

Exodus 2: Let Your Life Speak

Exodus: Out of Slavery
Week 2: February 15, 2015

Intro/welcome

Great week to join us, we're second week of a brand new series in the book of the Bible called Exodus
it's the second book of the Bible, a couple of thousand years before Christ

In the Bible, this Exodus story is one of the most important events that happens
because it's the FIRST place where the nation of Israel as a group and collectively meet God.

And what you find is that throughout the Bible, this Exodus story gets echoed and cited over and over and over again

Including and especially Jesus who will re-enact this story several times in his life and in many ways will be the perfect fulfillment of this Exodus story

Last week in Exodus 1 we started with the king of Egypt looking around and seeing all these Israelites in his land and he freaks out and enslaves them
and he declares that all Hebrew baby boys should be killed at birth

And we met Shiphrah and Puah, two brave midwives who are two of my heroes in the Bible who fear God more than they fear the King and they do not do what he commands
and we talked about how God invites us OUT OF slavery to life-stealing fear and into the freedom of the fear of the Lord that enables us to act wisely and brings life and blessing to us and all those around us.

All of this sets the stage for what we'll see here today as we pick up the Exodus story

Now my whole family is musical—my mom is a professional choir director, I've got musical genes and professional musicians on both sides of my family

Somehow those genes just blipped and skipped right over me.
But I've picked up a few things along the way

And one of the things that I learned along the way is that in SOME classical pieces of music if you've got a piece at the very opening that's called an overture

And at the outset of a 17th century opera piece what you'd get was some music and two characters from the opera would come out and would have a brief dialogue that would introduce the major themes to be explored in the opera

Today we're going to read the overture in Exodus—this one chapter of Exodus that's going to introduce about four or five themes that are going to be played out all throughout this book

Now, along with that, we're also going to help all of us wrestle with the question of what should I do with my life?

This question doesn't go away for most of us, does it?

We regularly ask and re-ask this question, what should I do with my life, what's the next step for me, what's my next career move

For some of us it's what should I do after the kids leave the house.

For others we're looking at retirement and trying to decide what to do with this unique transition in our lives

BESIDES sitting around eating bon-bons and watching America's Funniest Home Video re-runs.

Today, as we see the overture to Exodus and specifically the overture to the life of a very important character in the Bible named Moses

we're going to see how God works in OUR lives to help us to know and understand what he might have for us to do with our lives.

So if you've got a Bible, turn with me to Exodus chapter 2, again, it's the second book of the Bible and we're a couple thousand years before Christ.

The king of Egypt has issued an edict that all Hebrew baby boys are to be killed at birth, and then we get this story:

Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, ² and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. ³ But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

Okay, so pause here—in this moment in this story, you've got one of the most heartbreaking thing for any parent to have to do: to have to give up their child and not know what might happen to them

One commentary I read said that given that the river bank was so regularly frequented by women who were either bathing or washing clothes it was very likely that the baby was going to be found

Floating this baby on the Nile was a bit like leaving your child on the doorstep to a hospital or an orphanage 100 years ago—you knew SOMEONE would find them, it was really just a matter of whether or not they were good and trustworthy

So you've got this baby boy, mom can't hide him any longer, he's supposed to be thrown into the Nile, she floats him in the Nile instead
and the boy's sister is kind of trotting alongside the floating basket to see what happens

5 Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. 6 She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said.

7 Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"

8 "Yes, go," she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother. 9 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him. 10 When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses,^[L] saying, "I drew him out of the water."

Now because this book is so crucial to understanding the rest of the Bible, I'm occasionally throughout this series going to unleash my inner Bible nerd on you

Fair warning, this series will occasionally be sprinkled with serious Bible-nerdiness that I hope will help you to be able to read the Bible and see how gloriously it all fits together

And if you're here and you're brand new to all of this, some of these little Bible nerd moments might not make any sense to you, I just ask that you bear with me while I have my moment up here

And then I'll come back to get you, I promise, just sort of stick with me

So here's a Bible-nerd moment that I want to share with you that actually our associate pastor Steve Tamayo pointed out

[she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. -Ex. 2:3

14 So make yourself an ark of cypress^[C] wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. -Genesis 6:14]

This description of how the mom builds this little basket and specifically the idea of coating it with pitch

The one time we see this happening before is with Noah and the ark—God tells Noah to make an ark and coat it with pitch

So you've got two key figures in the first two books of the Bible both saved in water vessels coated in pitch: Noah and Moses

And in both cases, water was an instrument of destruction for many, many people but God moves to save someone or a small group of someones in these boats that are described in much the same way

She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water."

