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Covenant Provision
Exodus 2:11-25

Please keep your Bibles open at Exodus 2, verse 11 and following, and then let me invite you to bow your heads with me, as we go to God for His help as we study His Word,

“Father we pray now for the light of Your Word to shine with power into our sin-darkened minds and hearts and lives. Send us afresh Your Spirit, by whom the text of Holy Scripture was written, that reading it we might hear the voice of Christ. Grant that the preaching of the Word of God might indeed be the very Word of God to all who hear it this night. We pray for a fresh grasp and glimpse of Christ by faith. We pray for a renewed awareness of our own sin and need. We pray for guidance and direction as we seek to please You. Most of all, we pray for the glory and exaltation of Your great name and so we pray in Christ’s name, Amen.”

Last Sunday we began the study of the book of Exodus. We saw something of the terrible oppression endured by the people of God in bondage in Egypt. And we saw the desperate but faith-filled actions of two pairs of heroic men and women: the two Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah who would not obey Pharaoh and kill the Hebrew children, and Amram and Jocabed, Moses’ parents, who acted to save Moses’ life. We saw Moses being discovered by Pharaoh’s own daughter and being returned to Jocabed to raise him until he was ready to be sent off to the palace to learn the ways of a prince of Egypt.

Tonight we consider the closing section of chapter 2. And in verse 11 we fast forward a number of years. According to Acts 7:23, the action here takes place when Moses is now forty years old. In his early years he was presumably raised by his own family and taught the faith and traditions of Israel. In the intervening years since then, Moses has, as Acts 7:22 says, been taught all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He has become mighty in word and deed. He has been given the finest education then available including, many scholars suggest, legal training. There is an ancient legal text called the Code of Hammurabi which was widely used at that time, and many of its provisions bear similarities to some of the details of the law God was going to inspire Moses to produce. In other words, Moses has been prepared in subtle and remarkable ways to understand two worlds. He knows the world of the Egyptian court and the etiquette and protocols of the great and the powerful in Egypt on the one hand, and he knows the faith and the sufferings of Israelites on the other hand. It means too that Moses has been prepared for the roles he will come to exercise later as the leader and lawgiver of Israel.

And just as an aside, we ought to learn from this not to despise or minimize the works of God in providence in our lives. We may not always understand why our path has led us in the directions that it has. We are not God and can't see the situations that lie just out of sight, around the corner, for which we must be prepared if we are to honor God, serve others, and fulfill our callings; which means, in one sense, that in the life of a child of God there are no wasted experiences. Everything that makes us who we are, by God's wise providence, shapes us into the person God would have us be, so that He might use us for His own glorious ends. Nothing should thrill us more than the prospect of being a useful instrument in our Master's hands.

So as this second half of the chapter opens, we meet Moses in middle age, uniquely equipped for the role he'd one day fulfill. He is a man of two worlds and a leader, educated and trained in the best schooling then available. And we are told that Moses "went out to his brethren and looked at their burdens."

That does not mean that he went on a day trip to acquaint himself with the sufferings of Israel, as though it were a field trip from the university. This was no academic exercise. The Hebrew word used to describe his looking at their burdens means "to look with emotion." He is emotionally invested in the plight of Israel. Perhaps this was not the first time that Moses had gone out among his people and been forced to reckon with the terrible injustice he saw all around him. Acts 7:26 tells us that Moses already felt a sense of divine calling. He was not unaware of the value of his unique preparations. He felt that God was indeed going to use him to deliver his people. But what happens next forces him to reevaluate everything.

Sometimes biblical teaching, particularly biblical narrative is multilayered. It is like the layers of an onion. If we are going to appreciate the various facets of truth being taught here we need to "peel the onion," as the saying goes. We need to study each layer distinctly. In this story there are three layers of teaching that I want us to notice. ***First*** of all, there's the surface layer. ***Moses is an example to us.*** He teaches us some important lessons about following God and living out our callings as members of His covenant people. Then ***secondly***, ***Moses is the representative of Israel.*** If you look closely at the text, there are a number of features that establish a parallel between Moses' experience and the experience of Israel that will later unfold in the book of Exodus. And then ***thirdly***, ***Moses is the representative of the Lord.*** If his experience parallels Israel's, there is a real sense in which it also echoes the Lord's Himself.

