

(During worship we saw a skit called “The Exit Plan” by Karen Carson. After being given the task of moving two million people out of Egypt, Moses goes to several travel agencies for help. With humor Moses discovers God would give him all he needed.)

Imagine being asked to do the job Moses was asked to do. What would you do to move two million people? It’s fun to speculate; amazing to think that God works through ordinary folks. Or as John Calvin says, often God works in spite of us. God has a way of leading us in the right direction and to the right action. You might think it’s easy. But even though it seems like it should be easy, it’s not as easy as it seems.

Yet it’s through the process of following God step by step that faith grows; faith that God’s at work and that God is always right there with us. As the G.O.D. agent said, “I can assure you that all arrangements will be in place,” and that “a guide will be provided.”

Are you ready to be guided? God is at work. And God has a plan to implement – through you. God is never lethargic, preoccupied, or taking a break, even though it might see like it.

So, confident, armed, and ready, Moses and Aaron set out to call on Pharaoh. But it didn’t go well. In fact, this first encounter wasn’t so easy at all. Let’s listen to the story. READ Exodus 5:1-6:1.

What do you suppose is going on? Can’t you imagine that Moses left there licking his wounds saying, “I felt so strong. It was so right. How did I get it all wrong? What in the world happened?”

Have you ever stepped out in faith and things took a definite turn – for the worse?

As you can see, Moses’ faith went right out the window. Retreating like a whipped puppy, he said, “God you haven’t helped me at all. Do you hate your people? Why did you send me? See, I told you I couldn’t do it.”

And, God doesn’t rebuke him. Instead, God says, ‘don’t worry – it’ll be fine; it’s going to happen.’ *Easy for God to say.* But God graciously reassured Moses.

What’s happening is Moses experienced the front line of the battle. Perhaps the skit shows what our expectations really are. We expect a waltz, not a war. But in this world, there’s a war going on against God. And Moses hit the first battle.

So what do you do when you find yourself in a battle? If you are wise, you learn about your enemy.

In any contest information about the opponent is useful. The winter Olympics are a good example. I guarantee you every sportsman in the games knows who they are competing against. That’s what it takes to compete well. You can be certain that each Olympian uses that knowledge to gain a better advantage.

Certainly Moses confidently expected immediate success. But he was very naïve about Pharaoh, who was not about to allow a challenge to his authority over his labor pool.

My son says in soccer, the best preparation for a game is not only to know the individual players but also to have a good mindset yourself, so you can outthink that opposing player on the spot as you come against him. Moses was not quite prepared for the power he came up against. While he started strong, “Thus says the Lord, Let us go into the wilderness to celebrate a religious festival,” after Pharaoh refused, then Moses backed off saying, “well, it’s just three days and if we don’t go the Lord will fall on us with punishment.” Pharaoh seized that information and said, “Don’t worry; I’ll punish your people myself.”

So Pharaoh, right away, got the upper hand. But, Pharaoh also revealed a lot about his character, things Moses needed to know about the man he had come up against:

- Pharaoh arrogantly disregarded God. “Who is this Lord? I don’t know the Lord.” Moses learned this man would not be guided by a moral compass.
- Pharaoh was defiant. “Nor will I let Israel go.” Egyptian documents exist that show that workmen were sometimes given time off for religious observances. So Moses’ request was not unreasonable. Pharaoh, however, was unreasonable and cold hearted.
- He was also retaliatory when he ordered the government not to issue straw, making the laborers provide their own, yet still requiring them to meet the same daily production demands.
- Pharaoh was not beyond unjust abuse of the supervisors.
- He unjustly mocked those who challenged his decision in court.

It’s important to understand his tactics.

During the American Revolution the Battle of Saratoga is said to have turned the tide of the war. During that battle, the commander of the American forces, Daniel Morgan, ordered his soldiers to aim their fire at the men with the epaulets on their shoulders. That is, Morgan wanted his men to aim for the officers of the British army, not the rank and file soldiers. His strategy was that if the officers fell they would be defeated, and so it happened. The officers were so decimated the troops surrendered.

That’s exactly what Pharaoh did. He punished the Israelite supervisors when the people did not meet their quota, which undercut Moses’ authority with his leaders.

As a result, both Moses and his leadership were profoundly discouraged and disillusioned. They had been outclassed by a ruler who would tolerate nothing and respond without conscience. But as much as it hurt, God was giving them valuable information. Moses was learning how Pharaoh thinks. Moses was learning it would require a battle.

A few months ago I met a young man who served in Iraq. His unit moved into dangerous areas of Baghdad to rout out insurgents and stabilize the area for local residents. He said when they first went in the enemy would case them out by making small attacks. Would the unit remain predictable in daily tasks, or would they change their routine? They observed how a soldier carried himself, how he held his gun. Local Iraqis saw acts of kindness as weakness but they

respected competence. It was important for the American soldiers to understand them; when they didn't understand it made them vulnerable to the enemy and less successful with the process they call "clear, hold, and build."¹

So despite the seeming failure, the knowledge Moses gained would help him deal with this powerful, ruthless man. He would have to be a lot tougher; he would have to rely on divine power. God needed Moses to understand it would take God's power.

Jesus even talked about this to his disciples when he prepared them before sending them into the surrounding cities and villages. After giving them divine power to heal and cast out spirits He said, "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." (Matt 10:16ff)

The question is, are we going outside the church to rescue people from bondage and tell them the good news? This ancient story is not simply about Israel leaving Egypt. It symbolizes our God-given assignment. Are we, like Moses, a part of the game? Have we enlisted in the battle? Or is life lived pretty much for ourselves? There's good counsel here. When you step out, how do you understand the opposition? Do you know how to make a reasonable argument for worshipping God? Or do you simply keep quiet, get discouraged, and quit? If so, the enemy gains ground and people remain enslaved.

God says don't quit – learn. That hard rejection also taught Moses about God.

For God was not the least bit intimidated by this proud, unreasonable defiant man who said he knew nothing of the Lord. Pharaoh would now begin to learn about this Lord, and eventually he will beg Moses to take the people out of Egypt to go worship their God.

The Psalmist says kings of the earth often proudly flaunt their power but they are no match for God. God laughs at them, because God can make them stand or fall. Do you know what a great gain it is to be coupled with this God?

God was already at work. His biggest work was strengthening Moses so that he would have faith. What happens in your times of discouragement? Listen to God, turn to God in prayer, and you will find that setbacks are a great opportunity in which to gain faith. From God's perspective, those times are invaluable. Let us not shrink back. Let us press on to be the church God wants us to be and live in the community 24/7 for Him. The battle is the Lord's. We may get beat up a little but in God's time He will win the day.

AMEN

¹The Wall Street Journal reports the same thing is being done in Afghanistan, A8, February 13-14, 2010.