

MOSES AND THE KING OF EGYPT

INTRODUCTION

Last Sunday morning we began the Story of Moses, and together we carefully considered the four influences that fed his life, nourished his spirit, molded his character and prepared him for the great destiny that one day was to be his. Those of you who were here last Sunday will perhaps recall that in the closing moments of the sermon we followed Moses through a simple, yet profound and deeply moving religious experience in which the God of his fathers, the God he had been brought up to believe in, spoke to him personally. It was the kind of experience that made God as real to him as the light of the noon-day sun, and the outcome of it all was that he went back to Egypt where he had come from originally determined to set his people free. A real religious experience of any kind always gives the person who goes through it the sense that there is a God, that there is something over and above and beyond the swiftly changing patterns of everyday life, something unchangeable and unshakable, something "the same yesterday, today and tomorrow", and it also gives the person who goes through it the feeling that there is something to be done in the world, something worth doing, and that he is the one to do it. And so with his staff in his hand and undergirded with a sense of the Almighty, Moses returned to Egypt, to awaken his sluggish people who had been deadened by long years of servitude. Moses was now sure that God had a definite purpose for his life, just as you and I in our better moments are sure that God has a definite purpose for our lives. This is where we pick up the threads of the story this morning.

BACK IN EGYPT

Upon returning to Egypt, the first move that Moses made was to get his own people behind him. You and I wouldn't expect this to be the easiest thing for him to do. For several reasons. First of all, people are not always easily united. They do not always respond to leadership. Sometimes they are divided in their opinions of men as great as Lincoln and Gandhi. And then too remember this that Moses had left Egypt under a dark cloud of suspicion. In a moment of anger he had killed an Egyptian soldier who had been imposing upon an Israelite. And while many years had passed since this had happened, people have a way of bringing these old skeletons out of the closets in later years and in the case of Moses this could have nothing but a harmful effect upon what he was now trying to do. And finally, he had been away from Egypt for some time, a long time, something like forty years and almost a whole generation had grown up knowing nothing about him whatsoever. Added to this was the fact that he was now upon his return asking them to do the impossible. He was asking a relatively small group of pathetic slaves who had once rejected him to make a protest to the King of Egypt and demand that they be set free.

In spite of all this, therefore, it does surprise us to discover that the people did respond to his leadership and this they did almost immediately. I suppose they did this because they recognized that Moses possessed those rare, God-given gifts of leadership that people recognize and respond to almost at once. You and I have know people who have possessed these gifts, and we find ourselves responding almost immediately to their leadership. Of course, Moses himself didn't think that he had them. Remember how in the early chapters of the story he shrank from the responsibility of leadership. He made every possible excuse he could think of. First, he had no credentials and therefore the people would not accept him. Second, he didn't know enough about God. Third, he was not a good speaker. He had not learned that eloquence is not always

necessary in order for a man to be a great leader. Often it is, but not always. One thinks of the late King George of England, and of the speech impediment with which he had to live and lead. And what inspiring leadership he gave to Britain in the dark hours of the 1940's. Eloquence is not always necessary in order for a man to be a great leader. God can bring his great purposes to pass just as easily through men who do not possess the gifts of silver speech.

Slow!
It is true, is it not (and I make these general statements with some hesitation), it is true, is it not that the people who often think that they have the gifts of leadership are usually the ones who do not, and the people who assume that they do not have the supreme gifts and qualities which are required to undertake the great assignments of life are the people who often turn out to surprise you. They're the ones we need to watch!

DETERMINATION AND PATIENCE

Slow!
As I read over this story of Moses this past week, I was reminded once again that he possessed two superb gifts with which, if any leader has them, he is likely to succeed. He had both determination and patience. He had that quality of determined effort, knowing exactly what he wanted to do, exactly where he was going, believing too that God stood behind him in all that he was attempting to do. He was determined to see things through, come what may. You and I often see people who have this gift, but on the other hand they may not have the patience to go along with it; they may not have the patience to put up with the pettiness and grumblings of people and the stubbornness of resistance, to sit it out sometimes for years if needs be until the task is finished. Moses had both - determination and patience. And I suppose that every man must have both of these if he is to accomplish anything significant as he moves through life.

