

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 410

Moses in the Bulrushes

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 11th August, 2019**

Text: *“And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink” (Exodus 2. 3).*

Moses in the bulrushes! It is one of the best-known stories in the whole of the Word of God. Even our young children know it. But beloved friends, there is deep divinity in these well-known little stories of the Word of God – Moses in the bulrushes, David and Goliath, Daniel in the lions' den. They are not just stories for young children; they are stories for aged saints. Because the point is, that God who performed these wonders in these well-known stories is *our* God for ever and ever. He is the same God. He is in heaven. He is in control. He is the One to whom we look, the One on whom we depend, the One to whom we pray. So we have these well-known stories, but surely there are things in them that touch our hearts.

Speaking personally about some of these well-known stories, they have been made exceedingly precious to me. I think of Daniel in the lions' den. Once when we were in sadness and trouble, that word: “Is thy God ... able to deliver thee?” O what a word in season! What a word of divine power that was! “*Is thy God ... able?*”

Then David and Goliath. Years ago, I was tried and tempted before preaching. I just could not think of one thing in the whole Word of God. Truly it was, I had nothing to draw with and the well was deep. It was getting towards chapel time. One of our little children, knowing I was upset, said, “Why don't you tell us about David and Goliath!” It came with such power: “The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.” That God who *did* deliver, He *will* deliver.

And then especially this word I have brought before you this morning, the mother of Moses having to take that little child and leave him beside the banks of the river. We could walk with that, because one of our little children had to go into hospital for an operation. In those days, no way could you stay with them and there was not much visiting. O how we

walked side by side with Moses' mother, Jochebed, as she took that little boy to the banks of the River Nile and left him there. And do you know, beloved friends, I could see this: she did not just place him by the River Nile. She put him straight into the hands of Almighty God, and he was never safer in the whole of his life.

O to walk with these Old Testament saints! What I am trying to say to you, beloved friends: these are not just interesting stories we teach our little children. There are vital truths in them, deep divinity in them, and we walk them out.

Well then, Moses in the bulrushes. The whole account is *the providence of God*. I said recently that years ago somebody told me, "You ought to stop more often and explain what words mean." Well, God's providence means God performing in time all those things He has purposed to do from eternity. If God has something to do, it will be done, and all the powers of sin and Satan, death and hell, can never overthrow one providence. It is a wonderful truth, the providence of God. He is in complete control. The mighty armies of heaven and earth, our life's minutest circumstance, the rise and fall of nations, the very hairs of our head, the fall of a sparrow. Divine providence – the Lord in control.

This is the wonder of it. It is an all-wise providence. The Lord makes no mistakes. It is a mysterious providence. We cannot understand His goings. His way is in the sea, His paths in the mighty waters, His footsteps are not known. But He knows what He is doing, and He is in control. For His people it is a loving providence. That well-known scripture: "And we know" – we cannot always see it, and we certainly do not always feel it, but – "we *know* that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

So may this vital truth of the providence of God be a comfort and encouragement to all of you this morning – older ones with your infirmities, those of you who are unwell, younger ones, some of you with your various burdens and cares. But to know this:

"My life's minutest circumstance
Is subject His eye."

And there is nothing too small, nothing too great to pray about. O but to be brought to feel this: "My times" – that means all my circumstances, all the

happenings in my life, today, and this coming week – “My times are in Thy hand.” One hymnwriter says, “My God, I wish them there.”

So we have this wonderful truth of the providence of God and how He exercises it for the good of His people, how He is in complete control, and especially how this was revealed in the life of Moses. But it is, “This God is our God,” and He is still the same today.

Now this was a time of crisis in the history of God’s ancient people. They had gone down into Egypt. Everything was favourable when Joseph was alive. They had the land of Goshen. They had Joseph to look after them. But we are told there was another king, another Pharaoh raised up, who knew not Joseph, and he was afraid that the Israelites were multiplying into a great nation, and really what he sought to do: he sought to exterminate them. First of all, that cruel plan that if a baby boy was born, the midwives had immediately to kill that baby, but the midwives feared God and they obeyed God rather than Pharaoh. Then he thought of this exceedingly cruel plan, that every baby boy who had been born had to be killed. It was a time when God’s people were suffering deeply. The word *rigour* is used twice – extreme cruelty, the viciousness of the cruel taskmasters, many Israelites as slaves, having to work in the burning midday sun, having to bring their tale of bricks, and things being made harder and harder so that they could not, and then being lashed by their taskmasters’ whips.

