

Sunday 14th Jan 2024 10.30am

We're starting a new Sermon series today.

We are going on a journey together through the life of Moses. And I'm really excited about it. The young people in Bible Builders will be going through the same stories and so, my hope, my prayer is that we, as a whole congregation, will be talking about, will be wondering together about, the big themes in our Bible. Themes like mission, calling, covenant, worship, salvation, temple, freedom purpose and many more...

The fundamentals that underpin our faith.

We'll look at background to the stories. Dig deep into scripture. Relate it to Jesus – because all scripture points to him. See how we can apply what we've learned into our day to day lives – what we call in our house group, the so what question? What difference does all this make to our lives today and to the world around us. And finally, there'll be a challenge as I ask you to do something - to Act – just do it!

As we read the scriptures together this term we will see how:

Underneath the stories there are huge truths

Underneath God's plans for the Israelites – there were greater plans to come.

And underneath our own hopes and fears – there is a life waiting for us that is so much greater as we journey with Jesus.

Let's pray.

Traditionally, Moses is believed to have written the first 5 books of the Bible – known as the Pentateuch. You know like the pentagon is called that because its courtyard has 5 sides – well the Pentateuch has 5 books. Nothing very clever in the name.

And we find the stories of the **life** of Moses in the book of Exodus, the second book of the Bible.

And the word Exodus means – escape or way out. And so, the whole book of Exodus speaks of the escape from slavery of the Israelites from Egypt and their journey to the promised land.

Back in Genesis, we read how God chose Abraham and his family, and how He poured his love and attention into this family, through Abraham & Sarah then Isaac, and Jacob and his 12 children. We hear how God worked through Jacob's dreamer son, Joseph and despite some difficult times, Joseph ended up in Egypt. At the end of Genesis, God moves the seventy members of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob's family from Judah to Egypt at the invitation of Joseph. And the people of God prospered and flourished in Egypt.

But then there is a 300-year-long interval before the start of Exodus and things are not looking so great! The Hebrews had lost their privileged status that Joseph won for them. You see, Joseph had saved Egypt from disaster under the Twelfth Dynasty of pharaohs, and his family had been rewarded with possession of Goshen, the most fertile fields in the land. Pharaoh appointed Joseph as his royal vizier and mummified his body when he died as if he were one of his own. But shortly after Joseph's death, the Twelfth Dynasty fell and five new dynasties came and went during two turbulent centuries.

And the new Pharaoh, threatened by the sheer number and prosperity of the Jewish nation, turned Goshen, the area the Israelites lived, into a huge prison camp. But Moses tells us in Ch 1 v 12 that "the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread." Pharaoh feared the Jews, and set out to suppress them. First, he tried making them work longer and harder, but they continued to breed and to prosper. Then he told the midwives to kill the baby boys, but the midwives disobeyed.

This provoked Pharaoh to order that every Hebrew baby boy be drowned in the River Nile.

Pharaoh's decree forces two Hebrew parents to take their baby boy, down to the river, and hide him in a basket among the reeds. They pray to the Lord for a miracle, and God answers.

God reveals himself as God the Saviour when Pharaoh's very own daughter finds the baby and adopts him as her son. By God's power, he had not been overheard crying during his three months in hiding, but now he cries at the right moment to move Pharaoh's daughter to compassion. His sister Miriam is hiding and appears in time for the Lord to use her to suggest Moses' mother to look after her own baby!

So, the first few chapters of Exodus set the scene for the Old Testament's great escape story. You see, Egypt in the fifteenth century BC was the world's largest prison. And it nearly broke God's people, both physically and spiritually. As we begin our story in Exodus, the Hebrews are either worshipping God in private or else giving up on him entirely to serve the bold, brash and visible gods of the Egyptians.

God had a plan to rescue his people from slavery.

He was about to set in motion a series of events that would reveal his power, reveal who he was – and he would do this **through his people**.

God working through ordinary people to bring about extraordinary things.

Who here has seen God?

I've told you this story before, but for those who haven't heard it...

There was a small child in class, drawing a picture and his teacher came over and said – hey, what are you drawing. He said I've drawn a picture of God. To which the teacher replied – but nobody knows what God looks like.. And the young boy said straight back...well now you do!

But the reality is that God is invisible and that's a problem. It was a problem in ancient Egypt and it's still a problem today. In a world where people tend to worship what they can see and feel and taste and touch, an invisible God is all too easy to ignore.

