
Author:	Rev. Ted Gray send email...	Order Of Worship (Liturgy)
Congregation:	First United Reformed Church Oak Lawn, Illinois www.oaklawnurc.org/	(Song selections from the 1976 Psalter Hymnal, unless otherwise noted):
Title:	Living Faith in a Hostile World	137 - In Doubt and Temptation
Text:	Hebrews 11:23 (View)	438 - Thy Love to Me, O Christ
Occasion:	Regular Sunday	36 (Red) - God Moves in a Mysterious Way
Topic:	Living in a sinful world	480 - O Jesus, I Have Promised
Preached:	2021	Scripture: Exodus 1:1-2:10; text: Hebrews 11:23
Added:	2021-07-06	
Updated:	2022-01-01	

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Pastor Ted Gray
08/15/2021

“Living Faith in a Hostile World”
Scripture Reading: Exodus 1:1-2:10
Text: Hebrews 11:23

Amram and Jochebed are hardly household names today. Even among Christians those names may not be instantly recognizable as the father and mother of Moses. Yet these two seemingly insignificant people, this husband and his wife, stand as pillars of faith and are commended in Hebrews 11:23 which says, *“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.”*

Their lives of faith teach us that true saving faith cannot be quenched, even in a hostile world. Exodus 1:8 contains some chilling words as it describes how *“a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt.”* This new Pharaoh would rule with an iron hand, making life for the people of Israel a life of servitude. They would be reduced to slavery, the lowest rung on the Egyptian scale; they would suffer great abuse at the hands of the Egyptian taskmasters who were quick to crack the whip.

Amram and Jochebed, along with all the Israelites, found themselves living in a culture where the new ruler did not remember Joseph. The new Pharaoh did not remember God’s blessings on the nation, blessings that resulted from Joseph’s godly rule during one of the greatest famines the world had known.

Lest we think that Amram's and Jochebed's situation was radically different than ours, consider how few people in our society today remember the accomplishments of Joseph as they are recorded in the Bible. Americans, as well as citizens of many other nations, are biblically illiterate. They are biblically illiterate not only about Joseph, but virtually all the other people recorded in the Bible, including Jesus Christ.

I don't watch the game show "*Jeopardy*" often, but I have watched it often enough to marvel at the knowledge of some of those contestants. They know the answer to questions that I would never know the answer to. But at other times I'm shocked by how little they know when questions are asked about the Bible. Some of the contestants have so much knowledge of history, science, anthropology and other areas of knowledge, yet have so little knowledge about the Bible – little knowledge about those whose lives are recorded in Scripture, whether Joseph, Moses, his parents, or the Lord Jesus Christ and his disciples and apostles.

In that way, our culture is similar to the culture that Amram and Jochebed lived in. Yet, we are reminded by their lives that a godless culture cannot quench the true saving faith that God graciously gives to his people.

Obeying God Over Government

As we look at the faith of Moses' parents, we also see that part of true saving faith includes obeying God over the government, when necessary. The edict had gone out from Pharaoh, in Exodus 1:22, to throw every baby boy into the Nile River but to allow every baby girl to live. Although that was the clear command of the highest ruler in Egypt, Amram and Jochebed disobeyed the law of the land.

You probably noticed that they were not the only ones who disobeyed. So did the midwives. Exodus 1:15-16 describes how *"the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, 'When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.'"* But the midwives disobeyed the king, just as Amram and Jochebed disobeyed. Verse 17: *"The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the King of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live."*

There is a time to say as Peter said, in Acts 4:19, *"We must obey God, not men."* There clearly is a time for civil disobedience by Christians. The time for civil disobedience is when the government commands us to do what is contrary to the Word of God.

For the midwives, and for Amram and Jochebed, the time to disobey the government was when the government commanded that they put their children to death. For Peter and for the other apostles in the New Testament, the time to disobey the government was when they were commanded not to preach the gospel.

The example of the midwives, of Amram and Jochebed, and the apostles has a contemporary application. In the United States, as well as in other nations of the world, governmental regulations restricting churches and the spread of the gospel are proliferating. The rights of Christians are increasingly trampled while legislation is often enacted to advance the rights of other segments of society, segments that are diametrically opposed to the truths of Scripture.

As Christians, our commitment is to obey God and not the government when we are commanded to do what God forbids. The same is true when the government forbids us from doing what God commands us to do.

Third, we see from the actions of Moses' parents that true saving faith uses every opportunity to express itself. Amram and Jochebed put their lives at when they made the decision to spare the life

of Moses. They hid him for three months. If they had been discovered at any time during that period, their own lives would most likely have been taken.

