

MOSES: The Servant of God

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CHAPTER FOUR

DELIVERANCE BY MAIN FORCE

“And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not” (Acts 7:24-25).

THERE was true heroism in the act, when Moses stepped down from Pharaoh's throne to share the lot of his brethren. He might have contented himself by sending them money from the treasures of Egypt; but it was a greater and nobler thing to give himself. And the true religious instinct of his soul gleamed out as he did so. There was a revelation of the faith which had been kindled within him when he knelt at his mother's side in the slave-hut, and had survived all the adverse influences of the Egyptian Court, like a spark of fire living in the heart of black coals.

At the same time there was a great deal for him to learn. In after days he was to know the ways of the Lord God would make them known to him (Psalm 103:7); but just now he was full of his own ways. In after days he was to be a hand, nerved, and used, and empowered by God Himself (Psalm 77:20); but now he was acting in his own self-energy rash, impetuous, headstrong, girding himself and walking whither he would.

In after days he was to be the meekest and least obtrusive of men, conscious to a fault of his own weakness, and at every step looking up for guidance and help; but now he leaned wholly on his own understanding, and, without taking counsel of God, thought to secure the emancipation of his people by the assertion of his will, and the forth-putting of his might.

Ah! there was the making of a saint in him; but it would take many a long year of lonely waiting and trial before this strong and self-reliant nature could be broken down, shaped into a vessel meet for the Master's use, and prepared for every good work.

God's work can only be done by his chosen instruments, and they must be specially fitted for the service they are to render. That special adaptation is not natural to any of us, and can only come after years of deep and searching discipline.

I. THE FIRST ATTEMPT AT DELIVERANCE

(1) *It sprang largely from human sympathy.*

As soon as he reached Goshen his first act was to go out and see his brethren in the midst of their toils, working amid the conditions of the severest hardship. Brick-making in stiff clay-pits must always be arduous employment; but how much more so when an Egyptian sun shone vertically above them, and a task-master stood by with his heavy whip to punish the least attempt to flinch from toil or shirk the collar!

Imagine the accomplished courtier, the child of luxury and fashion, the man of letters and of mighty deeds, as he moves amid these long lines of slaves. At first it must have seemed very strange to him to realize that he was bound in bonds of such close kinship to these toiling, suffering, dying, Hebrews. **“He went out unto his brethren.”**

But this feeling must soon have given place to an intense commiseration, as he heard the nation sighing by reason of its bondage; and groaning under its accumulated sorrows, his soul would be filled with tender pity. But within a little, that pity for his people turned to indignation against their oppressors. Before he had taken many steps he came on one of the task-masters cruelly beating a Hebrew; and as he witnessed the horrid spectacle, the heavy blows falling on the unresisting quivering body, he could restrain himself no longer, and felled the caitiff lifeless to the ground, then bore away his body and buried it in the nearest sands, ever waiting to encroach on the more cultivated lands of Egypt.

It was a chivalrous act, well meant, and at least significant of the strength of the emotions pent up within him; but, after all, the mere impulse of pity would never have been strong enough to bear him through the weary years of the desert march. Beneath the repeated provocations of the people it must have given way. He could never have carried them as a nursing-father, or asked that he might be blotted out of the book of life for them, or pleaded with them for God.

Nothing short of a reception of the Divine patience, let into his soul as the ocean waves find an inlet into some deeply-indented coast, could suffice for the demands which would be made on him in those coming terrible years.

Is there not a lesson here for many of God’s workers?

They have not learned to distinguish between passion and principle, between impulse and a settled purpose. If some touching tale is told, some piteous appeal made for help, or some crowded gathering swept by a wave of missionary enthusiasm, they are the first to yield to the impulse, to volunteer their service, to give their money, and fling themselves into the breach. But, after all, this is not the loftiest motive for Christian service, and it certainly is not the most permanent. After a little while it dies down, and leaves us stranded as by a receding tide.