So think with me about that first layer, ***Moses as our example.***

As Moses observes the sufferings of his people, he stumbles upon an Egyptian, perhaps he was a superintendant in Pharaoh's labor camps, and he is beating a Hebrew. He "defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian," as Acts 7:24 puts it. Looking around to ensure he was unnoticed, Moses inserts himself into the fight, and in the struggle, he kills the Egyptian and buries the body in the sand.

The next day he sees two Hebrews fighting and once more intervenes. Clearly, under the weight of a growing sense of his calling to rescue his people, Moses is unable to resist getting involved. But as he does, he gets a real shock. Perhaps the Hebrew whom he had defended from the Egyptian had reported it, or else someone had seen the whole thing after all, but one way or another, word had spread among the Hebrews of Moses' actions. So when he asks, "Why are you striking your companion?" The man replies, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you did the Egyptian?"

Acts 7 indicates that Moses had hoped that his countrymen might recognize him as a potential savior and advocate for their cause. But instead, he was met with cynicism and suspicion. His crime was now known. Moses fled.

It seems as though Moses tried to take matters into his own hands. He has begun to feel as though God was calling him to rescue his people. His intervention was a premature expression of what he felt the Lord really wanted him to do. Yet the fact remains that it was the wrong action in the wrong way at the wrong time. Moses murdered the man and his violence was driven by his presumption about the call and plan of God.

On one occasion in Scotland I remember talking with a group of men who were waiting to be interviewed as part of the assessment process for their suitability for the gospel ministry. They were waiting quietly, all of them, looking very nervous. I asked them about their sense of calling and one young man in particular was adamant that he "knew" he was called into the ministry. I asked him what he'd do if the committee about to examine him did not agree with that assessment, to which he replied that he'd leave the church and go to another until someone recognized what he knew for sure, that God had called him into the preaching ministry.

There is a great deal of confusion about this whole subject of calling, but it is not a new confusion. Moses already seems to have discovered some of the pitfalls that surround this important subject. How are we to discern God's call and what ought we to do as we begin to respond to it?

John Calvin articulated three stages that normally characterize God's call, and here he is talking particularly about a call to a specific ministry in the church. The first part of a call is inward. It involves a desire for the work and sense of obligation to God and the church. It may well involve subjective spiritual experience or rest on particular passages of scripture that are important to you. This is not itself a call into full-time ministry. It is a highly subjective and personal thing that needs to be tested carefully by the church. And so, secondly, Calvin said, there needs to be the general consent of the church at large. If you begin to discern the call of God on your life, you must submit yourself to the assessment of the elders of the church. You must seek training and affirmation of your gifts and character. You must seek examination and the testing of your call from mature believers who are themselves called to serve. Should the church indicate that they do not perceive the requisite gifts or character traits that mark you as a suitable candidate for full-time gospel ministry, to boldly insist that you know better only confirms the assessment of your unsuitability. It displays a lack of humble submission to those whom the Lord has given authority in the church and reveals a pride in what you think is "your calling" rather than a humility that sees calling as a form of service.

And then finally, calling involves opportunity. If you have the gifts and the desire and the character and the recognition of the church but the Lord never actually opens the door for you to serve in that particular role, then the Lord has not called you to serve in that role. It is no good insisting that you "know" you are called. God has not seen fit to order things in His providence so as to give that ministry to you, and ordinary Christian humility demands that you submit to the guidance of providence.

Moses acted presumptuously. He assumed that all he had to do was step forward and lead. But instead of deliverance for Israel, the Lord disciplined Moses. Moses, it would seem, still had a lot to learn about himself before he could be really useful in God's cause. In fact, it was only after forty more years in the wilderness of Sinai among the Midianites that the formal call of God finally came to him. When it did at last come, Moses was a very different man. When God confronts him and calls him in chapter 3, gone is the bold and self-reliant presumption of the young prince of Egypt. In its place is a broken and humbled man who is so aware of his faults and failing and his previous mistakes that he proceeds to argue with God that he is not the best man for the job.

