

MOSES: The Servant of God

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CHAPTER THREE

COME TO YEARS

“By faith, Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter” (Hebrews 11:24).

IT all befell according to the mother’s faith. The princess, accompanied by a train of maidens, came to the river bank to bathe. She saw the ark among the flags, and sent her maid to fetch it. In the midst of the little group the lid was carefully uplifted; and their eyes were charmed with the sight of the beautiful face, whilst their hearts were touched with the whimper of the babe, who missed its mother, and was frightened by its unwonted surroundings and the many strange faces.

Quickly the woman’s heart guessed the secret. The neighborhood of Hebrew huts, the features and complexion of the babe, the unlikelihood of a mother forgetting her sucking child, the sudden recollection of the stern edict which her father had lately promulgated, all pointed to the inevitable conclusion, **“This is one of the Hebrews children.”**

The sudden interposition of Miriam, who had eagerly and breathlessly watched the whole scene, with her naive suggestion of fetching a Hebrew nurse, solved the problem of what should be done with the foundling almost as soon as it could have suggested itself. Quickly the child’s mother stood before the princess, and received the precious burden from her hands; and as she did so, was there not something in her almost convulsive movement which revealed to that quick eye the secret of the little plot? Whether it were so or not, the story does not tell. But with what an ecstasy of joy would that mother pour out her heart when the door was closed on the little group? The child’s life was secure beneath the powerful protection of Pharaoh’s own daughter, who had said, **“Nurse it for me.”** And the wages which she had promised would do more than provide for all their need. God had done **“exceedingly abundantly.”**

How long the boy stayed in that lowly home we do not know - perhaps till he was four or five years old: but long enough, in any case, to know something of the perils and hardships of his people’s lot; to learn those sacred traditions of their past, which he was afterwards to weave with such majestic simplicity into the Book of Genesis; and to receive into his heart the love of the only God, which was to become the absorbing passion and pole-star of his career.

Priests, philosophers, and scholars, might do their best afterwards; but these things had been built into the growing structure of his soul, never again to be disintegrated from its fabric.

What an encouragement is suggested by this record to mothers to make the very most of the early years during which children are confided to their charge. The circumstances must be exceptional indeed under which that charge can be entrusted to others.

At last the time arrived when Thermutis claimed for her own the child whom she had rescued. He had now grown so beautiful that, Josephus tells us, passers-by stood still to look at him, and laborers left their work to steal a glance. The mother's heart must have suffered bitterly as she let her boy go into the unknown world within the great palace-gate; and very lonely must the little household have felt when the last kisses had been exchanged, the last instruction given, and the last prayer offered. What a crowd of tender thoughts, curious speculations, and eager yearnings must have followed the little nurseling of the Hebrew home, as his mother took him and brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son! But, amid all, faith rose preeminent, and believed that He who had delivered the child from the perils of the Nile, would keep him pure and sweet amid the evils and fascinations of the Court.

What a magnificent land must Egypt have been in those days of which Herodotus and the hieroglyphic records speak! The atmosphere was rainless: the Nile brought from afar the rich alluvial soil, that bore corn enough to feed the world; the banks of the river were covered with cities, villages, stately temples, and all the evidences of an advanced civilization; whilst mighty pyramids and colossal figures towered to a hundred feet in height. Seven millions of people thrived on this green riband of territory; and whilst the great mass of them were probably poor and ignorant, the upper classes, and especially the priests, were remarkable for their familiarity with much of which we boast ourselves to-day.

The cream of all this was poured into the cup of Moses. He was brought up in the palace, and treated as the grandson of Pharaoh. If he rode forth into the streets, it would be in a princely equipage, amid the cries of "Bow the knee." If he floated on the Nile, it would be in a golden barge, amid the strains of voluptuous music. If he wished for aught, the almost illimitable wealth of the treasures of Egypt was within his reach.

