

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, September 3, 2017**

AN ALIEN IN A STRANGE LAND

Exodus 2:11-25

There is a giant gap in the biography of Moses in the Bible, not unlike what we find (or don't find) in the New Testament Gospels concerning the childhood of Jesus. Of the four Gospels, only Matthew and Luke give accounts of the birth and early years of Jesus, but even they tell us very little about His growing up years (Matthew 1:18-2:22; Luke 2:1-52).

In the case of Moses, the opening verses of Exodus 2 (1-10) tell of his birth and the decision of his parents to hide their baby boy as long as they could, refusing to obey the edict of the Pharaoh, who had ordered all baby boys born to Hebrew mothers to be drowned in the Nile River. We are also told of the divinely-orchestrated discovery of the baby in a waterproof basket in the Nile by the daughter of the Pharaoh, who then hired Moses' mother Jochebed to nurse him until he was weaned, at which time "she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son" (2:10).

That's all the Bible tells us about the early years of Moses, except for what Stephen tells in Acts 7:22, that, as we would expect, "Moses was educated in the best schools in Egypt" (*MSG*) and "was powerful in speech and action" (*NIV*).

That's all the Bible says. The account in Exodus 2 jumps immediately from the time Moses goes to the royal palace to live with the daughter of Pharaoh as a toddler to after he has grown to be a man (2:11). The next thing we know, Moses is 40 years old (Acts 7:23).

Which is when he came to what we talked about last Sunday: A fork in the road that would have major consequences for his life.

One way or another, at some point – we don't know when or how – Moses must have become aware of his Hebrew heritage. Even though ancestry.com wasn't around to help him, he must have figured out that he was not really Egyptian but Hebrew, and that the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob enslaved in Egypt were, as verse 11 says, "his own people."

This presented Moses with a huge dilemma. He was, for all practical purposes, the son of the daughter of Pharaoh. He was the Prince and pride of Egypt. Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian, wrote that because the Pharaoh had no son and heir, Moses was being groomed as his successor to the throne of Egypt. As he grew into manhood, though, Moses began to identify with the Israelites in the suffering, oppression, and injustice they experienced as slaves in Egypt. When the combination of his compassion for the Hebrew people and his anger toward their Egyptian oppressors reached the boiling point, Moses took matters into his own hands. After looking to see that no one was watching, he killed an Egyptian taskmaster who was mistreating one of the Hebrew slaves, and then buried him in the sand (2:11-12).

Applaud Moses for his social conscience. Affirm him for his sense of justice and his defense of the oppressed. But don't applaud his action. Killing the Egyptian in anger, and then trying to hide what he had done, was not the answer. Not God's answer. Nor God's time.

Moses thought what he had done was a secret. He thought nobody knew. It didn't take long for him to realize he was wrong. The next day he went out among the slaves again and this time tried to stop a fight between two Israelites, only to be rebuffed by one of the slaves, who said to him: "Who do you think you are? Are you going to kill me the way you killed that Egyptian yesterday?" (2:14, *MSG*)

At that moment, Moses realized that word was out and he was going to be in big trouble. He was right about that, because when word reached Pharaoh, he was so furious he wanted to kill Moses. In the eyes of Pharaoh, Moses was not only a murderer but, worse, a traitor.

Moses did what most of us, I think, would do under the circumstances. He fled. He ran for his life. He got out of Dodge as quickly as he could and didn't look back. He kept going until he reached the land of Midian, a barren, hot, arid desert region east of Egypt in the Arabian Peninsula. It was a long way from the palace of Pharaoh. In more ways than one.

Do you see how much like us Moses was in the way he responded to being found out? Or how much like Moses we are? Before he killed the Egyptian, what did Moses do? Verse 12 says he looked both ways to make sure no one was watching. He wanted to make sure nobody would know. Then he hid the body by burying it in the sand. Then, when he realized he had been found out, what did he do? He ran and hid out in Midian.

THE HIDING REFLEX

The hiding reflex is the classic human response when we do wrong. It goes all the way back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. After they ate the forbidden fruit from the tree in the Garden, what did they do? They covered their nakedness, and they hid. They tried to hide from God, which is a foolish thing to do, because you can't hide from God. There is nothing you have done and nothing you can do that is hidden from God. He sees it all. He knows it all.

But our natural impulse is to hide. We try to hide the truth about ourselves, the truth about our past, the truth about things we've done, the truth about our failures, from other people. Mark Twain, a keen observer of human nature, said it this way: "We're all like the moon. We have a dark side that we don't want anybody to see." Twain also said that man is the only animal that blushes, and the only one that needs to. We may blush for different reasons, but sometimes the reason we blush is because of the guilt and shame we feel for things we have done that we ought not to have done.

