

Faith on the Nile

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[0 : 0 0] beginning with P. I'm old school. I reduce everything to words that we can remember, and so I hope that we'll be able to just simply remember this story by way of these five words.

The first word I want us to think about is perception, the perception of Moses' parents, and it was in that perception that they chose to hide him from Pharaoh's army. Now, you remember the story. I'm sure that most people do. All the way, we're going to be taken back into the Old Testament to where the people of God, the Israelites, had spent the last 400 years in Egypt since they had been at the time of Joseph, and you remember how times had changed. The Pharaoh, who knew Joseph and who loved Joseph and who wanted to give, make provision for his family, was now dead, and there was a new regime in place that wasn't as friendly to the Israelites as the old regime had been. In fact, they were actively hostile, and they made life incredibly difficult for the people to the point where I'm sure many, many Israelites died because of the hard labor that this new Pharaoh imposed upon them. Of course, Pharaoh himself was afraid. He was afraid that they would rise. There were so many of them. There were over 2 million Israelites by this stage over a course of 400 years, and he was afraid that one day they would rise up and form an army and rebel against him and overthrow the Egyptians. Well, that wasn't ever going to happen, but fear is a terribly irrational force. And so he made life really difficult for them. He forced their men to build cities. He deprived them of materials to do so. And then when he saw that this wasn't doing any good, he started killing their babies. But this didn't do much good either because the midwives chose to act secretly and obey God rather than obey him. And still children were being born. Sons were being born in the community of Israel. And it was in that context that a family had a baby, and his name was Moses.

We know the story how his mother, because she was aware of the danger that was around her, she took her child. And after, I guess, after a short while, she hid him. She made a basket for him, and she hid him in the bulrushes so that he would be far away from where he would be heard or where he would be seen by the soldiers. And of course, when he was there, the king's daughter came to bathe, and she found him there. She took pity on him. His sister came out and told the princess, if you like, who he was, that he was one of the Hebrew babies. And she offered to take him into the palace as her son. And that was how he grew up. So there's the story. You know the rest of the story, how he became the great leader of Israel, how after a period of exile, God brought him back. There were the plagues, and then there was the Exodus, and Moses became one of the greatest of all of Israel's leaders, one of the greatest heroes of the Bible, not just because he led the people through the Red Sea, but because of his peculiar relationship to God. He was the only person in the Bible who we read who knew God face to face. Well, that's another story. We're not going to get sidetracked into that. But

Moses is the most fascinating character. Now here in these three or four verses is the first part of his life summarized for us. And it's summarized in terms of the word that runs all the way through Hebrews chapter 11, which is faith, by faith, by faith, by faith. And the purpose of this chapter, of course, was to remind everyone that in the Old Testament, there was real faith.

Just because Jesus had never been born does not mean that the faith of people in the Old Testament was unreal or it was any less legitimate. They believed what they had not seen yet. We believe what we read about in the New Testament, what has already happened. They believed what was still to come.

[4 : 40] And Moses was one of them. And his parents were amongst the people who lived by faith within the community of Israel. Now what we read here is really fascinating. By faith, Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born because they saw, listen to this, they saw that he was no ordinary child.

I want us to stop for a moment and to ask ourselves, what does this mean? They saw he was no ordinary child. That's the way the NIV. That's the way the NIV puts it. If you're reading the ESV, the English Standard Version, you'll read, I think, I'm doing this from memory, I think, they saw he was a beautiful child or a fair child. And right away, I'm hoping that the alarm bells are going. The questions are rising right away as to what does this mean? And I mean, surely, I mean, the elephant in the room here is, surely every parent thinks their child is a fair child or a beautiful child or no ordinary child.

Of course they do. There'd be something wrong if they didn't. Every parent thinks that way of their child. The moment your first child is born into a world, I'm sure that Joe and Susie have already experienced this, your whole world turns upside down and everything that you used to enjoy doing stops and life revolves around this new little helpless figure who wants to feed and wants to cry and wants to sleep. And you love it because there is that strange, unique bond that all of a sudden you discover for your child. Now, they saw that he was no ordinary child. Every parent thinks that. So what does it mean? Why is this in the Bible? Is this just here to describe the kind of love that a parent has for their children? I want to suggest, no, it goes beyond that. And I want us to suggest that the answer to the mystery is actually found not in Exodus and it's not found in Hebrews. It's actually found in the Acts of the Apostles. And chapter 7, let me just read it to you, comes within the defense that Stephen made just before he was put to death. You remember how he gave this potted history of Israel and part of this was the birth of Moses. And this is what he says.

