

Grounded

Family Matters

Exodus 1:8–2:6 (Selected Verses)

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. . . .

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. . . .

22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.”

1 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.

Grounded.

During the month of August we will be looking at some biblical characters who were well grounded when they faced times of challenge and uncertainty. From them we can learn how to live grounded lives that gives us a foundation for thriving even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Join me this morning in looking at a couple who were grounded in their faith and the difference it made.

The Story.

The descendants of Abraham, the Hebrews, were resident aliens in Egypt when our story unfolds. A few centuries earlier, one of the forebears, **Joseph**, had been taken as a slave to Egypt but through some amazing acts of God was elevated to the second highest rank in the land as Secretary of Agriculture. Through his management of resources, not only was Egypt saved during a time of severe famine but his own people were saved and relocated to Egypt. Because of Joseph his people enjoyed **a favored status**.

Benefiting greatly from their position, they grew in number and strength. But then things changed when a new ruler came to the throne who did not respect what Joseph had done and felt the Hebrews were a threat. The king was determined to attack this threat.

In this part of the story we learn a great truth. **Things change. Favored status and prosperity do not last forever without interruption.** Life will take us through seasons of challenge, pain and disappointment. Knowing this can help us to live wisely by not being so shaken when these seasons come and living in ways to help us face the surprises.

Warren Buffett has said, *“Only when the tide goes out do you see who was swimming naked.”* This season of Covid-19 has revealed many businesses and individuals who had not planned for a rainy day and were uncovered when the tide moved out to sea. For us, using our resources wisely, building and maintaining strong relationships with each other and with God during times of favor is vital when the tide goes out.

Well the king of Egypt began to execute his plan to limit the growth and accumulation of power by the Hebrews. First of all, he **enslaved and oppressed** them in order to break their spirits. Even under this pressure, the Hebrews continued to increase in number.

Seeing that Plan A did not work, the king ordered the **mid-wives who assisted the Hebrew women in giving birth to kill all the male babies.** Because these women loved and feared God, they did not carry out his plan and the number of Hebrews continued to increase.

Seeing that Plan B did not work, the king gave permission and **an order for the Egyptians to take Hebrew infants from their parents and throw them into the Nile** as crocodile bait.

Needless to say, the Hebrews favored status had deteriorated into a living hell – oppressive, slave labor and the threat of genocide and infanticide. You think Covid-19 is tough, imagine what it was like for those Hebrews. Who could live under such circumstances?

Continuing to live.

Amazingly, some among the ranks of the Hebrews continued living. A young man by the name of Amram married a woman named Jochebed. Together in this oppressive and dangerous environment, they began to raise a family. Their first child to be born was a girl. A few years later the second child was conceived. At the child’s birth, they discovered the baby was a boy.

With the birth of this baby boy, they were faced with a decision of what they would do. The reality of the situation was their child’s life was under threat. What they did would matter greatly for the health of their child and family.

A few weeks ago, I received a prayer request from a loving mother who is concerned about her elementary child returning to the classroom in this Covid-19 season. She like the rest of us knows that school is a petri dish for the spread of germs. Students in close proximity to one another share their infections not only with one another but with teachers and staff who in turn bring them home to their families. (Having been married to an educator, I have certainly had my share of infections that were brought home.) While parents know their children need the socialization school offers and the group learning of education, the health of their children and families is critical as well. These are tough decisions for parents.

Covid-19 has introduced many tough decisions into the lives of families – should the grandchildren visit with their grandparents, should a spouse in a high risk job continuing working if their spouse is in the high risk category, should a child who loves sports be denied the opportunity to play during this high risk season, should a diabetic college student be allowed to return to campus????

Understand that huge family decisions and action are not just needed during major times of disruption but also come in the normal course of our family life. Last September when I received the call from my sister saying our mother had a stroke, I knew we were facing some heavy decisions. When I arrived at the hospital and saw her condition, I knew we would face decisions about her ongoing care – would she need to spend time (maybe rest of her life) in a skilled care facility), would we have to hire assistance in caring for her if she went home, would my parents have the resources to provide the care, could my sister provide the level of oversight needed since she is the only sibling in the Kingsport area. For the past 10 months we have been making decisions and living them out. They are not easy and often there is no clear cut answer.

