

“A Daughter’s Dilemma”

Exodus 1:8-2:10

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He was a cute little three-year-old boy who could have been a part of any of our families. He was wearing a bright red shirt, navy blue shorts and shoes.

His name was Alan, but you never met him. I am confident you know of him and are aware of his story.

His picture gained world-wide attention when it was published in every newspaper and was downloaded on social media. It was the picture of this little boy lying face down on the coast of Turkey near the resort town of Bodrum.

He drowned when the boat he and his family were in capsized somewhere between Syria and Greece, the destination of these Syrian refugees. Alan’s five-year-old brother drowned, too.

When I saw the picture of this little boy lying all alone on the sea shore, I sat the paper in my lap and stared into space. I have had three children that age and have grandchildren close to Alan’s age. “What kind of world do we live in that puts innocent little children at risk?” I mumbled.

I wonder how many babies washed up on the banks of the Nile after Pharaoh ordered his citizens to throw all male Hebrews babies into the river.

This morning we are going to examine one of the most disturbing passages in scripture. It is a story that describes Moses’ birth and the first three months of his life.

I cannot imagine what it was like to live in these perilous times. To say the least, there was no shortage of fear, worry, grief and even anger. Listen as I describe the details with you.

Jacob was the third Patriarch of Israel, following Abraham and Isaac. He lived in Hebron in the land of Canaan approximately 1900 years before Jesus.

Seventeen years before Jacob died, he and his family moved to Egypt to survive the deadly consequences of a famine. They did this because Egypt had an abundance of grain in storage, and Jacob's favorite son, Joseph, was living in Egypt at that time.

Perhaps you recall the story of Joseph and the coat of many colors. This coat, given to him by his father, played a significant role in this family's unplanned journey and lengthy stay in Egypt.

Jacob had twelve sons, but Joseph had a special place in his heart. Even though Joseph was Jacob's eleventh son, he was the first one born to Rachel.

Evidently, Jacob's favoritism was enjoyed and exploited by Joseph. He shared with his brothers two dreams he had which indicated the time would come when they would bow down to him and be ruled by him. From that time on, they despised Joseph and avoided him as much as they could.

When Joseph approached his brothers one day while they were tending to Jacob's sheep, they plotted to kill him and throw him into a cistern. Only because Reuben, one of Joseph's brothers, intervened was Joseph's life spared.

Instead of killing Joseph, his brothers sold him to a group of Ishmaelites who were on their way to Egypt. When the Ishmaelites arrived in Egypt, they sold Joseph to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Joseph found favor with Pharaoh and was elevated to second in command. As a result, Joseph wielded much power and influence.

Years later some of Jacob's sons went to Egypt during a famine to buy grain. Joseph recognized them as the brothers who sold him to the Ishmaelites. He forgave his brothers for what they had done and made it possible for all his family to move to Egypt so they could survive the famine wreaking havoc upon their homeland.

Sure enough, Joseph's dreams really did come true. Thank goodness Joseph had matured by this time and helped his family instead of seeking revenge.

As long as Pharaoh was alive, Joseph's family was treated like royalty. They were considered honored guests and good neighbors, and as a result they flourished.

When Pharaoh died, everything changed. The new king of Egypt did not know Joseph, and he did not include him in his inner circle.

He also treated Jacob's family differently than the former Pharaoh had. Instead of treating the Israelites with dignity and respect, the new Pharaoh turned them into indentured

servants. Previous privileges granted to Jacob's family were revoked, and they were put to work building supply cities.

While the new Pharaoh was happy to have cheap labor, he grew increasingly concerned about the growing number of Israelites. He lived in constant fear of them aligning with one of Egypt's enemies to overthrow him. To keep this from happening, Pharaoh took extreme measures to curb the population of the Israelites in Egypt.

First, he ordered the midwives to destroy all the male babies born to the Israelite women. When the midwives refused to do this, he gave every Egyptian the right to throw male babies born to the Hebrews into the Nile.