He says, let me see if I can find it here. At that time, verse 20, Acts chapter 7, here's where I think the key lies. At that time Moses was born and he was no ordinary child. Now, actually, again, if you read in another version of the Bible, it refers to him being fair in the eyes of God. If you read the footnote in the NIV, you'll see there some readings say, fair in the sight of God. I believe that that's what gives us a key to what compelled, apart from natural parental affection and love, surely that would compel. That was enough to compel any parent to provide whatever protection they could for their children. But what compelled them more than anything else was that they saw his birth from a divine perspective, from a godly perspective. This is not just biology that's taking place. This is not just animal instinct. This is a recognition that Moses is our gift from God. And as Israelites, they would be able to think back to where God promised Abraham, their ancestor, to where God promised him that his seed would be as innumerable, uncountable, as the stars of the sky and the sand of the seashore, which meant that as that promise was unfolded, babies would be born. There is no such thing as an ordinary birth. Every birth in the

God's covenant community is extraordinary. And it's a fulfillment of God's marvelous promise to his people that one day that their seed would outnumber, or at least as far as we can count, the sand on the seashore or the stars in the sky. And every baby beyond that was precious in the eyes of God. Because God's promise went beyond the innumerable number of God's people. God's promise was that he would be their God and they would be his people, that they would possess the land that Abraham stood on and lived in, and that in their seed all nations would be blessed. That is what we call God's covenant with Abraham. It was his covenant with his people, because it wasn't just Abraham, it was everyone that came after him.

[10 : 11] The family of Abraham were all included in that promise in which God promised himself, I will be your God and you will be my people. And from then on, that special relationship in which God attached himself to this one family in the earth continued, and babies were born and generations were born, and the centuries passed until at last, you know the end of the story, don't you?

Jesus was born as the seed of Abraham and the one who would finally redeem people, you and I, from our sin and wash away our sin by dying on the cross. Now, here's my question. Did the coming of Jesus, did the death of Jesus, did the resurrection of Jesus annul God's promise? Did it bring it to an end?

Answer, no, it did not. It fulfilled it. Jesus was the answer. Jesus was the fulfillment. But God's covenant continues, this time in terms of the new covenant that he promised to, they promised in and through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that covenant includes us as the church. We enjoy a special relationship with God. God has united himself to us, and he has made provision for us.

Now, I know that the question you're asking, ah, but does that mean that every one of us is a personal Christian? Does that mean that every single one of us has a personal, just because we belong to the, just because you're baptized, does that mean that you have a personal faith in Jesus? Does baptism equate automatically to a personal faith in Jesus? Answer, no, it doesn't. There is only one way of being right with God, and that is by being born again, by coming to faith in Jesus. And we're going to see that that's exactly what happened in Moses' case. He came to the point where he chose to reject all the pleasures and the riches and the grandeur of Egypt, and he chose a life of persecution, hardship, because he saw, he perceived that it was only by being among God's people and by placing his trust and faith in the living and true God that he could be right with the living and true God. Now, that's what Moses' parents perceived. They perceived the importance of a covenant child, a gift that is born within the covenant community, and that required several acts of devotion and prayer and obedience and obedience and provision. And that's where then the rest of the Ps come in.

[13 : 44] The first, starting of, starting with perception, the perception that Moses was a covenant child. He was beautiful in the eyes of God. In other words, God had, God had attached himself to Moses as part of his his people. I can't help thinking, when I read this story, you know, I'm...

My apologies. I am breaking all the rules that I set for others.

I hope it doesn't go off again. That's the first time that's ever happened. Where was I? The perception that Moses was a covenant child.

Does anybody know how to switch an iPhone 12 off? Right. Okay.

The perception with which Moses' parents saw their child. But that perception led to a sense of responsibility, a massive sense of responsibility.