Yes, the first move that Moses made was a success. He got the people behind him. You have to have the people behind you if you're going to get things done. We pause in the narrative at this point to reflect upon this thought that the first move in any great undertaking is likely to be a success, not always, but more often than not it is. The first wave of enthusiasm and interest usually carries a person a long way out into the deep waters. For instance, usually the first year of marriage is a successful year, in spite of all of the adjustments that are demanded when two people come together and decide to live under one roof. The buying of a home, or the beginning of a family, the discovery of mutual joys and interests - the first year is always a wonderful and great experience. And the first year on a job is likely to be an exciting one - new faces, new experiences, new opportunities. There is no opposition. The way is clear; energies are fresh, and a man launches out into those first few months with enthusiasm and success. The first few weeks in Galilee, when Jesus appeared in all of the freshness and beauty of his life were successful. People wanted to hear him, see him and be healed by him. The opposition had not had time to rally itself. But this doesn't always last. It didn't then and it doesn't now. The honey moon ends. Dishes and diapers and drudgery come into the picture. The first wave of enthusiasm and success recedes and the stones are left on the bare beach.

Yes, the first move that Moses made was successful, but then trouble began to present itself. It begins to remind us that nothing great has ever been achieved without a struggle against all odds.

Picture the scene if you can. The Pharaoh of Egypt, the ruler of the oldest and the most powerful nation on earth at that time. The pyramids were thirteen hundred years old when Moses stood before the Pharaoh. There sat the King of Egypt in all of his power and prestige and standing before him a relatively unknown, untried, and inexperienced man who belonged to that troublesome minority group who were slaves. It makes me think of little David going out to meet mighty Goliath. It makes us think of those superb moments in human history when apparently insignificant but sincere human spirits have faced unconquerable obstacles and conquered them. As a matter of fact, when Moses first appeared before the King of Egypt and asked him to let his people go, he only made things worse for them. "Of course I will not let them go. They are too valuable to us to be released". Instead he increased their burdens. They were worse off then they had been before. And of course, this didn't enhance Moses at all in the eyes of his own people. And Moses himself was probably discouraged.

BEFORE THE KING But Moses didn't linger long in that mood. Remember he had determination and patience and this was undergirded by a strong faith in God. He continued with his campaign, and the first thing he did was something I suppose we would not have thought of doing, at least not in the same form. He employed some tricks of magic. He had a stick. He threw it to the ground and it turned into a snake. This was suppose to impress the king of Egypt. It was supposed to make him believe that the God of the universe was on the side of Moses. The only trouble was that the King of Egypt had some magicians too and they had some tricks up their sleeves. They could do the same tricks that Moses was doing. This approach to the King was therefore a complete failure. We think we can manipulate the energies of the earth by making the great atomic bombs, and we think that in this act of magic we have all of the security we need against the other nations of the world. And then like Moses, we suddenly discover that our opponents can do the same tricks, sometimes even better, and we begin to wonder whether this is our best form of security.

And then the plagues came - ten of them altogether, according to the final count. You may not have read about them in recent years; they make quite a monotonous story, not particularly inspiring, but dramatic in their own earthy way. They occupy five chapters in the book of Exodus. First frogs; then lice; then flies; then murrian that killed all of the cattle belonging to the Egyptians; then boils; then hail that beat upon the houses of the Egyptians; then the locusts, and finally darkness and death. These quite naturally were natural calamities. They are familiar disturbances in that part of the world. They were interpreted in later years as acts of God; what part God actually had in the sending of the plagues I shall leave for you to think about during the dinner hour following our service this morning.

