

# **SUNDAY SCHOOL FOR GROWN UPS**

## **Part Six: Moses**

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Several months ago, a good friend and I went on a bit of a nerd adventure...where are my nerds out there...We spent 5 glorious days in the badlands of South Dakota hunting for a very elusive gemstone called the Fairburn agate.

This is the kind of country we spent our time hiking through.

It's truly stunning and one of my very favorite places to be. Now you should know that this is an exceedingly rare gemstone that oftentimes will sell for hundreds of dollars. On average you can expect to walk along rock beds with your head and back bent downwards for 8-10 hour to MAYBE find one agate. Early on I had some amount of luck so here are two of my finds.

beautiful for sure but they are not the TOP SHELF kind of agate that we were really after. Time was running out and our quest was becoming more desperate. Towards the end of our trip, we arrived at a location called Indian Creek. Thousands of acres of rugged wilderness accessed only by a good 4-wheel drive truck. After 7 river crossings we felt we were sufficiently in the middle of nowhere to begin our hunt. For the next several hours we walked over countless millions of stones that looked increasingly the same. I'm not going to lie; we both were growing discouraged and tired and at one point as we were searching the creek bed I mentioned that perhaps I would pray that we would find an agate.

Ken plopped himself down in the middle of that rock bed and wondered aloud if that would really be an appropriate prayer. I paused as well, several feet away and I told him a story from a time in my life when I was a brand-new believer. I don't remember the circumstances exactly but I was with 2 pastors of the church we belonged to at the time. The older Sr. Pastor and a younger assistant pastor. The younger pastor recounted his time on the golf course the day before. He was having a terrible day of golf and at one point he paused and prayed "God make this shot go straight and true right onto the green" The Sr. Pastor interrupted his story and with great intensity said "God doesn't give a rip about your golf game" and then they proceeded to have a very robust theological argument about whether that was true or not. Does God intervene in the smallest of details of our lives. Does God delight in giving us delight in the small things. These two faith leaders came down on opposite sides of this question. And I think a question like this can influence our view of God. So there we were sitting on the river bank and tossing around the idea of whether it's ok to waste prayer on a request to find a rock. I came down on the side of the argument that God really does care about the details of our lives. That God really does show up and intervein in our lives in obvious ways. And maybe some of you in this room disagree with me and that's ok. but that afternoon a couple of months ago in South Dakota, as we finished up our conversation and stood up to continue our search, Ken looked down between his legs and found this:

This is a top of the shelf Fairburn Agate. Experts call this variety a floater agate and they are exceptionally rare. A guy could go his whole life without finding a gemstone like this.

Now I know that in the big picture a prayer for a better golf game or a prayer to find a rock is likely inconsequential to God's great purposes. They are trivial stories but I think they hint at a greater questions and a greater truth.

- Does God care about and at times intervene in the smallest of details of our lives?
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- Or is he a creator who set the universe in motion and is just watching from a distance, detached, uncaring, uninvolved.
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For 5 weeks of this sermon series, we have recounted stories from the Old Testament that detail how God does show up in the lives of his people, how he does intervene in big ways and small. But how about us?

- How does our story and God's story intersect?
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- Should we expect God to intersect our story like he does in these old testament accounts?
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Here's how I would distill that question

Are we part of the saving story of God?

I think this is an important question. It's important because if we answer that question with a resounding yes it binds us to the stories we have heard over the past Five weeks in our sermon series. It binds us to Gods overarching plan to save his people. If the answer to this question is YES then all who have put their allegiance in Jesus play a part in this cosmic story.

For the past Five weeks we have witnessed the extraordinary way these ancient stories point forward to Jesus. The Author and Theologian Graham Goldsworthy puts it this way:

*"We do not start at Genesis 1 and work our way forward until we discover where it is all leading. Rather we first come to Christ, and he directs us to study the Old Testament in the light of the gospel. The gospel will interpret the Old Testament by showing us it's goal and meaning."*

Today we are in week six of our sermon series *Sunday School for Grown Ups* and this week we will look at the story of sweet little baby Moses. For five weeks in a row, we have seen God show up in these stories in dramatic ways that leave no doubt in our minds. God showing up, he was seen, he was heard, he was felt. He acted in unmistakable ways. And wouldn't it be nice if we saw more of that today in our own lives. Wouldn't

be great if God unmistakably showed up. But that isn't usually our experience, is it? And I think that why today's story is helpful. It feels a little more like our own experience. In the story of sweet little baby Moses if we blink our eyes, we might miss God in the details.