It is better far to sacrifice the mere natural impulse for the strong sense of what is right, and what God requires. If we undertake a definite work because He calls us to it, because it is put before us as a duty for his sake, or because we are channels through which the unebbing torrent of his Divine pity is flowing, we have secured a principle of action which will bear us through disappointment, failure, and ingratitude. The way in which men treat us will make no difference to us, because all is done for Him.

(2) *It was premature.*

God's time for the deliverance of His people was not due for forty years.

- The iniquity of the Amorites had not reached its full, though it was nearing the brim of the cup (Genesis 15:16).
- His own education was very incomplete; it would take at least forty years to drain him of his self-will and self-reliance, and make him a vessel meet for the Master's use.
- The Hebrew people had not as yet come to the pitch of anguish, which is so touchingly referred to, when the death of their principal oppressor seems to have brought matters to a crisis, and they forsook the false gods to which they had given their allegiance in order to return to the God of their fathers (Exodus 2:23).

We all know something of this haste. We find it so hard to sit still, whilst our great Boaz does his work (Ruth 3:18).

We think that the set time of God's salvation must have arrived, long before the clock strikes. As Saul, in presence of the Philistine invasion, we suppose that we cannot last out for another hour, and force ourselves to offer the burnt-offering; and are chagrined to see Samuel's figure slowly pacing up the mountain pass as the fire burns down to its last embers, and to hear from his lips the sentence of deposition for our impatience (I Samuel 13:12-14).

Well may our Master say of us, as He did once of his brethren, "**My time is not yet come; but your time is alway ready**" (John 7:6).

Oh for grace to wait and watch with God, though a horror of great darkness fall on us, and sleep steals up into our eyes, and the head becomes thickly sown with the grey hair of age!

One blow struck when the time is fulfilled is worth a thousand struck in premature eagerness. It is not for thee, O my soul, to know the times and seasons which the Father hath put in his own power; wait thou only upon God; let thy expectation be from Him; wait at the gates of thy Jericho for yet seven days; utter not a sound till He says, Shout: but when He gives the signal, with the glad cry of victory thou shalt pass over the fallen wall into the city.

(3) *It was executed in the pride of human strength.*

It was but natural that Moses should suppose that he could do something for the amelioration of his people's lot. He had always been accustomed to have his way. Crowds of obsequious servants and courtiers had yielded to his slightest whim. By his strong right hand he had hewn out a great career. He was conscious of vast stores of youthful energy and natural force, untapped by sufficient calls, and undiminished by physical excess; surely these would count for something. He would make that nation of oppressors reel before his blows, and of course he would be hailed by his brethren as their God-sent deliverer. It was a rude surprise when, on the second day, he went out to continue his self-imposed task, and essayed to adjust a difference between two Hebrews, to find himself repulsed from them by the challenge, "**Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?**"

He had never expected a rebuff from that quarter. **“For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God, by his hand, would deliver them: but they understood not.”**

Evidently, then, God’s time had not arrived; nor could it come until the heat of his spirit had slowly evaporated in the desert air, and he had learnt the hardest of all lessons, that **“by strength shall no man prevail.”**

We have been disposed to attribute too much of the success of the Exodus to the natural qualities of the great leader; but we must always remember that, like Gideon’s host, he was at first too strong for God. God cannot give his glory to another. He dare not entrust his power to men, till they are humbled and emptied, and conscious of their helplessness.

Even the Son learned obedience by the things that He suffered, and descended into the dust of death, crying, **“I am a worm and no man,”** ere He could say, **“All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.”**

The most eminent of his saints must suffer from a thorn in the flesh, to remind him of his weakness; and he confessed himself grateful for it, because only when he was weak could he be strong. When the soul is inflated with a strong reliance on its own sufficiency, the power of God is unable to effect an entrance, or use that soul as a channel for its work.

It is when we are willing to be accounted as worms, as broken reeds, as little children, as foolish, weak, base, despised, as **“things which are not,”** that we become aware of being vehicles for the working of the might of his power, which He wrought in CHRIST when He raised Him from the dead. You must be brought to an end of yourself before God can begin with you. But when once you have come to that point there is no limit to what may be wrought during a single life by the passage through it of his eternal power and God-head.

