

Series: MOTHER'S DAY - May 9, 2010

PROMISES...BUT NO GUARANTEES
Exodus 1-2

1. At the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus said something to his followers that, if you understand it, is **very** profound. He told them—before they had ever done anything—or even signed on, ***You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world.***

-In a word—He was tell us that we **all** have something we don't think we have. Know what it is? **Influence**. In the span of our lives—we influence **hundreds—thousands** of people. And the people we influence—influence others. What Sonali's story makes clear is that Moms, in particular, may have more influence than anyone else.

Sometimes we don't **think** we do—because we can't see inside the hearts of our children. We sometimes don't live long enough to see the difference we've made.

-This morning's story is about influence—influence that came from some very surprising places and changed the course of history!

2. We've been talking about God's mission to make all things right and new again. The one thing we've noticed is that sometimes the story line gets very dark—hopeless, even. And when the Book of Exodus opens, that's where the storyline is. The surprise is that when things couldn't get worse—it's the sheer courage of several women that changes everything. Let me briefly tell you how that happens.

- a. Genesis ends on a high. Joseph, great-grandson of Abraham, has gone from slave to Prime Minister in Egypt—saved Egypt—and rescued his family. They are given the best land in Egypt.

-But when the book of Exodus picks up the story 400 years later—things have gotten **very** dark. The people have multiplied—as God promised—but that has created fear in the new regime that has taken over the pharaoh-ship of Egypt. The new Pharaoh doesn't know about--or care about Joseph. Specifically, the Egyptians are afraid that this multitude will join the enemies of Egypt and turn on them. His brilliant idea is to make the Hebrews their slaves—thinking that if they're exhausted, they won't have the energy for sex. It doesn't work—they multiply even **more** quickly.

- b. As you know, fear and racism causes people to do some **very** ugly things. Pharaoh turned to infanticide. He ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill the Hebrew boys as they were being born—that culture's form of an abortion. And it's in these ugly circumstances that the courage of these women shines!

But because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the king's orders. They allowed the boys to live, too. (Exodus 1:17 NLT)

-And, of course, because of their passive resistance, these slave women get hauled before Pharaoh—who asks them why they've allowed the boys to live. They say, "The Hebrew women just give birth too quickly!"

c. So Pharaoh turns to genocide—and commands his people to simply throw any newborn Hebrew boy they find into the Nile—filled with some of the biggest crocodiles on the planet. Imagine yourself in this situation. You're **owned** by someone—who kills your children and treats you like machinery. Life is hard and degrading. In the evening, when the old men talk about history—and the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—to be a great nation and have their own land—you ask, "So, where **is** God?"

3. In the middle of all this mess, a young couple by the name of Amram and Jochabed marry and have children. When Jochabed delivers her third child, this brutal genocidal law is in place. Imagine the fear! Every time this baby cries, she muffles it—terrified that the baby will be killed.

-At three months, Jochabed realizes that she can't hide the baby any more—and comes up with a plan. But it will take God's power—and incredible courage. She knows where Pharaoh's daughter bathes in the Nile as part of her morning devotions. So she makes a papyrus basket, waterproofs it with tar—like Noah's ark—puts her baby in it—and then places it strategically in the reeds. Miriam, her oldest, watches from a distance.

-This part of the story is told in pretty sparse detail—but my guess is that the emotions ran **very** high. If all goes well, she knows she's giving her baby to an Egyptian. If it **doesn't** go well—this is the day her baby will die! Well, the baby's crying—and Pharaoh's daughter has her attendants scoop the baby out of the water. Something inside her heart warms with compassion—and she decides to adopt this little Hebrew child and calls him, **Moses**.

-So Miriam runs up and says, "I could find you a Hebrew mother to come and nurse the baby for you!" It's kind of God's joke on Egypt; Jochabed is **paid** to care for her own son! The catch is that at **some** point—he will go to Pharaoh's palace and she will likely never see him again.

a. Imagine this being your child. Pharaoh's palace is a place of **amazing** privilege. This little boy will get the **best** of Egypt—which is substantial, because Egypt is the best-educated, most powerful nation in the ancient world. As the adopted grandson of Pharaoh, He will be protected, pampered, fed—he will have the life the Israelite slaves could only **dream** of having. And he will get top level education and training in the best Egypt has to offer—which is a **lot!**

b. But the down side is—in the process he will become Egyptian. What that means is that Moses will be training in Pharaoh worship and idolatry. Not only will he have money, sex and power handed to him—he will be trained in the art of making slaves obey. In short, Moses was sleeping with the enemy!