[15 : 06] Now, it's quite strange, isn't it, that you might think that if Moses' parents lived by faith, and if they perceived him to be a child of God, this is God's gift to us, and God's in control, God's sovereign, we know that God is sovereign, well, we're just going to leave it up to him to take care of this child. You might expect them to take that attitude.

Might you? That's one way you could think about it. Well, I mean, God's in control, so therefore he can... We'll just let go and let God. That's not what Moses' mother does, is it?

She does the opposite. Because she perceives him to be a child of God, given to her by God, she pulls out all the stops and does whatever is necessary, first of all for his protection. That's the second P, his protection.

And makes sure that she does everything within her power at that time. She uses all the resources and creativity at her disposal to make sure that her baby is kept safe.

Now, you would think any parent would do that. And to some extent, of course, any parent would do that. I'm sure that there were many parents in Israel who did similar things.

[16 : 30] They tried to escape or to avoid the scrutiny of Pharaoh by taking all kinds of... I'm sure that... I'm not... I don't know how many parents there were in Egypt at that time amongst the Israelites who may have taken similar steps.

But we read here that it was by faith that she did it. It's because she, Moses' mother, acted and lived under the power and the presence of God.

That she did everything at her disposal to protect Moses from the forces that would otherwise take his life. And there was a real danger.

Now, thankfully, we don't live in these precise circumstances today. But nonetheless, as parents, we're not just to say, well, we'll just let them get on with it.

We are to make every provision to protect our children from whatever dangers that there are in the world around us. There are physical dangers.

[17 : 41] There are spiritual dangers. There are dangers as they grow up. The danger... There isn't much danger as a child. Everything has to be done. But as our children grow up and as they become more active and as they go to school and as they hear and become aware of the world around us, we as parents are required by God, I believe, to protect our children from whatever danger that there is, whatever voices that there are in a hostile world.

The hostility in Moses' day was physical hostility. He was in danger of being taken away and thrown into the river. Today, we still live in a hostile world.

And we have to make every effort that we can to make sure that we protect our children. And that means that we have to know what our children are exposed to as they play with their friends, as they go to school, and as they engage with the world around them.

Parents, too, have to engage with the world around us. And we have to do so fearlessly, bearing witness to the Lord Jesus Christ, who we serve.

And sometimes in the very act of protecting our children, we will be required to say, well, we are a Christian family. We believe in the gospel. I'm not saying that you make yourself a nuisance or that you're rude.

[19 : 15] I don't believe God calls us ever to be rude or unloving to the world around us. There are ways of doing this in which we explain. When, for example, our children hear things or are taught things in school, which we know that are contrary to what we know to be right, according to the Bible, then there is nothing that stops us.

In fact, our communities encourage us as parents to engage with our teachers. Are we prepared to do that? Are we prepared to fearlessly, lovingly, gently, skillfully engage with the world around us in order to protect our children?

Children are a challenge to us as parents and us as congregations. Now, the third P is the provision that...

Isn't it fascinating the way that Moses was growing up? There came a point in his life where he had to be taken into the palace of Pharaoh.

And so there was this double life, wasn't there? There was what he had learned at home during his first formative years. And then he had to be...

[20 : 33] He had to go off to, like, boarding school. I don't know if that's a good analogy. I don't suppose it is, really. But he was taken into the palace where he had to learn a different language.

He had to wear different clothes. And he had to learn a completely different worldviews, a different religion, from what he had been taught at the time of his very young years.

It must have been incredibly strange for Moses. And it must have been incredibly difficult for his mother to have that happen. But it was either that or lose him at the very beginning. So she chose that.

And she was glad that she was able to make that provision for him. But during those years, they were crucial in his formation, the formation of who he was as a person.

And never, ever underestimate the power and the ability of a child to understand. You think that, well, my son, my daughter is only 10. He's never going to understand.

[21 : 34] Don't kid yourself for a moment. You're amazed. We have two grandchildren living with us right now. My daughter and two grandchildren. It is incredible how much a 10-year-old understands and perceives.

And so here are the formative years of Moses' life. And here is this golden opportunity for Moses' parents to make sure that he knows who he belongs to.

He belongs to the people of God. That he knows the history of how God created the world and how God spoke to Abraham and Isaac and Moses, the history of Joseph, all the stories.