But just because he's invisible, it doesn't mean he doesn't exist! There are loads of things that we can't see but we know they are there. Like gravity, the wind, bacteria, emotions – we may not be able to see them but we know they're real because we see their effects. God doesn't have a physical body we can see now, but we can know him through the effects he had on people throughout history, which we read about in the bible and we can know him by the effects he has on us now, today, bringing hope, peace, acceptance & purpose.

The Pentateuch tells us about the invisible God's master plan to make himself seen.

Seem as more glorious than the gods of Egypt; more powerful than the gods of Canaan; and yes, more satisfying than the gods of the twenty-first-century Western world – God would be seen **through his People**, through Moses, the Israelites and down through the ages through you and me. Yes, we can 'see' God through prayer and nature, but God **acts** through his people, through you and me.

This story **is** about Moses, but, most of all, this is a story about God.

Moses was not born by accident. He was part of God's plan. God's people were hurting. They were being worked to death in the blazing sun. And so, a baby was born.

This story shows how far God plans ahead. It shows how carefully he works behind the scenes to help his people. Nobody could suspect that the baby was important. Nobody could see the plan. Moses' birth seemed unimportant, unplanned, even chaotic. Nevertheless, God was at work quietly behind the scenes, preparing, getting ready to act, getting ready to save his people.

If you ever find yourself wondering if God really exists look back and see God's saving plan for his people through Moses.

Sometimes it is hard to imagine when we read the headlines or watch the news. How can such terrible things happen if God has a plan for good? But that is what the Hebrews thought when Pharaoh was trying

to work them to death—and killing their babies. Where is God? Why doesn't he do something? But God was doing something. A baby was born, and Pharaoh couldn't kill him. In fact, Pharaoh ended up paying the baby's mother to take care of the baby. God sure has a sense of humour. God **is** at work in our world, and in our lives. He is at work in your life. He loves you so much. He has plans for you too. They might be great or they might be small; it is impossible to say. Nobody would have guessed that God had great plans for this Hebrew baby. So why not you? Sometimes we wonder about God! When things are not going well, we ask the same questions that the Jews asked in Egypt... 'Where is God?' Why isn't he doing something? Why am I sick? Why can't I find a better job? Why didn't things work out better? Why can't I find a husband or a wife? Why is the world a mess? Why? Why? Why?

And so, **as** we hold onto the humanity's cry through the ages... we turn to another miraculous baby that we heard about in our second reading. The baby Jesus.

The parallels between Moses and Jesus are not to be missed. Both were

- born in obscurity,
- born to lead people to freedom.
- Born to be a mediator between the people and God
- Born to be a moral compass to humanity
- Born to serve,
- Born to offer a hope and a future

The story of Moses foreshadowing Jesus in so many ways. Pointing towards an even greater saviour. The echoes of Jesus jumping out at us, in the Old Testament reassuring us he is still at work – he is always at work. God **is** working his purposes out over the span of time, We can't always see what he is doing in the midst of all the mess and pain of life. But the God who called his Son to the cross does not call us to an easy life. God does not promise his people prosperity; he promises us victory. And, as he showed us, the road to victory is seldom easy. The baby Jesus, was recognised by the Magi as a king, and through their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, as king, priest and one who was sent to die for us. A baby sent by God to show us the way to freedom, salvation and everlasting life. Praise the Lord.

So what does this all mean for us today? God has won the victory, God has set you free from sin and death Free to enjoy life, **if** we accept his offer. God has a plan for us and nobody in this world can defeat God's plan for us—except us. If we refuse to walk with God, he will, with great sadness, accept our refusal. And then we will have lost. And God doesn't want anyone to be lost. As we understand more how God is at work, our faith increases and we can help others see what appears to be an invisible God to be active and alive. As we look back, we see him at work, we see him though in history, we see him at work in his Son, Jesus, who lived and died and is alive again, winning for us the greatest escape of all time. Accept Jesus and you are guaranteed the victory he has already won. And, seek God's plan for your life and step into it. You see, my friends God's plans are accomplished mainly **through his people**, through you and me – so we need to commit to his plans.

Do you know God's plan for your life? Why has God placed you here, now, in this place at this time, with all that you have been through in your life so far. Why has God placed you here, now, with these people, you see around you? You are already part of God's plan. You see, He may have a small plan. He may have a big plan – but he has a plan for your life. Do you know what that plan is?

Let's pause and reflect and listen. May I encourage you to sit with your palms on your laps face upwards to receive from God....because this could be a pivotal moment in your life as you commit yourself, either for the first time or afresh to God this morning. Amen.