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.

Most historians believe that the Hebrew being beaten was literally one of his own family tribe, that being from the tribe of Levi. Now I'm going to let you enjoy some the flavor of this story as told through the Mishna, for there is definitely some conjecture going on:

This man, according to some of the Jewish writers was the husband of Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri. Now the cause and manner of his suffering wrong was this, as they report one of the taskmasters having set his eyes upon his (Shelomith's) wife, who was a beautiful woman, came early one morning, and got him out of his house to work, and then went into his wife, and lay with her; which when the man understood, he made some disturbance about it, for which he caused him to serve in very hard bondage, and beat him severely; who flying to Moses for protection, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed; he took his part, and screened him from the insults and blows of the officer, and avenged his cause and smote the Egyptian and killed him: it is commonly said by the Jews that Moses killed him by the sword of his mouth, by making use of the word Jehovah; though others say, he smote him with his fist, which is more likely.

Marcus Kalisch (1828-1885), a German-British Hebraist and Bible commentator writes the following of this action of Moses against the Egyptian:

Passion did not so move him as to make him reckless. He looked round to see that he was not observed,, and then, when he saw there was no man, slew the Egyptian. A wrongful act, the outcome of an ardent but undisciplined spirit; not to be placed among the deeds "which history records as noble and magnanimous (Kalisch), but among those which are hasty and regrettable. A warm sympathetic nature, an indignant hatred of wrong-doing, may have lain at the root of the crime, but do not justify it, though they may qualify our condemnation of it.