When old enough he was probably sent to be educated in the college, which had grown up around the Temple of the Sun, and has been called "the Oxford of Ancient Egypt." There he would learn to read and write the mysterious hieroglyph; there, too, he would be instructed in mathematics, astronomy, and chemistry, in all of which the Egyptians were adepts. There, also, he would acquire a taste for music; so that in after days he could sing glad and triumphant songs of victory, and compose odes which embalmed the history of God's dealings with his people. How wonderfully was God fitting him for his after-life! Stephen says: "**Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians**" (Acts 7:22). Much of it was undoubtedly the merest folly; but much of it, also, stood him in good stead when he became the founder of a new state.

But Moses was something more than a royal student, spending his years in cultured refinement and lettered ease. He was a statesman and a soldier. Stephen tells us that he was "**mighty in words and in deeds**":

- mighty in words there is the statesman;
- mighty in deeds there is the soldier.

Josephus says that whilst he was still in his early manhood the Ethiopians invaded Egypt, routed the army sent against them, and threatened Memphis. In the panic the oracles were consulted; and on their recommendation Moses was entrusted with the command of the royal troops. He immediately took the field, surprised and defeated the enemy, captured their principal city, the swamp-engirdled city of Meroe, and returned to Egypt laden with the spoils of victory.

Thus year followed year till he was forty years of age. Already the foremost positions of the State were open to him; and it seemed as if the river of his life would continue in the same bed, undiverted, and only waxing ever broader and deeper in its flow.

But, beneath all, another thought was always present with him, and gradually dwarfed all others as it grew within his soul. He could not forget that his parents were slaves; that the bondmen who were groaning in the brickfields beneath the lash of the task-masters were his brethren.

He never lost the thought of that God to whom his mother had taught him to pray: and in his gayest, most successful moments, when sipping the intoxicating cup of earthly success, he could not rid himself of the impression that his destiny did not lie amid such surroundings as those, but was in some way to be associated with the fulfillment of that promise which he had heard so often from his mother's lips.

Thoughts like these would often cast strange shadows over his face, which baffled those who knew him best. His foster-mother might attribute the strange tinge of melancholy to ill-health or some unrequited love. His friends and companions would rally him on his absent-mindedness. His suite would often discuss the subject of their master's depression, and wonder as to its cause.

But the mystery remained locked in his heart till his vague impressions had become settled resolves; and he broke, as gently as he might, the news to his benefactress that he could no longer hold the position to which she had raised him, or be called her son, but must step back to the lowly lot which was his by birth.

The announcement would be, perhaps, met by bitter tears and hot indignation on the part of her to whom he owed so much; but neither the one nor the other made him swerve by a hair's-breadth from his purpose. And how great a sensation must have been caused throughout the Court as the news leaked out!

In how many circles it would be discussed, and what different interpretations would be placed on it! Some would attribute it to mortification or jealousy; others to the presence in his veins of base slave-blood; others to some scheme of ultimate self-aggrandizement. All would commiserate the princess, whose kindness seemed so rudely requited. But no one guessed the strength or purity of his hidden purpose, born of God, and nurtured by His good Spirit.

I. NOTICE THE NOBLE INGREDIENTS IN THIS GREAT RESOLVE

(1) *It was made in the full maturity of his powers.*

The impulsive ardor of youth will sometimes lead a young heart to say, “**This people shall be my people, and their God my God.**” But there was nothing of that kind here. It was the deliberate resolve of a man who had seen much of life, who knew all that could be urged from every side, and who was come to years. With nothing to gain and all to lose, after thoughtful examination, he descended from the footsteps of the loftiest throne in the world.

(2) *It was made when the fortunes of the children of Israel were at their lowest ebb.*

They were slaves, were suffering affliction, and were reproached. For a palace there would be a hut; for luxury, hard fare and coarse food; for respect and honour, hatred and contempt; for the treasures of Egypt, poverty and want; for the society of the learned and elite association with the ignorant and depraved. But none of these things moved him. He counted them as the small dust of the balance. With deliberate resolution he bowed his head beneath the yoke, albeit it was rough and heavy.

(3) *It was made when the pleasures of sin seemed most fascinating.*

There is nothing gained in saying that there are no pleasures in sin. There are. The forbidden fruit is pleasant to the eye and luscious to the taste; the first steps along the broad road are over a carpet of velvet grass, enameled with countless flowers; there are notes of dulcet sweetness in the siren’s song, which ravish the heart. Temptation would have no power at all if it were not so. The keen thrill of pleasure is the bait, beneath which the great enemy of souls hides the inevitable hook. And Moses was not oblivious to all this; yet, in the heyday of his strength, in the prime of his manhood, in a court where continence and purity must have been unknown, he dared to forego it all.