-Now think about that for a minute. Jochabed had had this legacy passed down to her—of a God who is All-powerful. Creator of all. No limitations. But she's caught in a system of oppression—enforced by people who have nothing but contempt for you and your God. And it's **very** likely that her son will become one of the **oppressors**.

- c. So, if you know that you have a 5-6 year window of time before your son gets plopped right into wealth, privilege, pride—a pagan education—and the worship of false idols—what would you do?

-Well, we do know that Moses wrote this story down as part of a five book record—called the ***Pentateuch*** or the Book of Moses. And you get the definite sense that his Mom filled his head and his heart with the knowledge of this God—the ***Most High God*** that she loved and served. He was the God who provides; Who sees everything—who interprets dreams. And He is the God who arranges history to serve ***His*** purposes! And He was the God who had told Abraham that they would be in Egypt for 400 years until he was ready to deal with the inhabitants of the land He had promised them.

4. Years later, Moses come outs the other end of all the preparation. Jewish tradition tells us that Pharaoh's daughter raised Moses to take the throne of Egypt—which he turned down twice. According to some historical records, he was an amazing military leader—and had huge respect among the Egyptian people. Stephen, one of the first Christian martyrs, said:

“Moses was taught all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was powerful in both speech and action. (Acts 7: 22 NLT)

-Something his parents taught him in those early years must've stuck with Moses—listen to what the Book of Hebrews says:

It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin. (Hebrews 11:24-25 NLT)

- a. Did Moses ***enjoy*** the privilege he had in the palace? I'm sure he did—at least at first. But there was apparently a disconnect in his heart. His people—those who laid the foundation for his life--were the slaves who made his lifestyle possible. How do you deal with that—and reconcile that in your mind? Years later—when he was about 40 years old, Moses went to check on his people.

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. Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. 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?" 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." When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian...
(Exodus 2:11-15 TNIV)

- b. I'm not sure what Jochabed had heard of Moses—or whether she had even seen him after he was taken to the palace. But I'm sure she prayed every

day—that her influence would stick and that God would use this power to help his people.

-My guess is that the very last word she heard of him was the trouble he had gotten into—and that he was now banished. Exiled. Who knows what he even believed about God? Now his life was in God's hands.

-My guess is that Jochabed and Amram, like many parents, died without ever seeing or hearing about Moses—or the deliverance God had promised their nation. But God hadn't forgotten. God was **on mission!** And when God is engaged, the impossible becomes possible; the unusual becomes usual; and the weak, the small, the insignificant, the oppressed—**win the day!**

5. Well, this story isn't over yet. In 40 years, the story started here would crack Egypt wide open in what I believe is one of the most phenomenal rescues in recorded history. And yet it started so **small**. The fascinating thing is that Pharaoh is trying to kill off the **males**. Did anyone notice who all the heroes are at the beginning of this story?

*Well, you have the Hebrew **midwives**—who stand right up to—and give it right back to the most powerful ruler in the world.

*You have a **Mom**, Jochabed—with the courage to put her son in a little boat made of reeds and pitch—and wait for him to be adopted by Pharaoh's **daughter**.

*And you have this spunky little **girl** named Miriam, "I know where you can find a great Hebrew Mom to nurse that baby!"

-I wonder if the Pharaoh who had to deal with Moses, in retrospect, wondered, "Maybe I should've taken out the **female** babies?" I just want to close with some encouraging news for you this morning—no matter who you are, really—but especially for Moms. After all, this is Mother's Day!

- a. God's plan is **still** to make all things right; to undo all the damage that's been done by our rebellion. From the outside? That's an **impossible** task! But, then—having the most powerful nation in the world release their entire workforce of slaves? All started by the peaceful resistance of slave women?

-See, the deal is that God **will** get His work done. His **promise** was that he would bless this nation that seemed very **unblessed**. That those that treated them with contempt would be cursed. What God **didn't** do was guarantee was the timing—which happened way more slowly than anyone wanted.

-What God **didn't** promise was that His intervention would be neat, clean and anxiety free. It wasn't. It took courage. Fear is the single most common human emotion there is. These midwives were **terrified** of Pharaoh—but they feared and respected God even more. I think of Jochabed—putting this little 3 month old boy in a floating basket in a crocodile infested river—and then sending little Miriam to watch him. Fear. Anxiety.

- b. Here's my question. What is God asking you to do---for **His Mission**--that you're **scared** to do? Will you do it—even if you don't see immediate results and become a hero? God has said to people like you and me over the years—people who quiver and shake inside, “Fear not...for **I am with you!**” The promise is that when **we** are weak, God is **there**—and He is strong; that **His strength is made perfect in weakness.**

-That's the promise. But there are no guarantees. You know—that we will be seen as stunning successes. That we will get it on the first try. That the fear will disappear. No guarantees—just, “Walk toward your fear; do **My will**—I'll be with you. My advice? **Go for it!** If you don't—you'll wish you had.