The list of family matters that arise that put us into the place of having to make decisions and take action is long: a spouse has a deteriorating mental condition and the care-giving spouse is coming to the place where he can no longer provide the care needed; a family member has an addiction that is destroying the family and needs an intervention; a needy family member is milking others in the family dry. . . Most of us will face situations and seasons where decisions and actions are demanded.

Messy Tar and Pitch.

Jochebed and Amram faced the decisions before them in an adaptive fashion. Initially, Jochebed hid her new son. But as he grew stronger and louder, she knew she could not continue to do so. Her next step was one that had high risk. She decided to place the baby in a wicker basket, waterproof it, place in among the river reeds where it would not wash away and hope someone would find the child and have mercy on him. (It was like leaving the baby on a doorstep and ringing the doorbell.)

Have you ever worked with a resin such as tar or sap that comes from a pine tree? If so, you know that they are messy substances that tend to get all over you when you handle them or are just near them. Well, Jochebed's plan was a messy one. Not only was waterproofing the basket with naturally occurring tar and pine pitch messy, the whole plan was messy. There seemed to be no clear cut, faultless plans – just a messy one.

As pastor, I have talked with many families facing tough decisions and actions. I have learned that seldom are there clear cut and neat answers. Nearly always things are messy and risky. Often the solutions offered don't satisfy everyone. (Try placing a family member in a facility where she can get the care needed. Try doing an intervention. Try cutting off funds to one who is irresponsible with them.) It seems these are never pretty and are difficult to carry out. Often you will make decisions without knowing fully they are the "right" decisions.

Support for the journey.

I wish I could give you a formula to equip you in making family matter decisions and actions. I would like to give you a series of prayers you could pray that would lead you to the answers. But there is no formula or prayer system.

What carried Jochebed and Amram through during their time of struggle? What guided them in their efforts to care for their son?

I believe there were three sources that provided support for them in their journey.

Jochebed and Amram were in it together. Like most couples I know, they may not have agreed about every decision and may at times come into conflict, in the end they were supportive of each other and came to be place of agreeing to the action of hiding the baby and then placing him at the edge of the Nile.

In our families, it is so critical to cultivate relationships with each other based on love and trust. Many of you have that from your spouses. Unfortunately, some do not. Hopefully there are other family members to whom you can turn as well. I have two dear friends who are facing major decisions with a parent who can no longer live along. In conversations with the husband, it is obvious how they are supporting each other in what they are facing.

While we are not told this in the story, I believe this couple were also part of a community that supported them. Knowing their Hebrew culture, it would be difficult to imagine they were not a part of a loving, caring community. Because of this, they did not have to take their journey alone or make their decisions in a vacuum.

When we began to explore various courses of action needed for my mother, not only did I recruit the prayers of many of you, I also sought counsel from the community of believers. I turned to a good friend who was the CEO of Hospice of Chattanooga. I talked with John Rouser who is a deacon at St. Francis Episcopal Church. I talked with one of our church members who oversees a skilled nursing facility and has been through caring for parents. From these, persons I received support and counsel that helped us in our decisions as a family.

For us as believers, this journey we are on is intended to be corporate. We have people in our fellowship who have been there and done that in most family matters we will face. They can tell us what they experienced. We have people who work in organization that we may need to tap into. Most importantly we have a community who will pray for us. For us to stay connected to this community and cultivate and grow our relationships is so vital for us. It can make a huge difference when we face big family matters.

In the Faith Hall of Fame in Moses' parents are highlighted: *By faith Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict* (Hebrews 11:23).

It is clear that Jochebed and Amram leaned heavily into their faith and relationship with God in deciding what to do. Their faith not only gave them support but it gave them direction. It provided for them a confidence that ultimately their son was in God's hands.

As we face our family matters, being grounded in our faith, our community of faith and with other family we can ride through the storms, make the messy decisions and have a confidence that God will be with us and provide.