But the moment had arrived, the moment of Israel’s redemption, the time when they were going to be delivered, when the four hundred years had passed that the Lord had promised to Abraham in that mysterious vision, when a deep sleep fell on Abraham, and a horror of darkness came over him, and a burning lamp went up and down between the pieces of the sacrifice, and the Lord made Abraham that wonderful promise that after four hundred years, there would be deliverance. The four hundred years had now passed, but how could it be and who could it be?

Who was going to be this deliverer? Who was going to be the one God had appointed? How could it happen in these dreadful circumstances? And the Lord raised up Moses. So it is not just this beautiful story, but it is also part of the great work of redemption. When the Lord needs a man, that man will be there. When the Lord needs a minister, that minister will be there. When the Lord needs a pastor, that pastor will be there.

Sometimes it will be in a mysterious way, and sometimes completely unexpected, but nothing can hinder the work of the Lord.

“He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.”

So there was this house of a Levite family. They already had a daughter, Miriam, and they already had a son, Aaron. Strangely, in this chapter we are not told their names. Later on we are told the name of the father was Amram and the name of the mother was Jochebed. Do not forget that in Hebrews chapter 11, these two are among the worthies who were commended for their faith. They risked their lives, they risked everything, but we are told, “They were not afraid of the king’s commandment.” We need that spirit ourselves, and it is needed in England today, and it is certainly needed in the church of God – not to be afraid of the king’s commandment, not to be afraid of what the wicked would do.

The time came when no longer could they keep this young baby hidden in their home. Now you see the unfolding, the unravelling, the mysterious workings of God. As you follow this through, *so much hung on so little*. Beloved friends, you will find this in your life, especially looking back: so much has hung on so little. Perhaps you had a disappointment, or you could not go where you wanted to go, and you were a little bit hurt, a little bit sad. But where you did go that day, it was the appointed time when the Lord met with you. That is why He disappointed you. Or perhaps one day you had a letter come unexpectedly. Your life was never the same afterwards. Or perhaps just a meeting, or just a phone call. But as you get older, you look back over your life. One of the godly Puritans said, “He who watches providence will never want a providence to watch” – the Lord’s hand in everything, the Lord’s purpose, causing all these things to work for good and accomplishing His purpose.

So we find this godly woman. “And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes,” and she laid him in the reeds by the river. It seemed a strange thing to do. You think – a three months old baby, and you are so concerned about his welfare, and what do you do? She goes and places him by the side of the River Nile, where there was every danger from passers-by and every danger from crocodiles. Humanly speaking, it seems the worst thing she could do. The only equivalent I could suggest to you: if one of you mothers had a little baby,

and you were fearful about what was happening in the town, so you took him in his cradle and left him by the side of the motorway on the M1.

Now Hebrews 11: it was “by faith.” God led her this mysterious way, and that truth has often made me think over many years, we need to be very, very careful about judging the actions of others, especially if they are really godly people. You sometimes see your friends or family or those in your congregation. They seem to be doing strange things. Why are they doing that? Why are they going there? It does not seem the best thing. I believe with Moses’ mother; this had been a burden of prayer to her. Before she ever put him into the ark of bulrushes, she put him into the hands of Almighty God. It was really this: “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.” Now what have you got as a congregation? You have many things – some spiritual, some providential, things in the unknown way, some glad things, some sad things. “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.” Well, Moses’ mother walked that out, and the Lord did bring it to pass.

But so much hung on so little. She made an ark of bulrushes. It seems to me that would be a most skilful thing, a most difficult thing to do, and to keep the water out. How did she know how to do it? You mothers here, I do not think many of you would know how to make an ark of bulrushes, but she did. She took that ark of bulrushes and laid it by the river’s brink. She left everything in the hands of her God, but she also got her thirteen-year-old daughter Miriam to watch, to see what would happen. She knew something was going to happen; she had not a doubt of that. She was not sure what it was, but she left her daughter there to see what would happen. She was not a fatalist. There is a difference between divine providence and fatalism. She did not just put the baby there and that was it. She left her daughter to watch what would happen, and soon it did happen.

But so much hanging on so little. Almost immediately, the king’s daughter, the daughter of that mighty Pharaoh who had issued this cruel decree of slaying baby boys, came down. It was by divine appointment. It was the right time. If she had come a bit earlier, the baby would not have been there. If it had been a bit later, you do not know what might have happened. But she came at the right time. Pharaoh’s daughter – is this the right person? She obviously recognised straight away that this was one of

the Hebrew children, one that her father had devoted to destruction. Well, ought she not to have obeyed her father and thrown Moses into the river? But she did not. At the very moment when she uncovered the ark of bulrushes, the child wept. It was by divine appointment. “The babe wept.” We are told that “she had compassion on him.” But then see the unfolding of divine providence.

