

Exodus

Chapter 2.11-25

Life Begins at 40

15.01.2006

"Life Begins at 40." Obviously it is not true literally, but there is a lot of truth in it. Because during the 40's, the realities of life often hit hard... careers may stagnate... bodies show more signs of aging... many feel life is stale... and some feel trapped. To top it all off, hormones start messing up as bodies adjust to life's next phase.

Turning 40 is a life-changing milestone. By then ideals and dreams sizzle or fizzle, beliefs and practices are challenged, the body cannot fight gravity as well. Some make a distinct change. Some are unfaithful. Some become more selfish. Others take up a cause.

In Ancient Egypt about 4,000 years ago, 40 year old Moses felt the need to change. With a stirring sense of justice, and a passionate temper, Moses hoped to become the champion of his people. Raised in luxury, as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, he took a trip to his own people.

Exodus 2:11-12 says *"he saw their forced labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinfolk. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand."*

We are not told if God thought it was okay for him to kill the Egyptian or not. But Exodus 2 gives three responses: Moses, the Hebrews and the Egyptians.

Moses knew it was dangerous. He had checked no one was watching, then killed him. His bold return the next day shows he felt safe among the Hebrews, thinking they would applaud and justify their new deliverer.

But the Hebrews did not respond that way. When Moses spotted two of them fighting, he approached them with the confident manner of a new arbitrator or mediator. *"Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?"*

But the guilty Hebrew defended himself by throwing mud on Moses. Moses could have been squeaky clean and helpful, but his hands were

tarnished. *"He answered, 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?' Then Moses was afraid and thought, 'Surely the thing is known.'"*

Rejected, and scared, time was short. Instead of being the hero who would deliver his people, this highly placed 40 year old became a rabbit scurrying from the baying dogs. He left because of the Egyptians. *"When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well."*

Midian was a hot dusty place, and the well was the social centre as well as the quenching spot, like a pub on the Birdsville Track. We will let him sit there as we think of others who have sat at wells. In Genesis 24, Abraham's servant went looking for a wife for Isaac. He found her at a well, where she offered him and his camels a drink. In Genesis 29, Jacob, stopped at a well, and helped Rachel water her sheep. He married her sister, and then Rachel.

So, in keeping with the pattern, we might expect that Moses would find a wife. *"The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's flock. But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defence and watered their flock."*

At long last, Moses would have felt needed. Rejected by his nation, his dreams of delivering people from oppression were now realised, although only a pale shadow of what could have been. Maybe that was to be his lot in life. Unable to return home to save his people, he rescued some girls. They left him, going home rejoicing at the early mark they had received at the hands of a surprisingly helpful Egyptian.

It was not until their father forced them to return, that Moses found a new home. And he did not marry the seven of them, or even two, just one, whose name was Zipporah. His own people rejected him, but foreigners welcomed

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him and accepted his justice. He captured this feeling in the name of one of his children. *"She bore him a son, and he named him Gershom, saying, 'I have been an alien residing in a foreign land.'"*

Life began at 40 in a totally different way to what Moses expected. It began in the cosy womb of the Egyptian palace, but changed to the harshness of the desert. Hiding there, with shattered dreams of what could have been, Moses grew older, not expecting a comeback, not hoping for a second chance, simply resigned to the fact that he had blown it and his people would continue to suffer.

But back in Egypt, unbeknown to Moses, the scene was changing. There were two signs of hope in the midst of desperation. The first was that Pharaoh had died. Would the next Pharaoh keep the same 45 year anger and fear against the Hebrews, or would he treat them any differently?

And secondly, for the first time, we are told that the Israelites began to cry out to God.

In their desperate struggle against the injustice from Pharaoh, they were not privy to the news we are told. For we are given the insight that God had heard their cries of pain. It was not that they would not have been heard before, if they had called out. Rather, in the Bible, when we are told that God hears, it means that God has not only heard, but is answering.

It is the same when we are told that God remembers. It is not that He has forgotten, but that He is in the process of putting his memory into action.

"God heard their groaning and remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites and took notice of them."

The chapter ends on a positive hopeful note. The king is dead, and God is about to do something about delivering his people from their oppression.

What could it be? Come back next week and find out.

But this week, we need to think a bit more about Moses being rejected, yet accepted by foreigners. For that was a familiar trend in the gospels with Jesus. In John 4, Jesus learnt that the Pharisees were very upset with him gaining more followers, so he made a strategic move north, through Samaria to Galilee.

Passing through Samaria, he sat at a well, because he was tired. A Samaritan woman came to the well. Could this be the woman who would marry Jesus? No, but marriage was certainly discussed by them. For after they had talked about drinking water, and living water, Jesus asked her to bring her husband. She then said that she did not have one, and Jesus agreed, and told her she had had five husbands, and was living with someone else's husband now. She was amazed and went to her Samaritan town.

In town she told everyone about Jesus, and they came to meet him. Many of these non-Jews believed in Jesus, and they urged him to stay for two days. Rejected by his own people, strangers welcomed him. This did not happen just once. Repeatedly Jesus was rejected by his people, and accepted by others. Even in Nazareth they rejected him and tried to kill him, and Jesus said *"No prophet is accepted in his home town."*

The religious leaders and those who knew the Old Testament were waiting for their deliverer. They groaned in agony under the heavy hand of the oppressive Romans, and expected a warrior king to deliver them. As Jesus came into Jerusalem on a donkey, the poor, distressed and outcast welcomed him as their new king, but the leaders rejected him, too busy in their finances in the temple. So Jesus cleared the temple and restored it as a place of prayer. But they conspired to kill him.

On the cross, we see His ultimate rejection. The strong deliverer was kicked out and killed. But God had a surprise in store. *"The stone the builders rejected has become the corner stone."*

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Jesus triumphed over their short-sightedness and evil. He was the saviour God the Father chose for all people, including us. Maybe the Israelites might find a surprise when we come back next week.

Do not be surprised by God on that last day. Do not belittle or reject Jesus, only to find out how important he really is. Pray for your friends, family and neighbours who have not seen the importance of Him. Ask God to change their hearts, so that they too will receive the once-despised Jesus as their Lord.