And of course, coming out of the Nile and into life here foreshadows what he's going to do many years later as he's going to lead the people of Israel OUT of the Red Sea no boat that time, but him and a whole nation of people will be drawn out of the sea

And this theme of being delivered by water, through water, out of water, is going to echo all throughout the rest of the Bible:

At the beginning of the book of Joshua as he crosses the Jordan into the promised land

The prophet Elijah ALSO crosses the Jordan river in dramatic fashion

Jesus has several important water events in his life, one where he crosses a lake by walking on water

but most importantly in the baptism of Jesus, which picks up on many of these Moses-like themes

And then the church for the past 2,000 years has practiced baptism as a sign of God's deliverance

Being delivered and drawn up out of the water into a completely new life is a repeated theme throughout the Bible

and it's part of why baptism is an important rite of passage in the church

When we're baptized, we're participating in God's story as he delivers US just like he delivered Noah, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and most importantly Jesus as our primary deliverer

And what happens here in this passage is that God moves to save Moses without his cooperation, without his participation

And then God positions Moses and prepares him for the work that God wants to do through him by having him be raised in the palace of the king

In the palace of the king, Moses is going to learn to read and write—which is how we get these first five books of the Bible—Moses and his team of scribes wrote all of these books

which are extraordinarily well-written and display fluency with all kinds of ancient poetic and literary devices

In palace of the king, Moses is going to get exposure get some leadership training, which will come in handy as he's leading a grumpy group of people across the desert

He's going to be very familiar with how the king operates, how the whole court of Pharaoh operates and that's going to come in handy later as well

So Moses is perfectly positioned in Pharaoh's house to learn a number of things
but also in the palace of the king, Moses is going to be a Hebrew boy among a whole bunch of Egyptians who don't like the Hebrews

And while Moses is safe and protected being raised as the son of the daughter of Pharaoh, his people are being enslaved and worked ruthlessly

And Moses is going to have to wrestle with his own ethnic identity as a Hebrew raised among and having the privileges of an Egyptian

And he's going to have to figure out how much he's willing or wanting to identify with his people who are enslaved

And all of this is unfolding over about the next 40 years, as from here Moses lives a privileged life in the household of Pharaoh until he's somewhere around age 40

And that's where the story picks up with this turning point of a story in Moses's life:
11 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.

Pause here: now Moses has been living the life of a prince of Egypt for almost 40 years at this point

And he does know that he's a Hebrew, he's probably been told either by his birth mom or by his adopted mother, he knows his brother and his sister, so he's probably visited with them over the years

And this can't have been the first time he saw his people being worked with their hard labor

When you're reading the Bible, one thing to look for is repetition—repeated words often signal the main point of what the author is trying to communicate

Here, the phrase "his own people" is repeated twice. It's not that Moses is seeing the Hebrews work for the first time

It's that THIS time, for whatever reason, he's resonating with and IDENTIFYING WITH these people, they're his OWN people.

When it comes to what moves you and I and anyone into acting on someone else's behalf, IDENTIFYING with them is the most important thing

Moses here has this moment of identifying with his people who are in need.

And this identifying himself with his people in slavery compels him to do something about it:

12 Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. 13 The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, "Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?"

14 The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must have become known."

15 When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian

About three years ago I was in the throes of making a major life decision—I was trying to decide if I would pursue the lead pastor position at Chatham Community Church

I was working as a supervisor in a campus ministry, managing and directing about 8-9 staff on a bunch of different campuses here in North Carolina

and it had only been a year and a half but I could tell it just wasn't a good fit, and I was trying to figure out if this position here would be

If I made this move, I'd be moving from primarily supervising and coaching full-time campus ministers, sort of one-step removed from front-lines of ministry

And I'd be moving back to the front-lines of building a community of Christ-followers and Christ-seekers and Christ-considerers

And I'd be doing THIS every week: speaking and teaching; something that I'd done occasionally regularly in my ministry but I'd never done it week in and week out

And one of my biggest questions and one of the search team's biggest questions for me

was would I be able to speak and teach every week? Would I be good at it?

And more importantly would it be good for everyone else who would have to suffer through what I had to say each week?