Whatever ministry we may exercise, whatever sense we may have of God's call on our lives, we need to be careful of the sin of presumption. Submit your opinion and instincts to the assessment of the leaders of the church. Be honest with others and seek guidance. Have your gifts and calling tested and scrutinize your motives? Do you want to lead or do you want to serve? Do you want to fulfill your potential or do you want to

be a blessing to others? Do you want to use your gifts or do you want the glory of God? As a pastor, I often meet people who are looking for a church, and they will tell me what their gifts are. “At my old church I had such and such a ministry. What ministries are there in your church for me to exercise my gifts?” I try to be honest with such people. I will tell them that if they are looking for a church to make much of them, they had best go elsewhere. I try to tell them that, if they are prepared to roll up their sleeves, however, no matter what they think their gifts are, and throw themselves into service wherever it is needed, whether they get recognized for it or not, then I am sure that they will not only find a very warm welcome with us but that God will use them in wonderful ways to the blessing of many.

Moses ran ahead of God’s providence and call, and it required forty years in what 3:1 calls “the back of the desert,” literally the back of beyond, the furthest reach of the most desolate place, for him to come to the point where he was fit for the Master’s use.

How many of you have ever filled out a gift assessment questionnaire? They used to have a great vogue in evangelical churches. The idea is that you answer a series of questions about your personality and character and preferences, your pleasures and inclinations and so on, and at the end you total up the scores on your questionnaires and discover what your particular “gift-mix” is. Now these things are not totally unhelpful, but I want to suggest that they tend to invert the proper focus of our attention. I’d like to suggest a safer approach to discerning your gifts and how you can be useful in the service of the gospel, one that is far less self-centered as well as very much less subjective and convoluted. It is simply to look for the opportunities for service that God in His providence opens for you. I am not necessarily talking about formal ministries in the church even: I am saying look around. What do you notice about the church? What might you do to serve a particular need that isn’t being met or that could be helped still further? Where are the openings for service? Throw yourself in there. Don’t ask “what are my gifts?”; ask “where can I serve?” Don’t ask yourself what you can do, ask *others* what you can do *for them*. Do it humbly, submitting to the wisdom of those around you who might very well warn you off or steer you in a different direction. Good counsel is invaluable. But better to roll up your sleeves and serve than to sit back and say the church does not have a ministry that fits my gifts.

Well, Moses ran ahead of God’s providence and call, and it all resulted in the tragic discipline and rebuke of the Lord. Let’s be warned by Moses’ example.

Then secondly, Moses here is *the representative of Israel*. What I mean by that is that Moses’ own experience seems to parallel and anticipate the experience of the whole people of God that would unfold in the rest of the book. Now at one level that is a helpful

literary device. These early chapters of the story have themes built into them that set us up for their later elaboration. That is how great writing works. But there is a *theological* significance to this, too.

Let me show you how Moses mirrors Israel here. First of all, it is clear in verse 11 that while Moses occupies two worlds, the world of the Egyptian oppressor and the world of the Hebrew oppressed, he has made a choice. Moses associates himself with the oppressed rather than the oppressor. Hebrews 11:24-25 tells us that, “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.” He went out to his brethren and he looked with emotion and his heart was breaking over the sufferings of Israel.

So here he is deliberately and self consciously identifying himself with Israel. He stands up as one of them, and the subsequent narrative develops in a way that shows how Moses becomes, in fact, the model for their entire collective history. Think of the contours of Moses’ story so far. First, he undergoes a transition from a position of privilege and favor in the house of Pharaoh to the wrath and hatred of Pharaoh. Isn’t that what had happened in chapter 1 of this very book to the whole nation? A new king ascended the throne who did not know or care about Joseph, and he persecuted and attempted to destroy the Hebrews. Then Moses is forced to flee Egypt into the desert, just as Israel would do years later. And there in the wilderness, Moses, like Israel, meets with God at Horeb, or Mount Sinai.

Moses gives us a picture in miniature of what Israel would endure in full. Now this is more than a literary device. It is an expression of a vital theological principle. It is the principle of *representation*. And it is a principle that finds its fullest and clearest expression in the life of Jesus Christ.