6. There's another thing we, as parents, need to understand. The place where our influence will make the most difference is in our family. We, like Jochabed, have this limited window of opportunity to lay the right foundation for our children's lives. Moses' parents must've done an amazing job. Listen to what he says years later in giving the Ten Commandments:

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deuteronomy 6:6-7 TNIV)

-What if Moses had been given the phenomenal training for the throne--with no spiritual foundation? I think he would've one well-trained, bright, talented leader—who was just as ruthless as Pharaoh. Our temptation is to raise our kids to be...? Well, bright, shining **successes!** And our culture's way of ensuring that is to give them the competitive advantage—in education, sports, the arts...and on and on it goes.

-Training and education are good things; but, I'm telling you—if there is no deep, spiritual foundation—when it comes to what really, **really** matters, God's mission—they will **lose the plot!** And if you launch them into the university system or marketplace without a spiritual compass—you are not ensuring success; you are ensuring heartache.

-God's promise is: **Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it. (Proverbs 22:6 TNIV)**

That's not a guarantee. Notice what it says, “...when they are **old!**” Literally—have whiskers. If you take the time to build love, respect and worship for God into your children's hearts—it will powerfully influence the entire direction of their lives. But that will take **some** effort in a busy world like ours.

-Because, see, one day you will **have** to let them go. Remember the illustration of the float plane? The relationship with the dock is temporary. Docks are for fueling; loading. If you try to keep the plane tied when it's ready to take off—it will do a lot of damage. A child's relationship with his or her parents is described in the Bible with the word **leave**. And kids start doing that in late childhood. You and I have this window of opportunity—when our influence can have an eternal effect!

7. One final piece that is implied—but not specifically mentioned here. Prayer. God later told Moses that the **cries of his people** had reached Him. My guess is that among those cries—was Jochabed’s and Amram’s. I’m guessing that as Moses went to be trained and live in Pharaoh’s palace, there wasn’t a **day** that passed that his parent’s didn’t pray for him.

-And I want to encourage you—especially you Mom’s. Pray. Pray some more. Keep praying—and never—**never** give up! God **promises** that He works in ways we would **never** dream of—as we pray. I’d like to close with a personal story of that—if that’s okay.

-The story starts with my great-grandmother, Clarabelle Mence, born in 1865. Clarabelle was raised in a Christian family, but like a lot of people, strayed far away from God. When she found out that she was dying of cancer—that drove her back to God. In 1905, on her deathbed, she pleaded with God for the souls of her eight children--until she had the assurance from Him that, even though she couldn’t raise them, none would be lost.

-My grandmother, Lillian Mence, was four when her Mom died. And from the outside—it looked like her Mom’s prayers weren’t being answered. In fact, she married a guy named John whose spiritual influences had come from His Mom - who did séances, told fortunes—and ran a little store near Pittsburgh that catered to spiritists. But John had a friend at the steel mill who invited him to church. So he went—and took his family right up to the front seats—and that very day, found Jesus.

-Well, my Dad and his brother were old enough that they didn’t want **anything** to do with Jesus. My Dad got into all the stuff guys do—and joined the Navy during WW2. And my grandmother began to pray. One night—she woke up terrified with a vision she’d had; his ship burning in the background, him in the water. She fell on her knees and cried out to God, “Oh no! He’ll **never** be saved now!” And then these words came to her, **But God!**

-She had **no** way of knowing that my Dad’s aircraft carrier was part of a tiny fleet that was doomed—right in the middle of the most profound David and Goliath naval battle ever fought—and they were way, **way** outmatched. Unbelievably—these huge battleships just turned and **left**. Historians still shake their heads in disbelief. But the vision was accurate. My Dad’s ship was hit by a kami kaze plane, blew up, and sank in 20 minutes. And it was in the middle of that battle, that my Dad prayed, “God I don’t know if you’ll have me—but if you will—I come.”

-My Dad was transformed—and spent 54 years loving and serving others. His transformed life—transformed me. My great-grandmother Clarabelle’s children and grand-children have had their share of problems, messes—and even addictions, but none have passed from this life without falling into Jesus’ arms.

8. God has promised that we would **never** be alone. God has promised that He can and will forgive and redeem anything we bring to Him. And God has promised that when we fall on our face and pray---He works! What He asks of you and me is, “I’m **here!** Will you trust Me?”