

Exodus 2:11-25

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[0 : 00] Well, back as a student a few years ago now, in Newcastle upon Tyne, I can still remember! the headlines on all of the newspapers when Kevin Keegan, famous football player, returned! to Newcastle to become manager of the club Newcastle United. Kevin Keegan, if you don't know who that is, well that probably means you've got a life. But it is probably to say that for the Geordies he is something as a god to them. So he was hailed as the Geordie Messiah and the papers had the headlines, The Messiah Returns, when Kevin Keegan came back. It was a very exciting time. The only thing was that within eight months of Kevin Keegan returning back to Newcastle United, he had gone again. He had resigned and left his job as manager of the club. Now, I cannot overstate to you this afternoon how much of a disaster that was for Newcastle football supporters. It was like losing their purpose in life. Their Messiah, their God, had disappeared. And they were so disillusioned that they had hundreds of fans literally on the streets protesting and climbing the walls of the football stadium

St James' Park. So disillusioned they were with their so-called Messiah. Now you've got to love the Geordies, haven't you? I don't know what they were thinking.

Can I just follow Richard for a couple of minutes? You certainly can. You certainly can. Your meeting sounds more interesting than that.

Well do come back, do come back. I've got to look back for all the old people. Good. So we saw last week, if you were here, in Exodus chapter 1, we saw the Israelite people, they needed a saviour. They were in hard slavery under the Egyptians.

But if you read, and we haven't really got time to look at it now, in the first 11 verses of chapter 2, the writer builds up our hopes in Moses as a saviour. So we get this incredible story in verses 1 to 11 of these incredible events where Moses' mother hides him and in the end she gets paid to raise him up in the palace of Pharaoh. Amazing events with God's providence for those who honour him. And so there, we're thinking as the reader, well perhaps the Messiah returns. But as we see in the rest of Exodus 2, his life and the life of God's people is marked with disappointment and disillusionment. Moses, he ends up leaving Egypt in the passage we've just read. And the people, they lose their Messiah. It's a disaster humanly speaking, isn't it? And aren't we left wondering why is there so much disappointment and disillusionment? So many setbacks for God's people with his salvation? When God makes these great promises to save his people, when the excitement then builds, why is there so many disappointments and so much disillusion when God works? Well this week I want us to look at this passage and sort of split it into three parts and make three points about how God acts as a saviour in this passage. So first of all, God raises up saving potential. He raises up saving potential and we're looking from verse 11 of chapter 2 now. Now in verse 11 we see a kind of fast forward, a time shift in Moses' life, don't we? So it says in verse 11, when he had grown up, he went out to his people. So we're not told anything about his teenage years before he becomes an adult. So I think we can assume that during this period, Moses is in the palace and he is home schooled in the palace. Stephen in

[4 : 40] Acts chapter 7 says that Moses in this time grew up in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. So he was educated in the strict royal curriculum. He was one of the few people to have any education at all. He learns the Egyptian culture and literature. He becomes a person with high standing, doesn't he, in the palace. He has a great position to be able to influence the royal decisions over the slavery of God's people. Great potential as a saviour to them.

So he has the ability to do it. But he also has the desire to do it too, doesn't he? Despite his Egyptian education, despite his Egyptian upbringing, he has a great affinity with God's people. Verse 11, as he comes out of the palace, he isn't thinking, well, you know, I've landed on my feet here, haven't I?

I'm a Hebrew really, but I'm not like those Hebrew slaves down there. I'm an Egyptian. No, we are told he went out to his own people and looked upon their burdens. He's in a position of great privilege. He's an Egyptian by royal decree. But he has an immediate sense of where he belongs and who he belongs to. He went out to his own people. He is still Moses of the Hebrews, the enslaved Israelites. He's got great potential as a saviour, hasn't he?

He knows his own vocation as a saviour. He knows that this is what he must do. So three times in the passage that we read, we notice him looking at injustice and acting upon it with the Israelites, with the Hebrew and with the shepherd's daughters in Midian. He is a natural born saviour. And actually, when you think about it, he is so like the Lord Jesus in that respect, isn't he? Who had such privilege and yet he came down from heaven. And John chapter 1, it says that he came to his own people. Jesus in the book of Hebrews Hebrews is not afraid to call his people brothers, his own people. Such affinity with those he came to save.