Moses used these natural calamities to promote his cause. As you know, at the beginning or in the middle of every one of them he would go to the King of Egypt and ask him to let his people go. The King, invariably, would promise him to do it, and then when the calamities would cease and the danger withdrew, he would break his promises. Kings are human and human beings often make rash and unwise promises in moments of emotional stress and strain, promises that are too rash to be kept once the danger has disappeared. I suppose we all do this. Occasionally I find myself doing. A day or two before my wife went to the hospital to give birth to our second child, and this was only about two a half weeks ago, I promised her that after

it was all over, we'd pack up those maternity dresses and I'd give her a few extra dollars and send her off on a shopping spree. And now that the time has come, she keeps reminding me of my promise, and like ~~Moses~~ keeps after me to let her go. Well, my point is that this is the way ~~it~~ was with Moses and the King of Egypt. In a moment of stress and strain, the King would promise to let ~~Moses~~ lead his people out, and then after the stress and strain had passed over, the King would change his mind. He would try to make bargains with Moses, but Moses was smart enough and wise enough to refuse the bargains.

There is one thing that has never ceased to amaze me about this story of Moses at this particular time. In spite of all of the disappointments and discouragements that he faced at the hands of Pharaoh, he never gave up. And mind you, it was quite a list of defeats and discouragements that he faced. A lesser man might have been tempted to give up in the face of such overwhelming odds and stiff opposition. But not Moses. He finally overcame the opposition and the King of Egypt sent for Moses and gave him permission to lead his people forth out of Egypt. They were free at last.

MOSES AND THE KING OF EGYPT

Moses and the King of Egypt. It was a great struggle between two strong and persistent men. Moses had the determination, the patience and the faith that was not shattered by defeat. I think there is a King of Egypt in every person's life. To be sure, he may take many different forms. For instance, if you're a young person just starting out along life's path, it may take the form of uncertainty and indecision as to which possible direction you ought to move, in to what field or occupation, in order to find the greatest possible degree of self-fulfillment and service. Or, for instance, if you're a person involved in the medical profession, it may take the form of cancer and you may have stood before that dreadful and dreaded disease and pleaded with it in your way of scientific research that it would let your people go and it has not. The King of Egypt may take the form of illness in your own life, and you may struggle to get away from it. If you're a mother, it may be some bad influence that is gradually encircling your son or daughter and you stand before it pleading, let my child go. If you're in public life, the King of Egypt may take the form that he took in the life of Woodrow Wilson when personal enmity and public opinion were the King of Egypt that would not let his League of Nations come to pass. If you're just a plain ordinary person, it may be the self within you which keeps you from moving out in the deep waters of life - the self that caters to indifference, laziness and lack of discipline, and you beat on the door of that stubborn king time after time saying "Let me go". But the king of Egypt continues to hold you back preventing you from becoming a free person.

There is a King of Egypt in every person's life. The way a person meets that opposition will reveal the quality of his life. As you stand before your King of Egypt, remember Moses - his determination, his great patience, his spirit when up against overwhelming odds. All of these born of a vital faith in God. This kept him going. Force didn't work and it won't work with you whether you're a mother, a doctor, a politician or just a plain person. Force and violence never seem to accomplish anything permanent. Soon victory was to be theirs. This little group of enslaved peoples were on their way up and the proud, self-confident Egyptians were on their way down. These things happen in life. The right will always win. And the person who is on God's side will emerge the victor!

LET US PRAY:

We ask, O God, for the strength and the help to meet whatever opposition comes to us in life with determination and patience, trusting not in violence or force, but in the things of the spirit by which those conquer who are willing to suffer if need be, and to die, and live again. Amen

LET US PRAY:

And now may the spirit that was in thy servant Moses be in each of us, and as we go forth from this place, may we go with a sense of thy undergiring. Help us to die more and more to our own self-importance in order that we may be used by thee for great and noble purposes of freeing those imprisoned by life's experiences and bringing them to the light of thy glory. Amen