Some sins are easier to hide than others, because some are more easily done in secret than others. You may be struggling with a sin, a sinful habit or addiction that nobody, or almost nobody, knows about. There are probably men here today, and maybe women, too, who struggle with pornography. Probably some teens, too. It is an epidemic in our culture that has

caught millions of Christians in its evil web. The sin you hide may be cheating, or gambling, or stealing, or the abuse of drugs or alcohol, or adultery, or sex outside of marriage. You know it is wrong, but either you feel powerless to overcome it, or you don't want to overcome it, because of the pleasure you get from it, however short-lived it is.

Our natural impulse is to hide our sin and hope that no one ever finds out. But you cannot hide your sin from God, whatever it is. And there is no need to try. God sees. God knows. God cares. God loves. God forgives. God loves and forgives and saves sinners. The Bible says: "This is how God showed His own love for us: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

If there is a sin that has you in a vice-grip, secret or otherwise, if you need help to overcome a sin in your life, confess it to a brother or sister in Christ you can trust, and pray for one another, because, as it says in James 5:16, the prayers of a righteous person are powerful and effective. The blood of Jesus covers all our sins, the little ones and the big ones, the private ones and the public ones. Jesus *can* set you free.

Remember, as Chuck Swindoll says, that hiding wrong does nothing to erase it (Swindoll, *Moses*, 59). Moses couldn't erase or undo his wrongdoing. Hiding the Egyptian's body in the sand couldn't undo the fact that Moses was guilty of murder.

IN EXILE IN MIDIAN

Moses' solution, the Scripture tells us, was to flee the wrath of Pharaoh. I doubt that he said to himself: "I think I'll go to Midian. Pharaoh will never find me there." I think he just wanted to get as far away from Egypt as possible, as far away from Pharaoh as he could get. He ended up in Midian because he happened upon a well in the desert, and where there was a well, there was usually a village nearby. He stayed in Midian because Reuel, who was also known as Jethro (Exodus 3:1; 18:1), showed him hospitality and invited him to stay with his family. Moses married Zipporah, one of Reuel's seven daughters, who gave birth to a baby boy. Moses named him Gershom, which means "a stranger there," because, as he said, "I have become an alien in a foreign land" (2:22). He who had been the Prince and pride of Egypt, the future Pharaoh, was now in exile, tending the flock of his father-in-law in the desert of Midian. It was not the way Moses expected his life to go. But life does not always go according to our plan, does it? God's plan for Moses' life turned out to be much different from Moses' plan. It would involve Moses spending 40 years in the desert. That is how long God took to prepare Moses for his life's mission.

We live today in what has been called a "microwave culture" (Swindoll, *Moses*, 85). We want everything fast. We want it now. We detest having to wait. Moses had to learn to slow down in order to get in step with God and His plan for Moses' life. Maybe that is true for some of us, too. We're constantly looking for shortcuts – in business, in relationships, in our relationship with God. But sometimes there are shortcuts. Sometimes, as it did in the life of Moses, the work of God in us, or the work of God through us, takes time. And we must give God time to work. Even if we feel like we're in a desert place.

If you have ever lived in a country other than your country of origin – I know some of you have, and some of you do right now – you know what it is and what it feels like to be an alien in a strange land. Different customs. Different traditions. Different values. Different lifestyles. Different language. It is just different from where you are from. It is not a comfortable place to be. You may feel like you don't belong. Or you don't fit in. Or you don't understand the way other people talk or act.

ALIENS AND STRANGERS IN THE WORLD

The truth is that all of us who believe in Jesus and belong to Him are, as it says in 1 Peter 2:11, “aliens and strangers in the world.” Like the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, we are “aliens and strangers on earth” who are “longing for a better country, a heavenly one” (Hebrews 11:13, 16).

Midian was not Moses' home. Neither was Egypt. Where you are from is not your home. Where you live now is not your home. Northern Virginia is not your home. America is not your home. This world is not your home. So do not become too attached to it. Do not get too attached to the things of this world. You can't take any of the stuff of this world with you. But you don't need to. God has a place, a home, for you in His kingdom that will be better than you can ever dream or imagine.

So, if you feel like you're stuck in Midian, trust that the Lord is with you, that He will not leave you there forever, that He has a purpose and a plan for you, and that there is “a better country, a heavenly one” awaiting you. In God's time.

Lord, let it be so in us. Amen.