And he knows he's the only one to do it. Now, I was thinking about saying this or not. I think I will. If you look at the verses where he looks to the left and he looks to the right, so verse 12, he looked this way and that, seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. Now, when I think of that, I sort of imagine this Punch and Judy style pantomime where Moses comes out, he looks to his left, he looks to his right and then he truncheons this guy on the back of the head and does a sort of underhanded burial in the sand. Well, I'm not sure after hearing other people's opinions on that, that that is what the meaning is there. I think what is happening there is that as he comes out and he sees his kinsmen being attacked on the street, he looks to his left, he looks to his right for help.

[8 : 21] Who is there to help? That is what we would do, isn't it, if we walked out on the street in Ealing. The first thing we do is we look around to see if there's anyone there. But that is just the problem, isn't it? Verse 12. He looked this way and that and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian.

There is nobody else there to help. Nobody else there to intervene in this. So he knows he is the only one. It is his job to be saviour. He has great potential, doesn't he? In such a position, with such a desire to save. God raises up saving potential. But secondly, with God there is saving disappointment at times. There is saving disappointment. Now there's no denying that despite Moses' great potential, actually by the end of this chapter, what we have is Moses in exile in a foreign country as a fugitive from Pharaoh. And if you look at verse 23, it says many days pass and the people are still left in the sorry state that they were in the beginning, aren't they? Humanly speaking, it's all been a waste of time. It's a total letdown. This saviour isn't what we'd hoped for at all.

It seems like such a waste of Moses' potential. All that build up and all that potential in chapter 1 and early part of chapter 2, all of that for Moses to end up saving a few shepherd girls and looking after some sheep. It is such a waste of Moses' potential. And the disillusionment builds, doesn't it? There's a vote of no confidence in verse 14 as a Hebrew says, he made you a prince and judge over us. There's disillusionment with him as a saviour even from his own people. And when he finally settles down in Midian, he has a child and he calls him Gershom in verse 22.

And he says, I've been a sojourner in a foreign land. The name Gershom means sojourner or alien. It's basically his own resignation document. He thinks, I've blown it. I've hit rock bottom here. I'm not even in the right country to be their saviour. I can't do it for them. It's a bit like calling your child disappointment, isn't it? It's a bit harsh really. But Stephen again in Acts says that Moses was away from God's people for 40 years during that period.

What a waste. 40 years of pain and suffering. And might that be how we experience God's salvation?

[11 : 31] Full of apparent disappointments. Full of disillusion perhaps with church. Where perhaps God raises up saving potential around us? Perhaps when church leaders seem so great and yet they fail?

Or we get tired of waiting for the answers that we want in prayer? Could you wait 40 years for those answers? And so of course it seems, doesn't it, even with Jesus, such potential.

He comes to his own people, doesn't he? And yet in that same verse in John chapter 1, his own people don't recognise him. He's met with disappointment and disillusionment. And at the end of it all, he's dead and buried, isn't he? What a waste, his disciples think. What a disappointment God's salvation can seem. There's saving potential, saving disappointment. But third point, and the last

point this afternoon, there's God saving providence. God saving providence.

Now I guess in this passage we're left wondering, aren't we, why on earth God allows Moses to be chased out of Egypt, away from the people that he's supposed to be saving? And why do we get this terrible tension with them, God's people, 40 more years of suffering while Moses, their so-called saviour is living this sort of domestic life with a wife and children and sheep? It just doesn't make sense, does it? It seems like such an anticlimax, such a waste.

And we're so often tempted to think, aren't we, God has forgotten us. God isn't going to save us. God is working in his wisdom for an even better salvation. That delays are not an oversight in God's plan. Now as we close, I want us to see a few reasons why it might be that Moses and the people are left in this 40 year kind of standoff in Egypt and in Midian. The first thing is that during that 40 year time, God's people learn to pray. They learn to pray. Now for this it would help if you just looked at verses 23 to 25, just that little chunk at the end there.