And as I was in this discernment process, a wise friend of mine recommended that I read a book that was called "Let Your Life Speak."

The book was actually annoyingly written and maddening

But his key premise was actually pretty helpful, so I'll save you the trouble of having to suffer through it and give you the good stuff

and what he suggested was that over the course of our lives, God is at work in the desires of our own hearts and in our circumstances to show us who he wants us to be and what he wants us to do

And that part of what we need to do at key points of decision-making for our lives is step back from the particulars of that specific decision and let our lives speak to us
more specifically start to pay closer attention to how God is trying to speak to us through the various experiences in our lives
which then helps us to make good decisions for the future

So I'm reading this book and I'm starting to ask God to give me ears to hear how he would speak to me if I looked back through my life

And one of the things that came back to me was when I was in early elementary school, like kindergarten or 1st or 2nd grade
going to small Baptist church in Newport, Rhode Island

I can vividly remember sitting in a pew and looking up at our pastor behind his big Baptist pulpit and I don't know exactly how this was phrased in my head

But I remember vividly thinking something like "I think I'll be doing that some day" or "I wonder if I'll be doing that some day"—that could be me!

Fast forward A bunch of years later in high school I was president of our church youth group and on youth Sunday they perhaps foolishly let me give the sermon
my youth pastor was very helpful between services and very encouraging, he said to me, "Alex, your content is PRIMO, you've got great things to say! Just one thing: SLOW DOWN!"
Let your life speak, right?!?

But perhaps the most significant experience I had as I was considering whether or not God was calling me to a work where the most public part of it would be communicating weekly

Was my senior year of college, I got a phone call in my dorm room from an acquaintance of mine named Daniel Vandergriff.

Daniel Vandergriff was someone who I knew okay, we were not close or in the same social circles

But he was a student leader in a different Christian campus ministry and he was responsible for booking speakers every Thursday night for their meetings

And when he called he told me that he'd been praying about who to invite to come and speak for their next open spot in a couple of weeks, that God had literally given him my name.

Someone I didn't know that well. And the general policy was that they didn't have student speakers. They almost always had a local pastor come from the outside community

But God had given him my name, and so he was calling me to ask if I'd speak for his Thursday night meeting

So I did, and it went great, and I got great feedback, people probably told me to slow down again.

So far as I know, nothing happened that particular night that changed anyone's eternal destiny

But I think that event was for me: looking back on that event that was an overture in my life, that God was sounding a key note of the work he wanted me to do

Moses here has this "let your life speak" moment as he kills this Egyptian. Because Moses is a deliverer.

Moses has been created by God to deliver people who are under oppression
his major life's work and why people are going to make bad movies about his life 4,000 years later
is because he's got this freakish gifting from God that has been hard-wired into him to be a deliverer like just about no one else in all of history

And his IMPULSE here is spot on: HIS people, that HE'S identifying with, are being mis-treated in vicious ways and something MUST be done about it

And MOSES is just the person to do it. His impulse is God-given and the work of delivering the Hebrew people is ALSO God-given

BUT this is not the way, THIS is not the time, THIS is not how it's going to be done.

And ESPECIALLY after the week we've had here in Chapel Hill with the killing of the Muslim students, we have to clearly state that what Moses does here is wrong

Moses acts wrongly and prematurely on the right impulse; he will be the one to deliver God's people but it will be in God's timing, in God's way, in God's power
He is impulsive and too hasty and there are consequences.

Let me ask you: have YOU ever done what you think is the right thing but done it in the wrong way or in the wrong timing? What happens when we do that?
We make a mess! That's what happens!

Ever see some elementary school kids playing double-dutch with jump-ropes? What happens if the person jumps in too early? You get all tangled up in it!

That's exactly what happens with us when we get impatient and jump in too early, before it's God's work and God's timing for us

Sometimes we identify the right need, the right issue, the right thing that we're supposed to be the one fixing

but we get impatient and get the timing wrong and/or we do it in the wrong way and what happens is we get all tangled up in it

This is exactly what happens to Moses. He prematurely does the right action of deliverance in the wrong way, and as a result HE gets all tangled up in it

The very next day, he again tries to deliver, this time it's one Hebrew from another, and he is rejected by his own people

This launches another major theme found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy

in spite of Moses's giftedness and humility the people will regularly reject and re-reject his leadership

And so Moses flees to Midian to escape Pharaoh, and here's where God's going to do a long, important work in Moses, here's what happens next:

15 When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well. 16 Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's flock. 17 Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock.

