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Profiles in Courage
Exodus 1:8-2:10

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹ He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. ¹⁰ Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land."

¹¹ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. ¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. ¹³ The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, ¹⁴ and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

¹⁵ The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ¹⁶ "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." ¹⁷ But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. ¹⁸ So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" ¹⁹ The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." ²⁰ So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. ²² Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews^[a] you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

Birth and Youth of Moses

2 Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. ² The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. ³ When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

⁵ The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. ⁶ When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said. ⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” ⁸ Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. ⁹ Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. ¹⁰ When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses,^[b] “because,” she said, “I drew him out^[c] of the water.”

The story starts about **400 years after** the great ending in Genesis, where Joseph welcomes his brothers, who sold him into slavery, to come with their families, and settle in Egypt, where they will be saved from famine.

400 years is a long time.

A lot has happened.

The Egyptians face different enemies, they are occupied by foreign invaders.

And all the while, the Hebrew people are growing in number.

So much so that when this **NEW Pharaoh** comes into power— a man who doesn’t know Joseph, and has no moral obligation to care for the Hebrews, he is **threatened by these ‘other people’, these ‘non-Egyptians’**. Nevermind that they have been living alongside one another for centuries!

This new Pharaoh, possibly Ramses II, was **CRUEL, and FEARFUL**.

He was afraid that the Hebrews might join up with a foreign power, should they be attacked again.

So he devised a plan to keep the Hebrews in their place.

He **enslaved** them, forcing them into hard labor under harsh conditions.

He made them the **enemy of the Egyptians**.

But his plan backfired, because the Hebrews only grew in number!

So Pharaoh comes up with a ***new plan***.
 And this guy is ***not the sharpest crayon*** in the box.
 He contacts two ***midwives*** who attend to the Hebrew women,
 and tells them to kill all the newborn baby boys, but let the girls live.
 Which really doesn't make much sense,
 because who will do all the labor he is demanding of the Hebrews?

This is where ***two COURAGEOUS WOMEN, two smart women,***
 come into the story and ***change the very course of history***.
Shiprah and Puah—they fear God, not Pharaoh.
 In other words, they knew what God wanted them to do,
 so they disobeyed Pharaoh's command.
 And they used his stupidity against him.

When he saw his plan wasn't working, he called them in,
 and asked why there were still Hebrew boys alive—
 And they ***shrewdly lie and tell him***, these Hebrew women give birth so fast,
 we can't get there in time to kill the baby boys!
 And the king buys their story.
 So Pharaoh comes up a new plan—***for everyone in Egypt*** to throw baby boys into
 the Nile River!

This is where ***TWO MORE courageous women, one just a child,***
 come into the story.
 The first is the mother of a baby boy.
 We know from Exodus 6:20 and Numbers 26:59 that her name is ***Jochebed***.
 And she already has a daughter, who we learn later is Miriam.

This brave mom gives birth to a little boy, and hides him for as long as she can,
 and then devises ***a plan that just might save his life***.
 Instead of throwing him into the Nile (obeying the law of the land).
 She lines a basket with pitch to keep the water out,
 And places her son into a little 'ark'—it's actually the same Hebrew word used to
 describe Noah's ark.
 And she asks big sister Miriam to hide in the reeds
 and watch where the basket goes.

Which is when **ANOTHER courageous woman** enters the story.
 An unlikely hero, the daughter of the evil Pharaoh.
 Tradition and later writings refer to her as **Bithia** in 1 Chronicles 4:18.
 She sees the little boy in the basket, and knows he must be a Hebrew baby,
 And she feels compassion.
 She decides to defy her dad, and the law of the land.

She **doesn't call Egypt's 911** to report a little Hebrew boy,
 And she doesn't push him further down the river.
 Moved with **compassion**, she rescues the baby from the water,
 And plans to take this child as her own.
 Talk about **COURAGE!**
 Her father is the one who demands babies like this be killed!

This is when BIG SISTER appears and boldly asks Bithia—
 should I get a Hebrew woman to nurse this baby for you?
 And the Pharaoh's daughter agrees—not only does she agree,
 but she says she'll put the **woman on the royal payroll** for her work!