(4) It was too apprehensive of the judgment of other men.

We are told that he looked this way and that way before he smote the Egyptian; and when he found that his deed of revenge was known, he feared and fled (Exodus 2:15).

But

- Suppose that he had felt that he had been divinely commissioned to execute judgment upon Egypt;
- Suppose he had realized the Divine Presence with him;
- Suppose he had known that he was on the line of Divine purpose would he have cared who was looking, and what was being said?

It would not have been possible. Fixing his eyes on the movement of the Divine cloud, absorbed in the one passion of doing God’s will, sure that he was immortal till his work was done, he would have been perfectly indifferent to the praise or blame of men.

Whenever men look this way and that to see what other men are doing or saying, you may be quite sure that they do not know certainly their Master's plan; they are in front of Him, and are acting from the prompting of their own self-will, though perhaps under the cover of religious zeal.

There has been only one perfect Servant of God who has ever trodden our world. He never looked this way nor that. Away on the mountain height of unbroken fellowship He received the plan of his life, which He wrought out in daily detail, and He alone could say, "**He that sent Me is with Me; the Father hath not left Me alone, for I do always those things that please Him.**"

Oh for the single eye, that our whole body also may be full of light!

II. THE FLIGHT TO THE DESERT

The news of Moses first attempt came to the ears of Pharaoh, and he sought to slay Moses. But Moses feared, and fled from the face of Pharaoh.

In after years, under similar circumstances, it is said, "**He forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king**" (Hebrews 11:27). And when we ask the reason of his fearlessness, we learn that it was by faith he did so; for "**he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible.**" But if such were the case afterwards, why was it not so at the time with which we are dealing? Why did he not exercise faith in the invisible God? Why did not his heart beat with even throb in the one crisis as in the other. The reason is obvious.

Faith is only possible when we are on God's plan, and stand on God's promise.

It is useless to pray for increased faith until we have fulfilled the conditions of faith. It is equally useless to spend time in regrets and tears over the failures which are due to our unbelief.

"And the Lord said to Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?"

Faith is as natural to right conditions of soul, as a flower is to a plant. And amongst those conditions this is the first – ascertain your place in God's plan and get on to it; and this is the second - feed on God's promises. And when each of these is realized, faith comes of itself; and there is absolutely nothing which is impossible. The believing soul can "**do all things**" with God, because it has got on to God's lines; yea, it is itself as the metal track along which God travels to men in love, grace, and truth.

But Moses was out of touch with God.

So he fled, and crossed the desert that lay between him and the eastern frontier; threaded the mountain passes of the Sinaitic peninsula, through which in after years he was to lead his people; and at last sat wearily down by a well in the land of Midian. There his chivalrous interference was suddenly elicited on behalf of the daughters of the priest of Midian, who seem to have suffered daily from the insolence of shepherds appropriating the water which the shepherd-maidens had drawn for their flocks.

That day, however, the churls met their match, and were compelled to leave the water-troughs to the women; who hurried home, unexpectedly early, to tell, with girls enthusiasm, of the Egyptian who had delivered them from the hand of the shepherds. It was a good office that could not pass without requital in that hospitable land, and it opened the door to the chieftain's tent; ultimately to marriage with one of those same shepherdesses; and finally to the quiet life of a shepherd in the calm open spaces of that wonderful land, which, on more than one occasion, has served for a Divine school.

Such experiences come to us all. We rush forward, thinking to carry all before us; we strike a few blows in vain; we are staggered with disappointment, and reel back; we are afraid at the first breath of human disapprobation; we flee from the scenes of our discomfiture to hide ourselves in chagrin. Then we are hidden in the secret of God's presence from the pride of man. And there our vision clears: the silt drops from the current of our life, as from the Rhone in its passage through the deep waters of Geneva's lake; our self-life dies down; our spirit drinks of the river of God, which is full of water; our faith begins to grasp his arm, and to be the channel for the manifestation of his power; and thus at last we emerge to be his hand to lead an Exodus. **"This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working."**

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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