(4) *It was made decisively.*

Many would have tried to retain the proud position and to benefit their enslaved brethren at the same time; to temporize between an outward recognition of Osiris, and a heart-loyalty to the Lord; to keep on good terms with court and brick-kiln. But there was no trace of this in the great renunciation which cut Moses off from the least association with the fond and fascinating associations of early life.

Are there not times in all our lives when a similar step has to be taken by ourselves? We have to die to much that is pleasant and attractive, in order to rise to our true life.

- Buried, to bear fruit; maimed, to enter life;
- Laying our Isaac on the altar, to become the leader of the faithful;
- Turning aside from the gate of a sunlit garden, to take a darker, stonier, path;
- Renouncing what others hold without rebuke, because of some high purpose which has forced its way into the soul;
- Choosing Gethsemane and Calvary and the grave, in fellowship with the Man of Sorrows;

Being willing to renounce friends, wealth, reputation, and success, and to be flung like a shipwrecked sailor on some lone shore, because of some vision that beckons us.

Those who have done any one of these can understand, as others cannot, the nobility and greatness of Moses choice.

II. THE THOUGHT WHICH LED TO IT

“By faith Moses refused “

Faith rests on promise; to her the promise is equivalent to fulfillment; and if only she has the one, she dares to count on the other as already hers. It matters comparatively little that the thing promised is not given; it is sure and certain, because God has pledged his word for it, and in anticipation she enters on its enjoyment. She weighs the things that she can touch against those which are only as yet foretold, because in her judgment the latter are as real as the former.

Thus it was with Moses.

He believed God’s promise to Abraham, that after four hundred years of bondage his people would come out; and he knew that that period had nearly expired.

He cherished a fervent belief in that promise made to the chosen people, that from their ranks the true Deliverer would arise a shadowy belief in the coming Messiah, which, notwithstanding its vagueness, he dared not forfeit.

He believed that there was a destiny waiting for the chosen people in the long future, which would throw into shadow all the pomp and splendor of the magnificent Pharaoh.

He believed that there was a recompense of reward awaiting them beyond the bourne and limit of Egypt, more glorious than the dazzling splendor of its highest rewards and honors.

He evidently believed, what he expected his brethren to believe, that God would deliver them by his hand. And it was this that determined him.

Had he simply acted on what he saw, he had never left Pharaoh’s palace. But his faith told him of things hidden from his co-temporaries; and these altered his course, and led him to act in a way which to them was perfectly incomprehensible.

He did not simply close his eyes to the claims of Egypt, and steel his nerves against the threats of Pharaoh, isolating himself with the exclusiveness of a cynic: that might have been dictated by a strong and wise policy. But he did what he did, because he saw by faith what eye had not seen, or ear heard, or the heart conceived; and these things that wealth and that reward being so much better than anything Egypt could offer, he cheerfully took the path of denial and reproach, which led to them.

See, child of God, what is within thy reach, if only thou wilt dare to deny thyself and take up thy cross!

Send the spies into the Land of Promise. Climb the delectable mountains, and put the telescope to thine eyes. And as the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory breaks on thy vision, thou wilt be prepared to count all things else, which had seemed gain, to be loss and dung, and not worthy to be mentioned in the comparison. Is the renunciation hard?

Do not forget that CHRIST is suffering with you in it all. His steps lie along this road. It is “**the reproach of Christ**” a little phase of His long suffering through the sufferings of his people.

He knows every step of the way, because He has so often traversed it in the experience of his own. There is no solace to the agonized soul so sweet as the perpetual mention of his dear name, as if it were conscious that in all its afflictions He is afflicted and that the Angel of his presence is going at its side.

And who can estimate the result? The water streams from the smitten rock; the flower springs from the dead seed; the crystal river flows from the moraine of the glacier; the bright gold emerges from the dark mine and the cleansing fires. An Exodus and the birth of a nation of freemen were the outcome of this great renunciation.

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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