[14:20] And in those verses, we've got three or four times where God's people cry and groan about their suffering, don't they? So verse 23, the people of Israel groaned and they cried out for help, they cry for rescue. Verse 24, God heard their groaning three or four times there. Now the interesting thing about those words, those groaning words, is that in the original Hebrew they're not all the same. So I think we lose that a bit in the English. They're all slightly different words, commonly used in the Bible, but all slightly different. Now the first two words are words that are used for a sort of moaning and crying that just happens as a sort of knee-jerk reaction to pain. It's what anybody would do in a situation of suffering and hurt.

It's just a sort of an impulse reaction of crying out in pain. But the third word is different to that. They cry out for rescue from slavery. Their cry came up to God. That word is different.

You see, their moaning and crying becomes a cry for help to God. It becomes a prayer. In their suffering they learn over time they learn over time to rely on God, to call out to him, to know that only he can help them.

God uses the evil of these Egyptians and the terrible situation to help his people grow in faith, to grow closer to him.

In a sense he is already rescuing them there, bringing them closer to him. And never has the prayer life of the church been so healthy than in times of real hardship and adversity. Just think of the book of Acts.

[16:27] So much persecution there for Christians and yet what do you see time and time and again? When the apostles are in jail, they meet to pray. And here these people learn to pray in this time.

But secondly, Moses learns to feel as his people feel, as their saviour. So you remember we talked about how he names his son Gershom in verse 22.

I've become a sojourner in a foreign land, he says. Now that's a huge letdown for him, isn't it? But do you see that over that 40 year period, Moses will learn what it's like to be an alien.

He will learn what it's like to be far from home. No longer in the palace in Egypt. He will learn to fear the Egyptians as his people do. And when he returns to them eventually, he'll be far more able to sympathise with his people.

You know, there was a period of about nine months, a few years ago, where I lived in Scotland for a time to study. And I'd never been in Scotland before. I didn't know all of the quirks of Scottish people. And I had to speak a few times at a church in Glasgow. And it was great.

[17:54] Really, really great time. But I knew that I wasn't really able to connect with those Scottish people as being a sort of young upstart from south of the border. Until I learned to live the Scottish way of life for nine months. Until I learned what the weather was like. Until I learned how to hate English people. Until I learned how to love porridge and all of the rest of it. And hopefully by the end of nine months, I was a bit more able, just that bit more able to connect with them and to speak to them on their level. And you see, that is what is happening to Moses, isn't it? Moses learns to feel as his people felt. And again, doesn't that remind us of the Lord Jesus? How the book of Hebrews speaks of him, again, being able to sympathise with our weaknesses. Because he himself was also tested. He didn't stay in the palace of heaven, did he? No, he came to live a life full of suffering. Ultimately, he comes to us from that life. He comes to us from a life that ends in the grave. He learned to feel as his people feel. He learned obedience through suffering, Hebrews says.

Well, time is running away with us. And I'd love to go into this more and more, because there are so many other reasons why we can see that Moses is in this place for this amount of time. We learn

later on that Jethro, who is his wife's father there, this priest, later becomes a believer. And it's probably because of the time that Moses spent in Midian. And also, later on in the journey of Exodus, Moses will lead God's people out of Egypt to this same land through Midian, the place that he has learnt, the terrain. Now, how much easier it is for him to be a saviour to them, knowing the landscape. So many ways that we see God's saving providence in this situation. There may well be times of disappointment and disillusionment.

We can see the potential in others. But there are those setbacks, aren't there? There are those things that seem like such a waste in God's salvation plan. But might he be teaching us how to pray and making his servants better, better equipped to carry out his salvation?

And of course, we see all of this so clearly in the Lord Jesus Christ, who came from such a high position. And through the rejection and disillusionment of his own people, he learned what it felt to be human. He learned to feel as his people feel. God's salvation, it raises up great potential. And in Jesus, as we look at his life, we see great disappointments. And yet in the resurrection, we see most clearly God's saving providence. Let's finish with a prayer, shall we?