

Moses: The Negotiations

This morning a whistle stop tour through the chapters of Exodus where Moses negotiates with Pharaoh for the freedom of the Israelites. Right lets take a quick look at where we've got to so far. It seems to me there's a lot of love and fear in the story of Moses. The love of a mother and sister leading to the miraculous rescue of baby Moses, when there was an edict to kill all Hebrew boys at birth. Moses was brought up in the Palace alongside, Pharaoh's own children. The fear when Moses ran for his life after he had murdered an Egyptian. Then years in exile, working as a shepherd while having his own family. The fear and wonder at the burning bush realising that God had a commission for him. An adventure that's about to get even more dramatic (it's sounding more like an episode of Eastenders by the minute!).

While Moses had been away, life back in Egypt, was getting increasingly tough for the Israelites. But God all seeing, all knowing was watching over his people. God spoke directly to Moses, called him by name and told him he was concerned about the suffering of his people and that God was going to rescue them. Great, but maybe not so great when you are being told you have to go back to the place you escaped from to do the negotiating!

As an aside, as you know 5 of us have just returned from the Holyland. As well as our main guide, 2 of the visits provided their own guides and I was struck by the fact that all 3 emphasised the patterns we see in the Bible. Patterns that we can see replicated through history. Godly patterns from the past that we can stand on and pray into for our own lives. For example in the story of Moses so far, as God watched over his people He watches over you. As God knew Moses by name, He knows you by name. God had his hand on Moses from birth and had plans for his future. So He has good plans for you. God is concerned when His children suffer. He will be concerned for you too.

Back to the negotiations. Before the negotiations even begin with Pharaoh Moses tries his luck negotiating with God. From the way Exodus is written it seems that God spoke to Moses in an audible voice. Moses tried to get out of his assignment. "I'm not good at making speeches Lord". Moses asked God questions. "Supposing Pharaoh asks who you are"? God replies. It's written like a normal conversation. But Moses relationship with God is anything but normal. Whilst we believe each of us has and can develop our relationship with God, and that relationship involves 2 way communication, I ,for one, have never heard the audible voice of God. If you haven't either please don't worry, from everything I've read it's a very rare event. In fact it may be something we should be relieved about! It seems that the clearer God's form of communication the harder the assignment He is setting.

So Moses reluctantly returns to Egypt meets up with his brother Aaron who has been recruited to help. First they tell the Israelites what God has said. I imagine their response something like "Yippee, the Lord has heard our cry and He is going to rescue us at last." Moses is now their new best friend.

So Moses and Aaron pluck up their courage head off to meet with Pharaoh. Now Moses may have grown up with this Pharaoh in the palace but hadn't seen each other for about

40 years. Was the meeting awkward or friendly? We don't know but it explains how Moses was able to gain an audience with Pharaoh who would have considered himself a god and would have been very particular about who he had meetings with.

Moses, heads up the delegation, and tells Pharaoh "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says let my people go"....Pharaoh replies something like "Oh really .. Who is this God of yours? I have no need to acknowledge His authority.. I am in charge here and the Israelites aren't leaving. Everyone get back to work". Something about Moses request must have really rattled Pharaoh because later that day he gave the order to make life even tougher for the Israelites. They still had to make the same number of bricks but weren't given any straw and had to gather stubble themselves. It's as if Pharaoh was throwing down the gauntlet. "Don't you dare challenge my authority". The power struggle had begun.

Things weren't going too well. With no straw the Israelites turned against Moses. Poor Moses, he must have felt very disheartened. "Norman no mates". Moses tries complaining to God " Why Lord? Ever since I went to speak to Pharaoh in your name, he has brought trouble on this people, and you have not rescued your people at all." A bit cheeky! It's OK to be real with God.

Battle commences. The series of plagues now begin. Blood, frogs, gnats, flies, on livestock, boils, hail, locusts, darkness. God shows His mighty power in ever more dramatic ways. The Lord gave Moses and Aaron the power to start and stop the plagues by holding out their staffs. Each time there was a plague Pharaoh would call for them, saying "I will let them go if you stop this." Moses and Aaron would stop the plague and Pharaoh backs down. "No, I won't let them go, back to work." Finally it was the plague on the firstborn. This was what made Pharaoh finally submit to God's authority. God said "every first born Egyptian son will die tonight". Mirroring exactly the way Pharaoh had tried to control the rise in population of the Israelites. So that night the Angel of death visits every Egyptian house but Passes over every Israeli home.

When Pharaoh wakes in the night to find his son dead, he summons Moses and Aaron and finally says "Go". So that very night, the night of the Passover, the Israelites started to leave Egypt. The Exodus had begun. There were 600,000 men plus women, children and all their animals and possessions. God rescued His people, set them free, and that is why the Passover is such an important Jewish festival, celebrated to this day. The Passover festival is important to us too because it links with Easter. The last supper of Jesus with his disciples before he was arrested, the meal that we remember every time we take communion, they were gathered in Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover.

We were saying earlier about patterns in the bible. The story of Moses part in rescuing God's people in the Old Testament is a foreshadowing of Jesus. Moses lifted up his staff. Jesus rescues us, by being lifted up the die on the cross for us.(cf John 3:14). The death of the Son opens the door of freedom for the Israelites and for us.

But the death Pharaoh's son and the death of Jesus are two very different scenarios. Pharaoh is forced by fear to acknowledge God's power and authority by having what is most precious to him taken from him. Jesus, Gods own firstborn son, willingly gives everything up for love. Jesus gives His earthly life for us, to enable us to be rescued. Has there ever been such love?