When they could no longer conceal Moses, his parents took more creative measures. They coated a basket with tar and pitch to make a small ark for Moses to float in. When they put that little basket in the river with Moses in it, they stationed his sister, Miriam, to be the lookout. Verse 4 tells us how *“his sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.”*

Miriam not only served as an effective lookout, but when Pharaoh’s daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and when she saw the basket among the reeds with a little baby in it, Miriam used tact and wisdom to get Moses back to his mother. In verse 7 she asked, *“Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?”* She made it sound as though she had no relation or acquaintance with the baby, but offered to get *“one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby.”* She only had one mother in mind and that was her mother, and the mother of her little brother, Moses.

Obedience Rewarded

This account of Moses’ life being spared stands on its own as a fascinating slice of history. But it also has a number of applications for you and for me today. It teaches, first, that God rewards obedience, even in this life. How many mothers in Israel would be paid to nurse their own children? None, except for Jochebed. In verse 9, after Miriam had brought her mother to meet Pharaoh’s daughter, Pharaoh’s daughter said to Jochebed, *“Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.”*

The midwives were also rewarded. In Exodus 1:17 we read how *“the midwives feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live.”* What was the result? Exodus 1:20-21: *“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.”*

Although at times our obedience to the Lord may not seem to find an earthly reward, it always receives a heavenly reward. The author of Hebrews writes about that later in the chapter. After describing those who had great temporal blessings, *“who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised”* (33) the Holy Spirit describes how *“others were tortured, and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection.”* (35)

The certainty of our reward – both temporal and eternal – is based, not on us, but on Christ and his work on our behalf. He bore the curse of our sin, covering it with his precious blood. And he imputes his perfect record of obedience – his righteousness – to everyone who by his grace has saving faith in him alone.

That truth is evident in the Old Testament and the New. It is written between the lines of Exodus 2:3, which describes how when Jochebed could no longer hide Moses *“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.”*

The Hebrew word for *“basket”* in Exodus 2 is the same Hebrew word translated as *“ark”* in the account of the worldwide flood of Noah’s day. That is significant because the water represents the flood of God’s righteous and proper wrath against sin. The flood of Noah’s day represents the judgmental flood of God’s righteous and proper wrath. All of us, because of our sin, deserve to come under that wrath. The only way for Noah to escape the judgmental waters was by the ark.

The same was true for Moses. He was spared from drowning by being placed in the basket coated with tar and pitch – a miniature ark. And in the same way, you and I only escape the righteous and proper wrath of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Interestingly, the word for “pitch” is the same root word for propitiation. Just as pitch covered the ark and covered the basket making them secure, the propitiation of Christ – that Jesus covered our sin with his precious blood – secures the salvation of all who by his grace have saving faith in Christ alone.

In that sense, the ark was a type, or foreshadow, of Christ. Just as the ark spared Noah from destruction, and the little ark – the basket – saved Moses, so we are saved from drowning in our sin; we are spared from damnation through saving faith in Christ. It was J.C. Ryle, a gifted Anglican from another era, who pointed out, “What the ark was to Noah” – and this would also apply to Moses, and to you and to me – “Christ is to the soul.”

Peter brings that out in 1 Peter 3 where he describes the ark and the flood of Noah’s Day. He reminds us that only a few – a remnant – were saved; the rest of the world perished in their sin. And in that context, he writes: *“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”* (1 Peter 3:18). It is through saving faith in Christ alone that by God’s grace and Spirit’s power, we are spared from drowning in our sins.

Because of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, we are not only saved from sin but also our reward in heaven is great, regardless of earthly circumstances. Regardless of whether our earthly circumstances are like those recorded in Hebrews 11:33 – *“who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised”* or, if our earthly circumstances are like those in verse 35 who suffered severely – our reward in heaven is still incomparably great.

But to have that blessing you must have saving faith in Christ alone, for as Hebrews 11:6 points out, *“Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”*

The Perfection of God’s Providence

Another application: We are to praise God for all his works, including his work of providence as well as redemption and creation. One of the things that makes this biblical account so interesting is the timing of each event. Those who don’t know about the Lord’s providence would likely say, *“What a coincidence! What a lucky break that everything worked the way it did for little Moses!”*

But those who know God’s hand of providence understand that it is by God’s determination that at the very same time when a cruel leader who would oppress God’s people was coming to power, the leader who would deliver God’s people was being born. The one who would deliver God’s people, Moses, would be prepared by the Egyptians themselves. He was given the finest education, he was prepared and provided for in the palace of Pharaoh, all of which shaped him into the leader who would deliver Israel out of their bondage in Egypt.

The same is true today. Although circumstances often look bleak for God’s people, God himself is raising up the political leaders that he desires to be in place, for Romans 13:1 assures us that *“there is no authority except that which God has established.”* The political leaders may bring about the needed reforms, or they may add to the godlessness of their culture. But either way, God has a purpose and a plan for them, a purpose and plan that ultimately leads to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the ruler over all nations and all people. And that is why Romans 13:1 tells we must be in submission to the authorities. But our submission to them ends when they command us to sin.