“His providence unfolds the book,
And makes His counsels shine;
Each opening leaf, and every stroke,
Fulfils some deep design.”

Young Miriam must have been a brave little girl, but she was led by the Spirit of God and she went up to Pharaoh’s daughter and suggested to Pharaoh’s daughter that she might like a nurse, and she could find her a good nurse. Well, you might have said it was an impertinent suggestion, but the hearts of all men and all women are in the Lord’s hand. Immediately she said, Yes. She could just as easily have said, No. So you have this wonderful happening, this unbelievable happening. “Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages.” To many people, that has been a good word under various circumstances in a providential way: “Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages.”

So you have this amazing happening when Moses’ mother has her beloved baby back with her in her own home. Not only that, but she is being paid for what she is doing. Not only that, but she has the royal authority of Pharaoh’s daughter. But beloved friends, over and above it all, she has this wonderful opportunity. How many years Moses stayed with his mother, we are not told. Some have suggested three years; some have suggested five years. But in the history of the church of God, what a blessing many godly mothers have been made to their children, even in the very early days of their infancy. So in that godly home, where faith prevailed, where the Lord was present, where the Lord was working, there little Moses was early instructed in the right way in the things of God. Those parents knew one word well: “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.”

So what have you got this morning?

“‘Cast,’ He said, ‘on me thy care;
’Tis enough that I am nigh;
I will all thy burdens bear;
I will all thy needs supply.’”

Under the Holy Ghost’s almighty, sacred influence, in those few years the truth of Almighty God had sunk into that little boy’s heart, and all the powers of hell could not remove it, because although immediately afterwards he was taken to the court of Pharaoh, a court of paganism, wickedness, licentiousness, “Grace once received can ne’er be lost, nor hell from Christ thy soul divide.” That truth remained in his heart, and under the Holy Spirit’s influence we have that amazing word: “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.” There never was a choice like that, when you think of what he gave up! He had everything there – any kind of pleasure, more lawful, more unlawful; honour – he was a great man; wealth – unbelievable wealth.

If you read Josephus, he tells us quite a lot about Moses that is not recorded in the Word of God. He tells us how he was quite an eminent soldier, and how on behalf of Pharaoh he conducted a very successful campaign. Perhaps for you young ones, you want to know who Josephus was. Josephus lived in the very early years of the gospel [c. 37 - c. 95]. He was born about the time the Lord Jesus died, and he was a Jewish historian. He has always been accounted a very good historian. He gives the history of the Old Testament. Whether all these things are definite or not, we do not know, but they are certainly very interesting. They certainly tell us many things the Old Testament does not tell us, though we must only hold fast to the Old Testament as infallible.

So no one ever gave up as much as Moses did, except our Lord Jesus. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.” “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.” So he gave it all up, and we are told, for Christ’s sake. That is an interesting word. So

many years before Jesus was born, it was for Christ's sake he gave it all up.

But in the Lord's mysterious sovereignty, he had a double preparation for his life's work: on the one hand, the teaching from his father and mother in his own home, and then as Stephen tells us in that remarkable speech in the Acts of the Apostles, "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." He had that preparation for his life's work. When he had to go forth many years later to meet Pharaoh, he was not on strange ground. The Lord had prepared him for that. So it was a double preparation. It is a wonderful truth. Some people have thought that Moses was the greatest man who ever lived, and not just from a Biblical point of view, but from every point of view. But what he was, he was by the grace of God. But the Lord who did all this for him in the beginning did not fail him.

But Moses had a great trial. After all this wonderful, mysterious beginning, and then after that most gracious choice when he was forty years of age, giving up everything for Christ's sake, and what happened? Everything went wrong. He was disappointed. His own people did not listen to him. He had to flee. Was Moses mistaken? Had it all been a dream? Was it all imagination? From when he was forty years until he was eighty years old – and his life's work had not begun – what was he doing? He was hidden away in the backside of the desert. He was doing a job that a little boy could do. This great man, a prince in Egypt, was taking a few sheep into the wilderness every day and then leading them home – until the appointed time came. The Lord did not begin to use him until he had had those years of trial, and when he was brought to feel his complete unfitness. And then the wonders of the burning bush, the revelation: "I AM hath sent me." And Moses led the redeemed people of God out of Egypt, through the wilderness, right up to the borders of Canaan.

What a subject! What a truth! I know this has been a sermon different from usual, but it touches every detail in our little lives – our own lack of wisdom, our own foolishness, our weakness, our helplessness, but Almighty God in control, and Moses' God ours.