So big sister goes and gets mom to be the nurse for her own son,
 until he is weaned, when he goes to live as Bithia's own child.
 The Pharaoh's daughter **names him Moses**,
 which means, I drew him out of the water.
 He grows up in the royal household.

So, what did we just WITNESS?

Often big Bible stories are about **God doing supernatural things—**
 like a burning bush, or parting the Red sea.

But, this is a story about ordinary people.

Doing what they knew was right!

Does this mean God isn't at work?

Or does it just mean that **God works THROUGH all of us?**

We learn in just a few paragraphs that **without these courageous,**
 disobedient women, there would be no Moses.

No liberation of the Hebrew people.

No exodus, no parting of the Red Sea, no promised land!
 Without them, there would be no Bible as we know it!
 Their courageous actions **literally CHANGE the course of history**.
 And their disobedience means that the house of Pharaoh will literally raise the
 Hebrew boy who will help liberate all the Hebrew people!

All of that, just from the courage to do what was right,
 From some great civil disobedience!

This is how liberation begins—
 with people who step out courageously and get into **'Good Trouble'**.

We just lost Congressman and civil rights activist **John Lewis**.
 Who famously encouraged people to get into 'good trouble',
 He spent his life fighting
 for voting rights and equality for black Americans.

Lewis stood up to the authorities and the laws of the land,
 to champion the lives and dignity of all Americans,
 even when it nearly cost him his life.
 While peacefully crossing the Edmund Pettus bridge in Selma,
 Lewis was **beaten**, almost to death.
 But he persisted.
 He was **arrested** numerous times in his activism.
 He knew the law of the land,
 and he knew **a greater law**—the law of **dignity for all God's children**.
 His **civil disobedience paved the way** for countless black Americans to simply
 enjoy some of the same privileges as whites.
His 'good trouble' changed the course of history.
 This ordinary man with courage and faith, changed America in so many ways, and
 his legacy continues to inspire us.

What does this say to us TODAY?

In what ways are we being prompted to follow **a greater law**?
 In what ways are we being asked to **act courageously**?

I recently heard sociologist, speaker and author Brene Brown talk about how anxiety is contagious, which makes perfect sense....
but ***courage is also CONTAGIOUS!***

One courageous act—leads to another—and another.

Think about that—what does that mean to you?

Have you ever been ***INSPIRED*** to do something courageous, because someone did something courageous for you? Or in front of you?

Where do we have the ***opportunity*** to act courageously?

To get into some ***“good trouble”***?

To obey ***a greater law of God’s goodness and grace?***

We certainly have opportunity ***to act on behalf of those in need,***
Those who are being ***marginalized,*** those who are being ***left out.***

And we have ***a MODEL for that...***in all these courageous women,
and countless other people of faith, including our Savior ***Jesus***—
who always acted on behalf of the least of these,
even when it violated the laws of the Sabbath,
or the sensibilities of the religious leaders.

Truth is, there are ***so many HEROES among ordinary people,***
Doing ***small but courageous things,*** every day.

There’s a book called ***The Butterfly Effect: How Your Life Matters,***
by Andy Andrews.

It’s all about how small actions have extraordinary consequences,
that ripple out into the world,
causing more and more people to make a difference.

For instance, a teacher might say ***an encouraging WORD*** to a student,
who then shares something encouraging with a friend,
who reaches out to smile and talk with a complete stranger,
who might just decide against committing suicide that day.

Or a teen can ***STAND UP for someone being bullied...***
which causes that person to stand up for someone else being,

and maybe that person decides to become a police officer to help more innocent people who are being hurt.

Courage is CONTAGIOUS, praise God!

How is God calling us to act in courage?

Do we have our ***eyes and ears and hearts*** open to the prompting of God's Spirit—showing us where and how to act?

Are we following God, even when that gets us into 'good trouble'?

Friends, hear the ***GOOD NEWS of the Gospel*** today:

We are people of faith,

Who say something, and do something, led by the Spirit,

And ***our courage might just be the very thing that inspires*** the next person.

And for the ***gift of contagious courage***—all God's people say, Amen.