Notice here, again, Moses the deliverer, this time his impulse is controlled a little bit and he doesn't get quite as crazy with the shepherds as he did with the Egyptian

But here we see that even in a foreign land, even as a displaced man, this same impulse is in Moses and it's been given by God to be used for God's purposes.

18 When the girls returned to Reuel their father, he asked them, "Why have you returned so early today?"

19 They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock."

Notice here that the girls call Moses an Egyptian—he's just been driven out of Egypt BECAUSE he's taken a radical step to give up his Egyptian identity and identify with his own people the Hebrews, forfeiting all this luxury and privilege

But now he's been rejected by BOTH the Hebrews AND the Egyptians and as he flees, these women amplify about Moses what is true:

he's a man without a clear identity, without a people and without a home

Dad, however, is less concerned about the inner world of Moses' ethnic and cultural identity, he gets down to business:

20 "And where is he?" Reuel asked his daughters. "Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat."

21 Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. 22 Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom,^[c] saying, "I have become a foreigner in a foreign land."

So a strange thing happened as I let my life speak three years ago or so and as I continued to reflect on the path that God led me down

That event of God speaking my name to my acquaintance Daniel Vandergriff to have me come and speak

Was followed by my going to work for a campus ministry where I only spoke maybe 8-12 times a year.

The most important parts of my work weren't the public speaking parts, they were behind the scenes stuff like mentoring and training students

I spent most of the next 16 years doing other things, growing in other ways, developing other skills and growing up emotionally and spiritually and intellectually

Public speaking hadn't been the primary thing I'd been called to lead with for most of the past 16 years

which was why it was a question mark as I was applying to serve here

But the more I thought and prayed about that, the more I realized that if I'd been given a microphone and told to go and speak as much as I could at age 22, it would have been a train-wreck

Because God had given me a very good gift but if my character didn't develop to be large enough and strong enough to wield this gift faithfully then it could easily turn into a curse for me and for everyone else around me.

When you see a Christian leader in those headlines, it's often someone who's very gifted who's character and faith just couldn't keep up with their giftings

But this isn't just true for religious professionals, it's true for all of us:

when our gifts are disproportionately large compared to the content of our character and the depths of our faith

the result is we're a small child running around with a very large and very dangerous weapon

Doors will be opened because of what we can do with the gifts that we have but because we can't wield them with the character and faith required to use them appropriately, we will end up killing Egyptians—we will almost always act selfishly or impulsively

We will cook the books. We will lie on our reports. We will not be able to make hard and self-sacrificial decisions. Or we will exploit our relationships and use people—we will have ethical, relational, or moral failure

Many of you work for bosses and companies and managers who have tremendous leadership gifts but do not have the character or the faith to steward those gifts well

My friends, God has given YOU great and wonderful gifts

But if our character and our faith is not well-matched for the opportunities and gifts and capabilities that we have, it very often results in failure on any number of levels

So in my own story God signaled in the overture that he wanted me to speak and teach, but then he gave me great work to do that would develop me in other skill areas and more importantly would develop and grow my character

So that when the time came to be up-front week in and week out

I would remember that it's not about what I say up here that matters the most but how much integrity I have with the rest of my life that counts the most.

Moses is going to spend 40, yes 40! Years in Midian, while God deepens his character, steeps him while he patiently watches over sheep

So that when his time comes to serve and to lead and to be this world-renowned, famous deliverer, he will do so from a deeper center and a more mature character.

Being in Midian isn't the end of the Moses story, he's not being put out to pasture, he's not being forgotten or neglected or put on the shelf or punished

he's being seasoned, tutored, trained, deepened, made wiser and more pure for the work ahead

so that he might steward his tremendous gifts and the tremendous pressures he will face with courage and patience and fortitude.

In this overture here at the beginning of Moses's life, when we let Moses' life speak, we see a number of places where God's speaking and themes that get introduced at the very outset:

-God will deliver Moses through the waters--and beyond Moses, God will deliver us, too through the waters

-Moses will be equipped in Pharaoh's house for the work he'll be given to do

everything from leadership training to politics to the education that he gets
-Moses is a deliverer—in God’s timing and in God’s ways he will deliver all of Israel
-Moses will be rejected, tried, and re-rejected by his people throughout their journey
-Moses will battle with impatience (this comes up big at the end of Moses’ life)
-He’ll spend 40 years watching stupid sheep, which won’t be that different from herding dumb Israelites through the desert for another 40 years!