We also see in this account how the Lord works his providential hand in even the most unusual situations. Consider, for instance, that Pharaoh’s daughter should “just happen” to come to the river

to bathe as the basket containing Moses came to rest among the reeds. We understand that was not a lucky break or an unusual circumstance, but the perfect timing of God's divine providence.

The same is true of little Moses' cry at that very time. Verse 6 describes how when Pharaoh's daughter *"opened the basket and saw the baby, he was crying, and she felt sorry for him."* There is something about a baby's cry that can soften even the hardest heart. Admittedly, sometimes it will agitate the heart, too! But so often when we see the tears from the cheeks of a little baby, our heart goes out to that baby. As we hear the cry we desire to help. This, too, was in God's providence, that the tears of the little baby, Moses, would wring compassion out of the heart of Pharaoh's daughter.

We also see God's providence at work as he uses the lowliest of people to accomplish the mightiest of deeds. He does so in order that we may truly know that he rules and reigns from heaven. Psalm 113:7-8 teaches that *"He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes, with the princes of the people."*

Likewise, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 tells us to *"consider your calling, brothers (and sisters): not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'"*

Jochebed and Amram fit the description of being *"low and despised in the world"*; they had no great social influence. They were just two of the million or so Israelites in Egypt, oppressed by Pharaoh and put into great servitude. Yet God, in his gracious providence, used them to defy Pharaoh's edict. By doing so they spared Moses, who would be a type or foreshadow of Christ. Just as Moses led the people of Israel out of bondage in Egypt, so Christ leads his people out of bondage to sin and Satan, through the desert of this life and into the promised land – the heavenly Canaan.

And as they put the life of their baby, Moses, ahead of the command of the king, God used their obedience to raise up the future leader of Israel. Moses would later confront Pharaoh over and over, as the Lord used Pharaoh to demonstrate God's power over the wicked. In the words of Romans 9:17, *"For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.'"*

If we thought more about God's providence, as well as his work of creation and redemption, how much more thankful would we be? As we sang earlier in William Cowper's well-known hymn:

You fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

And as we see God's work of providence so long ago, in a situation that seemed so bleak and dire, we can have great confidence in our Lord, even as we look at a culture in which circumstances for

Christians look increasingly bleak and dire.

But to have that confidence in God, no matter what comes up in our lives, we need to focus our faith on Christ; we are stir God's gift of faith to us, striving to have faith like that of those named in Hebrews 11. As our text says, *"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."* And Hebrews 6:12 tells us not to become lazy in our walk of faith *"but to imitate those who through who through faith and patience inherit what was promised."*

Hebrews 11 was written to reveal a glimpse of the magnitude of God's grace in giving us saving faith in Christ; and Hebrews 11 was written to give us role models. The people listed in Hebrews 11 are referred to as *"a great cloud of witnesses"* in Hebrews 12, where the opening verses tell us, *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."*

As you see the increasing hostility of our culture and world against Christianity, focus always on Christ so that you do not become weary in living out your faith and so that you do not lose heart.

Our world is becoming ever more hostile toward Christianity. There are an increasing number of people, not only on *"Jeopardy"*, but in society, in political office, and in judicial robes who are like Pharaoh.

They no longer remember Joseph. They no longer remember how he was used by the Lord to spare Egypt and the Israelites through a catastrophic famine. They no longer remember Moses, and how God used him to bring his people out of Egypt so long ago. Many no longer remember, nor do they care to remember, biblical truths concerning both God's warnings and his promises; nor do they remember the redeeming work of his Son for all who have saving faith in him. Yet many others remember those truths but detest the truths of God's Word as *"their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."* (Rom. 1:21)

As our culture becomes more antagonistic against Christianity and against biblical truths, it becomes a crucial time for people of faith like Amram and Jochebed – and people like you and me – to live out our faith without fear, trusting in God's providence to bring about the blessing he has in mind, whether temporal, eternal or both.

Amram and Jochebed are hardly household names, even among Christians. But may you and I follow their example of living out our faith in a hostile world, this week and always! Amen.

Bulletin outline:

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. - Hebrews 11:23

"Living Faith in a Hostile World"

Hebrews 11:23; Exodus 1:1-2:10

I. The faith of Moses' parents, Amram and Jochebed, teaches us that true saving faith:

- 1) Is not quenched, even in a hostile world (Exo. 1:8; Heb. 11:23)

- 2) Obeys God over government when necessary (Exodus. 1:15-2:4; Acts 4:19, 5:29)

- 3) Expresses itself creatively in every way possible (Exodus 2:2-4, 7)

II. Applications:

- 1) God rewards obedience, even in this life (Exodus 1:20-21; 2:9). The reward is based on the obedience of Christ and His work on our behalf

- 2) We are to praise God for all His work, including providence and redemption (Exodus 2:3-6)

- 3) We are to strive to have faith like that of Moses' parents, and others in "*the cloud of witnesses*" who have gone before, focusing always on Christ alone (Hebrews 12:1-3)

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