First let's recap a little. Over the course of this sermon series, we have painted a powerful picture of God's dramatic and unmistakable intervention in the lives of His people. We have built a case for God's redemption story. For all of human history the redemption story has been a purposeful march to restore our relationship with God. To restore creation the way God intends it. How God from the very beginning stepped into the lives of his people. And so this is one of the themes weaving it's way through our series.

God steps in and the saving story marches on.

We started in week one where it all started in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. We talked about how we were made to live between the tree of life and the tree of wisdom. But we reject God's authority were banished from the Garden.

God steps in and the saving story marches on.

In week two we tackled the story of Noah. At it's core it's a story of humanity getting exactly what it wanted. The arrogance that we witnessed in the Garden spirals ever downward into sin. Noah hears the voice of God and acts in obedience and faith to build the Ark.

God steps in and the saving story marches on.

In week three we moved on to the story of the Tower of Babel: "come let us built a tower that reaches to the heavens"

And just like in the garden when Adam and Eve rejected the rightful authority of God and turned to their own wisdom we see the Tower of Babel builders repeating this same pattern.

God steps in and the saving story marches on.

In week Four we tackled the story of Abraham and Isaac: A cliffhanger story where we see father and beloved son setting out on a God given mission to sacrifice his son. Isaac the son carried the wood that would feed the fire that would consume his body. All seems lost but the hand of God holds back the knife. God himself provides the sacrifice.

God steps in and the saving story marches on.

And last week Rick recounted the life of Joseph:

God steps in and the saving story marches on.

And this brings us to our story today. In our story of baby Moses we are going to have to squint our eyes a little to see God intervening.

Up to this point all of our stories have taken place in Genesis. Today we move out of Genesis and into the second book of the Bible called Exodus. I would invite you to grab a Bible from in front of you and turn to the second book called Exodus chapter 1

And so last week we left off with the people of God in a pretty great place. They are living a comfortable life. Joseph had rose in power and has set them up to be respected amongst the Egyptians, they had their own land to farm and raise their families...Life was good.

Remember our Series Thesis?

Let's WONDER like children and READ like adults.

So today I'm going to read right out of a child's story book so we can Wonder like children

[READ]

Sweet little baby Moses. But we are also called to read like adults and there is some very adult like truths to discover. Reading like adults means we keep our eyes open for the bigger themes, that we keep our eyes open for Jesus. Reading like adults means that we don't skim over the tough stuff. And we will see that there is lots of tough stuff. Brutal oppression, racism, slave labor, a deadly river, defiance, dishonesty, the murder of babies, genocide, and an impossible kind of decision for a desperate mom. And our story starts out with trouble on the horizon.

Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.

How so very typical of humanity and politics. A new king, a new pharaoh, a new president and all the old allegiance's go out the window. With these ominous words, God's chosen people would move from prosperity to persecution. The land of Egypt which had been a promising place to put down roots becomes a nation of bondage and servitude. But God had never intended Egypt to be the promised land, He had a much different plan for that. On his deathbed Joseph had given a prophesy, a prediction. He said this

*"God will surely come to your aid and take up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. **Genesis 50:24***

because that was the deal that God made with his people and we are going to watch as God steps in and the saving story marches on. Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt marks a turning point yet again as God prepares his people to step forward in faith.

*“Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.” Exodus 1:8-10*

Like most tyrants down through history this Pharaoh has a streak of insecurity and paranoia. And while it was true that the nation of Israel continued to grow dramatically Pharaoh was looking for an excuse. The evangelist Billy Sunday once said “An excuse is a skin of a reason stuffed with a lie” Pharaoh was beating the drum of fear and war to his people to exact a program of genocide on an ethnic group he wanted power over. Nothing new here. In the sad human history of racism, we have heard all of this before. And Pharaoh’s leaders and his people were only too glad to respond to the dog whistle. Look:

*So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly. Exodus 1:11-14*

From Pharaoh’s perspective this solved both his immigrant problem and his labor shortage problem. Beaten and weary, God’s chosen people wouldn’t have the energy to rebel against Egypt. And it solved a labor problem as two large and prominent cities were built in record time. And you will note that Pharaoh was trying to strike a balance...he wanted to be rid of some of the Israelites but not all of them. Back in verse 10 it said that he feared that they would “leave the country” There is an abundance of historical records regarding the barbaric cruelty of the Egyptians. Slaves at the time were considered the property of Pharaoh and once they were branded with his royal seal they were placed in concentration camps away from their families and forced to complete massive building projects.