And they made as much provision for him as they possibly could to ground him in the truth. And that is the fantastic opportunity that not just Joe and Susie have, but that you have as a congregation with the children that you have.

It's a wonderful opportunity. Now, that doesn't mean that every single child that grows up in the covenant community is going to actively choose the gospel for themselves.

[22 : 49] Sadly, some of them don't, at least so far. The story's not finished. And if you're praying for your children who have now left home, and as such have not professed Jesus, and in fact they appear to have rejected everything that they were, or at least most things that they were taught in their youth, in their Christian environment, then you carry on praying.

Don't give up. The story is not finished yet. Let me ask you, if you are a child who has been brought up in a Christian environment, you've been brought up to know the Bible, you've been brought up to know the Lord Jesus, you know that you need to be born again, you need to come to faith in Jesus, then is this not your opportunity to take that step?

To come to Jesus, to listen to Him, and to ask His forgiveness for all the wrongdoing that there has been in your life, because that's what He promises to do.

What an opportunity we have. Sooner or later, of course, in any family, a child reaches the point where they have to leave home, and where parents have to leave the child to the providence of God, and that's exactly what happened in Moses' case.

Whatever he had learned in his formative years, there came the point where he had to leave, and according to the story, he took some steps and made some decisions that are highly questionable at first.

[24 : 37] Moses wasn't perfect, just like I'm not perfect, and you're not perfect, and our sons and daughters are not perfect, and sometimes they will make mistakes. We have to leave that to the providence of God, but God, what Moses discovered was that God had gone before him.

Wherever he went, when he fled to Midian, in order to get away from the danger of Egypt and the king that sought his life, he discovered that God was waiting in Midian for him.

God is incredibly patient, and he will choose the right moment, and he did choose the right moment to confront Moses in the burning bush and says, right, Moses, this is the time.

You need to go back, because I've got a job for you to do. In the strange providence that we think is so mysterious and twisted and contorted, we don't understand it.

Nobody's ever understood the way in which God works, and yet God does work, and he will work, and he'll continue to work, and he'll continue to bring people to himself.

[25 : 55] Moses reached that point in his life where he had to make a choice. The choice was between the voice that said, come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

If anyone will come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. Or the voice that said, you live in the palace, you've got your life worked out for you, you'll never have to lift a finger, you'll be surrounded by luxury and riches and ease and glory your whole life.

He chose the former. He chose to suffer the ill treatment of the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.

And that, of course, is always the call of the gospel. Even today, 2,000 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, the gospel invitation goes like this, that Jesus died on the cross to take away our sin.

He calls us and invites us and indeed commands all of us today to come to him, come to know him and follow him and love him. And that command is as applicable to the covenant people of God as it is even if you're here for the first time from the outside.

[27 : 29] The invitation is the same whether you were brought up in a Christian home or whether this is the first time you've ever heard the Bible. God's invitation is free and it is genuine.

The door is open. Jesus has died and risen again to welcome you into his kingdom if you will come. That is what baptism signifies.

It signifies the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit. God's power to wash away our sin. And every time we witness the sacrament, our minds should automatically be fixed on the cross where Jesus gave himself for us and rose again.

So let's let's renew our commitment to what we are as a church, as God's community of people and let's make sure that we keep that promise to pray for Caleb and all of the children who grow up within our bounds because God will hold us to account because of the marvelous privilege that he has given to us.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for every opportunity that we have to reflect on the gospel and we thank you that we are not just a group of hearers but that we are a group of people who are active in our prayer life and in our worship and we want once again to pray for Caleb as he grows up and as he hears your word and as he discovers life, we want to ask that he will know you and that he will follow you and love you all the days of his life but we pray that for all of the children who are growing up right now within the congregation.

[29 : 28] We pray that as they go to Sunday school that they will be thrilled by what they hear. We pray that the Holy Spirit will draw them to a personal relationship with Jesus and we pray for those who have grown up and have left home.

We pray especially for those who haven't as yet come to a personal faith in Jesus and we pray once again for them that you will open up their hearts and that they will hear your voice and that they will come to Jesus as their Savior in his name.

Amen. Amen.