And I’ve shared with you some of how at a critical moment in my own life, I stepped back and saw how my life has spoken

What about you? How does your life speak?

If you listen to your life, what would you hear God saying about how you’re wired, what he’s made you to do, what work he might have prepared in advance for you to do?

Some questions/prompts:

1. What did you want to be when you were a kid?
 - a. Unwrap the package to the impulses underneath

Sometimes it’s not the job itself but the type of work that matters, the nature of what that job was that was attractive to you
and we have to be open to God steering us into a different way of expressing those same impulses.

For example, Teacher: maybe not working in a classroom but nurturing, encouraging, building up kids or teens

Are there other ways that you might express those same impulses in a slightly different package, a different delivery device?

2. What problems or opportunities consistently drawn to?
3. What opportunities over years consistently come your way un-asked for?
4. What Egyptians have you killed along the way? Mistakes you’ve made in following your impulses but acted prematurely?

This past week I did this—started digging up around some places where I made some mistakes in my work and some of it was painful to think about

But I asked God to help me to see what the impulses were and then asked him to show me if they were good and given by him or if it was just me being stupid

And it was really good to have the Lord help me to look through and see some things maybe in a little bit different light

Dig up a few old dead Egyptians, look over some of your mistakes

Those might be signs of what God WANTS you to do but he wants you to be patient and let him unfold his plan in his timing and for it to be delivered in his way.

5. Are you currently in Midian? Feeling like you've shelved your dreams/passions/interests or your dreams have been shelved for you?
 - a. How leverage this time to deepen your character and your faith?
 - b. Don't get too comfortable in Midian & be open to when God tells you it's time to move

Spoiler alert: Moses will RESIST when God tells him it's time to go and do and be the deliverer he is MADE to be and he actually WANTS to be

Because "hey, I tried that already and it didn't work out so well!"

And at some point it's easier to tend sheep in Midian than to walk up to Pharaoh in all his might and power and tell him that he needs to let God's people go or he'll pay for it

It's easier to get comfortable and settle for a lesser version of who God wants you to be than it is to live a fully alive life taking risks for God

So if you're in Midian, don't get too comfortable! Go to work in the areas where God wants to shape your character and form you more fully, be open to what he wants to do in you

And be ready to move and act and when he would call you to move and act, to take some sort of risk.

In double-dutch, there is a bad or wrong time to jump in. But there is also the right time, the right rhythm, the right pace, the right window

And if you've tried before to jump in and gotten all tangled up and it hasn't worked, you can easily jump to the wrong conclusion: I'm never doing that again, I'm never going to try that again.

And in SOME cases, that might be the appropriate application, that might be the message God is trying to send to you

But in OTHER cases, that's the exact WRONG take-home lesson. It's not NEVER but rather it's IN GOD'S TIMING

And if and when it's the right time to jump in, and God's telling you, "I want you to jump in NOW! THIS is your time!"

Then don't freeze! Don't watch! Don't let that pass you by because you got comfortable on the sidelines watching!

Be open to the fact that the same God who has maybe sent you to Midian for a purpose, sent you in a different direction for a season of refining and deepening your character and your faith

Might in fact be telling you it's time to do what HE has made you to do and what YOU wanted to do in the first place

Finally, one word of warning: when you step back to listen to your life speak just recognize that when we do so most of us have something we either WANT our life to say or DON'T want our life to say

Be aware that we're always going to be tempted towards projecting our hopes and dreams or fears as we look back over our lives, so:

6. Name ahead of time and RELEASE what you want or don't want your life to be saying to you

If we can prayerfully name that before the Lord, he can help us to not fall into the trap of self-fulfilling prophecy or self-defeating avoidance of what he's trying to say to us.

In the first two chapters the stage is set for Moses to become the deliverer God has made him to be and to lead the people out of slavery in Egypt

But in order for Moses to lead the people out of slavery in Egypt, Moses has to be delivered from the slavery of his own giftings and passions outstripping his character and his faith

And so we'll leave him here this week in Midian for about forty years before God's done preparing him for the work he's given him to do

And in the mean time, I want to invite you into your own journey this week of letting your own life speak as to what God might want to do in and through you, too.