It was during this period of unspeakable horror Moses was born. Immediately, his life was in danger.

Moses' mother did a good job hiding him for three months, but she realized any day he would be discovered and killed. To save his life, she crafted a small basket that would float and placed him in it. She carefully situated the basket among the reeds where Pharaoh's daughter often went to bathe.

When Pharaoh's daughter heard the baby crying and saw him, her heart melted. She realized it was a Hebrew child, but refused to have him drowned. Instead, she took pity on this baby and decided to raise him as her own.

Moses' mother was brought to Pharaoh's daughter and was allowed to nurse her child and take care of him. As a result, Moses' life was spared, which made it possible for him years later to become the leader who mobilized and liberated the Israelites from bondage in Egypt.

How does this story speak to us today? Last week, the more I pondered the events described in our text, the more I was drawn to the decision Pharaoh's daughter made.

Why did she spare Moses' life? After all, she was subject to her father's ruling just as everyone else. Why did she defy his order?

I know why Moses' mother spared Moses' life. I am sure every Hebrew mother of a newborn son tried to save her baby.

I can even understand the midwives looking the other way when mothers gave birth to Hebrew boys. They answered to a higher power. God would have the final word in their decisions, not Pharaoh.

Why did Pharaoh's daughter disobey her father's orders, though? I think this is worth exploring.

Often I have said when a name, a face and a story are connected to an issue or decision, it changes a person's perspective. I believe this is what happened to Pharaoh's daughter.

Maybe she had not given much thought to what her father's decision meant for the Hebrew women who gave birth to a baby boy. Perhaps she did not know any of them personally.

And then, she looked at this little baby lying so helplessly in a crudely crafted basket floating in the Nile, and reality hit hard. She probably thought of how hard this must have been for this baby's mother and what kind of courage it took to carry out this well-devised plan.

Did her father, the king of Egypt, think about the heartache and havoc this horrendous decision would cause? Did he know how painful and agonizing this would be for every family affected by this decree? Did he even care?

She cared, and she was not about to be a part of genocide. She risked her own life to save Moses.

There is something about our text I do not want you to overlook. In this story, the women are the heroes: Moses' mother, Jochebed; the midwives, Shiphrah and Puah; Pharaoh's daughter.

They are the ones God used to change the course of history. They are the ones who outsmarted Pharaoh and stood up to him. They are the ones who reflected the heart and nature of God. They are the ones who refused to ignore injustice. They are the ones who made hope visible. They are the ones who spared Moses' life.

What impact do you think their compassion and courage had on Moses? Years later, who accepted God's call to confront Pharaoh and to lead his people out of bondage? Who made hope visible when the Israelites were at the breaking point?

It was that baby who was placed inside a handmade ark and was safely lifted out of the water by Pharaoh's daughter's handmaid. Where do you think Moses got his inspiration to become an advocate? I think you know.

Good and evil have always existed side by side in this world, and they always will. Every generation lives in "the best of times and the worst of times," as Charles Dickens reminded us in his historic novel, A Tale of Two Cities.

It is up to us to decide which side we'll be on every day. Will we pursue justice or promote evil? Will we heal wounds or cause them?

Will we build up or tear down? Will we be honest and trustworthy or deceptive and conniving?

Will we be generous or greedy? Will we be kind or rude? Will we be compassionate or indifferent?

Will we be humble or arrogant? Will we be inclusive or exclusive? Will we forgive or seek revenge?

Will we promote peace or create chaos? Will we love or hate?

Will we be like Moses' mother, those brave midwives and that courageous daughter, or will we be more like Pharaoh, the kind of corrupt, greedy, power-hungry, paranoid leader who made despicable decisions that forced good people like these two midwives to lie?

I wish we could make a one-time decision to be like these heroic women and settle this issue once and for all. It doesn't work that way, however. Every day, we'll face the temptation to be more like Pharaoh than the women in our story.

When you come face to face with this choice this week, look the person in the eye who needs you to be at your best. You may be the one who saves a little boy like Alan.