We’ve already seen how the stories of Moses and Jesus echo each other. What we need to see is that the gospels also make the history of *Israel* and the story of Jesus echo each other as well. So, like Israel, *Jesus* goes down into and comes up out of Egypt, “Out of Egypt,” Hosea said of *Israel*, “I have called my son.” Matthew says that Hosea’s words here speak ultimately about *Christ*.

At Jesus’ baptism He goes out into the wilderness of Jordan, where John the Baptist was reenacting the Exodus story, calling Israel out into the wilderness once again, to enter the Promised Land in repentance through the baptismal waters of the Jordan

River. There Jesus, as the representative of His people, is baptized. He had no need of baptism Himself, having no sin of His own, but as the representative of His people, He is baptized both to indicate that He would be the one in whom the cleansing spoken of in baptism would come to us all, and “to fulfill all righteousness,” that is to obey *for us*, as our representative, to undergo what sinners were bound to undergo by God’s command, though He had no sin of His own.

Then, immediately after His baptism, Jesus is led by the Spirit further out into the wilderness, just like Israel in the desert, led by the Lord in the pillar and cloud. There He faces a series of satanic temptations to which He responds by quoting from the book of Deuteronomy, where Moses recorded a series of tests faced by Israel in *their* wilderness travels. But whereas Israel had failed to obey, the gospels tell us *Jesus* perfectly obeyed.

There is a crucial theological principle here. And it’s not surprising that we discover it in the story of Moses, who is the man whom God will call to be the earthly savior of His covenant people, because Moses is a type of Christ. He is a precursor and picture of, and pointer to, Christ. Like Moses, Christ is the representative of His people. But there is an important asymmetry here. Moses anticipates Israel’s story. His story precedes and hints at the plan of God for Israel’s story still to unfold. But Jesus’ story is retrospective. It looks back at what has *already* happened to Israel, and it *repeats* that story, and it rewrites it. *Where Israel sinned, Christ obeys. Where Israel failed, Christ succeeds. Where Israel forfeited its sonship, Christ’s sonship is confirmed and conferred to all who believe in Him.*

If we learn from Moses’ example what we ought to do and ought not to do, we learn from Moses as a type of Christ that the only source of power that can motivate and propel us to obedience is to be found, not in moral examples, but in gospel provisions. Jesus obeyed for us and bled and died for us. Resting on Him, we have acceptance with God. That reality ought to fuel and motivate and inspire obedience in our hearts. Our doing for God must rest first on God’s doing for us in Jesus Christ. Perhaps one great reason we can’t sustain godly disciplines is because we do not constantly fix our eyes on God’s gift for sinners in Jesus Christ.

And then thirdly and finally, notice that this principle of representation is a two-way thing. That is to say, Moses not only echoes the story of Israel, representing them, he represents and mimics God Himself.

In verse 11, Moses looks on his suffering brethren and acts decisively, even if wrongly. In verse 25 we read that “God looked upon the children of Israel and God acknowledged them.” The same verb is used there for both Moses’ looking and being moved over Israel’s plight and God’s looking. God looks so as to act. What is beautiful about verse 25 is that the Hebrew literally says “God looked upon the children of Israel and God knew.”

It says God knows. Isn’t that beautiful? He knows their plight just as He knows ours. He never forgets His covenant with us. He is faithful to us in our need. In fact, if we are to ask how it is that God knows, the fullest answer must be to point to Christ who is God come down to dwell among us. He knows, because in Jesus Christ He was made flesh. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, not unable to sympathize with us, because He was tempted in every way as we are. God knows. He knows bodily weariness and emotional pain. He knows joy and sorrow. He has wept with grief and laughed with friends. He knows what bodies feel like in the last few second of breath before death takes them. He knows what it is like to be rejected and despised of men. He knows what it is to be cursed by God.

Moses is the representative of Israel to God and of the Lord to Israel. That is what it means to be a mediator. He was the mediator of the earthly and temporary covenant made at Sinai. Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and man who does what Moses did symbolically. He is God and man. He is God for us and to us and with us, and He is one of us, constantly dwelling with God and before God, as our advocate and representative.

In Him God has come down. In Him God has entered our creaturliness. In Him we have access to God as a loving Father and never a wrathful judge. Praise God that Moses teaches us not simply what we must do but points us to what God has done for us, in the great covenant provision for the rescue and redemption of His people: the only Mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus.

Amen.