This is an actual depiction

from an Egyptian tomb from about this time period. It depicts all stages of mudbrick making including a depiction of the slave masters holding rods and the inscription that reads “The rod is in my hand; be not idle.”

*But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread. Exodus 1:11-14*

Did you catch that? Where else have we heard about God’s people multiplying and spreading. “Be fruitful and multiply” was the promise given to God’s people at creation. “I will make you a great nation” was the

promise given to Abraham. This too is a theme that marches through the Bible. Even under brutal oppression the chosen people continued to faithfully grow as a nation. When he realized that captivity and harsh labor was doing nothing to bring the Israelites under his control. That, in fact their population was growing by leaps and bounds it was time for plan B.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, "When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." **The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do;** they let the boys live.

Plan B was to go from slavery to slaughter by drafting the Hebrew midwives onto the killing team. But plan B was destined to fail as well and we will note that this is the first overt mention of God in our passage today and what we read is this: the Midwives "Feared God" so they disobeyed direct orders from Pharaoh. Interesting don't you think. Clearly, they had all kinds of reasons why they should fear Pharaoh yet they disobeyed because they feared God more. Can we press pause just a moment at this point? For some of us who have perhaps followed Jesus for a while the idea of Fearing God is likely not new and doesn't give us reason to pause. But if you are just putting the pieces together. If you are still thinking about what it means to follow Jesus, I suspect this may be a little confusing because likely one of the things you have heard about God is that God is love and fear seems to be at odds with that. There is a passage in the second half of our Bible called the new testament, in a portion called Hebrews that I think is helpful.

*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so **worship God acceptably** with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."* **Hebrews 12:28-29**

The author is encouraging us to "worship God acceptably" Because we are part of his redemption story, because we are receiving his kingdom and because God rules and reins in that kingdom there is an acceptable way to approach God and that is with reverence and awe. This is what is meant by fearing God.

And with these two Hebrew midwives we get our first glimpse of how God shows up in a more subtle way, in a way that I would maintain can be true for us as well. And it all centers on an awareness of the promises of God. It centers on an awareness that these captives in Egypt shared with people like Adam and Eve, and Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Joseph. That God steps in and the story of redemption marches on. These two women and likely many more Hebrew midwives defied the King because they knew the promises of God, they knew they were part of the redemption story. No over the top appearance of God here. No vision or voice of God. This is how I would describe God showing up. If you're a note taker write this down

God shows up in the faith of his people.

A faith that believes God is who God said he is and that God will do what God says he will do. These women believed God, feared God because they were rooted in the redemption story.

But fearing God and not fearing a king has its consequences in the world and so we read:

Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?" The midwives answered Pharaoh, **"Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive."**

Pharaoh's plan is falling apart again and he summons the midwives to demand an answer and this is the answer he gets "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive." What Pharaoh gets is an insult and a lie. Insult because the insinuation is that Egyptian women are weaker and more helpless than Hebrew women. A lie because, well, it was a lie. No matter how you slice it there was purposeful deception. The truth would have gone something like this. "Well your royal highness the truth is, killing babies is just plain wrong and I fear my God more than I fear you" Now the outcome of that truthful answer would have been predictable. They would not have lived to see another day of saving babies. What I know is that I am not going to provide us with an entirely satisfactory answer to this seeming contradiction of a command to tell the truth and a double handful of instances in the Bible where deceiving an enemy is encouraged and even rewarded. and while a nuanced understanding of what love requires of us is helpful we end up managing a tension. Shiphrah and Puah were lying to Pharaoh but they did so in the interest of preserving life and love. In doing so, they saved many lives including the life of our baby hero Moses who would go on to save his people. And no matter what ethical conclusion we reach, apparently the answer was satisfactory to the King and more importantly, as we will see, it was pleasing to God. Our story continues:

So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

God was kind to the midwives and all the people were blessed. And not only was God kind to the midwives but he rewarded and blessed them with families of their own. This passage also reinforces our premise that God shows up in the faith of his people. Faithful midwives and a faithful nation and God steps in and the story of redemption marches on. Although the King has let the Hebrew midwives off the hook, it doesn't mean that he is done with God's chosen people. Nope...there was a plan C

Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live."

Genocide is in full swing. Pharaoh now has enlisted his entire country in his murderous plot and baby boys were being thrown into the Nile river to drown or very likely to be eaten by the notorious Nile Crocodile. Why just the boys and not the girls? Remember that the king's plan was to command and control his nation. He still needed slave labor...he just wanted to lessen the threat and he wanted to strike a blow to the moral of the

people. It was in the middle of this treacherous time for the people of God that a young couple did a very faithful thing. Knowing God's promise to make them a great nation, they got married and they had a baby.

Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months.

Their faithfulness is forever recorded generations later in the book of Hebrews in what is known as the Faith Hall of Fame. We read

By **faith** Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

Faith and courage because you can imagine the worry and anxiety as they awaited the child knowing that if he was a boy his life would be in dire danger. And every hour and every day as they hid him worrying that he would be discovered. And desperate times call for desperate measures. So we read this:

But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

An agonizing choice as the child became too active and noisy to be hidden. An impossible choice for a mom to place her child in the Nile river where countless baby Hebrew boys had met their end through drowning or by being eaten by crocodiles. An amazing act of faith and hope that somehow, somehow God would intervene and save her baby boy. Listen...At one point in history, God's entire plan for redeeming his people was floating down the Nile river in a basket.

OK Time for a POP QUIZ:

A month ago we studied the story of Noah's Ark: Do you remember what the word ARK meant in the original language. I'll let you off the hook. The word translated to ark means a sarcophagus or sacred shrine. In Egypt, it described a storage container for idols. We discovered that in the case of Noah's Ark, God placed, not idols, but humankind made in his image. The Ark became a means of redemption for the faithful remnant. God steps in and the story of redemption marches on.

It's an unusual word borrowed from the Egyptians and it only shows up twice in all of the Bible...Where else? Right here in our story. The basket made of papyrus...same word. In faith the mother of Moses placed him in an ark. Both arks represent the same thing, God's means of saving humanity. Noah's ark saved a righteous remnant from God's judgment on humanity. Moses' ark saved the man who would lead a nation to safety after God's judgment on Egypt. Both arks are about salvation, saving those God loves. They were life preservers for everyone on board. And because it is a means of redemption a means of saving his people this



all points to Jesus and specifically to the ultimate ark, the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross is the rescue for those who are sinking in the sea of moral mess-ups. Only the cross of Jesus will get you through the rough seas of sin to the other side where we spend eternity with God.

And so the Ark with baby Moses, is set afloat on the Nile river and notice the older sister of Moses keeping an eye out to see what would happen. Not to save him but to simply observe his fate. And it doesn't look good:

Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said.

Pharaoh's daughter of ALL PEOPLE! Despite moms best efforts, the worse possible outcome. The baby basket ARK has drifted right into the hands of the enemy. But faith in our sovereign God means that God can show up in the most unlikely ways, God can even show up in the hearts of our persecutors. And God does show up, God does provide a way when there seemed to be no way and this is what it looks like:

Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" "Yes, go," she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him. When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water."

In a conclusion that is filled with irony we see that faithful people of God like the midwives, Moses parents and sister and yes even Pharaohs daughter all play a part in God's story of redemption.

The fingerprints of God are all over this story, you just need to know where to look. All these acts of faith worked in concert to place the man Moses in the perfect place at the perfect time to fulfill Gods plan to rescue and redeem his people.

It's critically important to know and trust in God's promises to his people. The Hebrews knew they were part of a story greater than themselves. It's what allowed them to move in faith,

Do you remember the questions we started with today?

- Does God give a rip about your golf game
- 
- Does God care about and at times intervene in the smallest of details of our lives?
- 
- Can we part of God's redemption story?
-

If your answer is yes or if you desperately want to believe the answer is yes then it's all about a step of faith. Faithfulness is how we become part of HIS story.

It's staggering to think that we, as deeply flawed, broken people are invited to become part of God's redemption story. The God who put the universe in motion, who breathed the stars into existence, desires YOU to be a part of the story for his glory. The promises of God are clear. You are a chosen person, part of a royal priesthood and holy nation, a person belonging to God. In every experience you go through, God is at work in your life. While it may seem like you are stuck, waiting and forgotten, God's Word says that you are part of the greatest story ever told. At every turn, God is working for your good.

If you have already given your allegiance to Jesus than his call to you is to walk in faith according to his promises. If you're here today and you're putting the pieces of faith together. If the evidence has convinced you and you feel God pulling you towards Himself, then I invite you to step right into His story today, right here and right now. It's a story that has spanned thousands of years of history. but the story isn't complete without you.

If that's you, in a minute, I'm going to pray and I would invite you to pray along with me. Say yes to moving your allegiance to Jesus, Say yes to making him the authority in your life. Say yes to become part of his story.