

INTRODUCTION

United States is a country where people adore heroes. Typical heroes can be soldiers, police officers and fire fighters. They sacrifice themselves to protect the people they serve. But heroes can also be ordinary people who seize the opportunity to do extraordinary things. When my kids were still small I told them that they too can be heroes of others. In 2007, I took my older son to watch the Transformer movie. I know some of the fighting scenes may not be that appropriate to a three-year-old boy. But guys should watch guys' movies. To my disappointment my son fell asleep toward the conclusion of the story. After we came out from the theater I took him to a McDonald's for ice-cream. When he was enjoying the treat, I had a little father-and-son talk. I recalled some of the scenes in the movie and said that heroes are people who are willing to do nice things for others. I told him that he is a hero to his younger brother. I know it will be a long learning process. To this day, after 10 years, my two boys sometimes look at each other like enemies. We can find a lot of heroes in the Bible: Abraham, Peter, Paul and so on. God called them to do great things. As we begin a new preaching series we shall study the life of Moses. We will explore selected chapters of Exodus and subsequent books. Moses led the Israelites to leave Egypt, cross the Red Sea and through the wilderness. Moses may have some glorious moments, but he has his weaknesses just like you and me. We examined the story of Joseph last Sunday. In Exodus chapter 1 we are told that after Joseph passed away there was a new Pharaoh who did not know about the things Joseph did. At that time a new dynasty rose up. The king turned hostile toward foreigners. The Israelites used to be honorable guests in Egypt. Now they became slaves. Besides forcing the Jews to do hard labor the king used extreme means to control their ever-growing population. He asked the midwives to kill all the male infants at birth. Out of reverence to God the midwives refused to comply. Then the Pharaoh demanded the midwives to throw all the baby boys into the river, perhaps to drown them or to feed them to the crocodiles. That is the background when Moses was born. The Israelites might think that they would forever be slaves. There seemed to be no hope. Little did they know that God had been working behind the scenes to deliver them from the land of slavery. Moses' story is part of God's grand scheme. We shall learn that God accomplishes big plans by connecting smaller things. From this passage we will study three words that begin with the letter P – God's Protection, Providence and Preparation.

EXPLANATION

1. 神的保護 God's Protection

We just read part Exodus chapter 2. If you pay attention to the details you can hardly miss the fact that God had been protecting Moses. Let us review three episodes. First, God protected Moses even when he was still an infant. God preserved Moses life through the hands of the midwife and his family members. When Moses grew to three-month-old his mother had no choice but to follow the king's command. She put Moses in a basket and allowed it to flow in the river. But Moses' sister Miriam kept an eye on the basket. On that day, Pharaoh's daughter came to the river to bathe. She showed compassion to the crying baby. Then Miriam appeared and volunteered to find a woman to nurse the baby. Moses could have perished. But now he returned

home. Pharaoh's daughter even paid Moses' mom to take care of the baby. The princess eventually adopted Moses as her son. The Pharaoh who had planned to kill Moses now called Moses grandson. There could not be a better outcome! The second incident happened when Moses was already an adult. He saw an Egyptian beating a Jew. Moses came forward and killed the Egyptian. Everyone knew about it, so did Pharaoh. God protected Moses from the hands of Pharaoh, then Moses fled to Midian. Why Midian? According to Genesis, the Midianites were the descendants of Abraham. They were like distant relatives to Moses. They could communicate in similar languages. However, Moses did not know anyone there. How could he survive? That leads us to the third snapshot of God's protection. Moses met the daughters of Reuel, whose other name is Jethro, at a well. The ladies were bullied by some shepherds. Moses chased the bad guys away. He was then invited to Jethro's home. Not only that, he even stayed there and later became a son-in-law. Thus, God prepared a safe haven for Moses for the next forty years. The Bible says God is our Protector. **Psalm 121:7-8** read: 7 The Lord will keep you from all harm - he will watch over your life; 8 the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore. Jesus also said in **Matthew 10:29-30** that: 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Moments ago, we sang about our God who watches over the sparrows. He protects all His children from physical dangers and spiritual temptations. Sometimes we may take our safety for granted. When my family arrive at our destination after a long road trip the first thing we usually say is: "Thank you Father for protecting us on the road." I cannot count how many times I escaped from danger on the roads. I have full confidence on my driving skills but I have no control over other drivers. Last year after I moved here I noticed that some people in Memphis are quite aggressive behind the wheels. We have to give thanks to God for protecting us from physical dangers. He is way better than any insurance policy or safety device. We also have to give thanks for His protection over spiritual temptations. We all have our weaknesses. It can be our personality, temper, or love for money or vain glory. Satan knows how to attack our sore spots. But if we rely on God's protection we can live a victorious life.

2. 神的眷顧 God's Providence

We see God's protection over Moses. A second thing we notice in Moses' life is God's Providence. God's protection is part of His Providence. By Providence it refers to how God cares for His children. I looked up its definition from a Bible dictionary I found in our library: "Providence is basically God's provision for the needs of men on time." (Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol. 2, p. 1792) That is quite straightforward. Not only that God gives us what we need, He does so according to the best timing in His plan. The principle of Providence affirms that our lives are not meaningless. God gives us opportunities to make decisions. He then leads us to the next step. The basic formula is that if there is no A, then there will be no B; if no B then no C, and so on. Let us take a look at how God's Providence was played out in Moses' life. First, how did Moses end up in the Egyptian palace? It was because on the very day when Moses was put in the river Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe. Moses would not have become the son of an Egyptian princess if she did not go to the river, did not see the basket where the baby was in, the baby did not cry and she was not moved by her compassion. See the chain of causes and effects? God provided the conditions and people were involved in His plan. Some of you may argue: if Pharaoh's daughter did not show up then it would have been the end of story for Moses. He would become a take-out lunch for the crocodiles. We do not know. But if it was God's will to

put Moses in the palace He would use other means to accomplish His goal. We can use the same logic to look at how Moses settled in Midian. If Moses did not rest by a particular well he would not have met Jethro's daughters. If there was no shepherd harassing the women then Moses would not have known them, went to their home and married one of them. Everything worked together to achieve the outcome God had planned. We read **Romans 8:28** last week. It is very applicable to Moses' life: And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. God has a wonderful plan for each of us too. There is no coincidence in God's Providence. You may not be another Moses. The fact is, when God called Moses, he had zero idea how God would use him. Therefore, the key is whether or not we submit ourselves to the guidance of our Lord. God has different plans for each of us. He gives us freedom to pursue our goals, as long as we stay away from sins. Young people can aspire to become the next doctor, accountant, engineer or whatever profession. You can work hard to become a manager or switch to another company. But no matter what plans we have we should seek the Lord first. Our constant prayer should be: "Lord, may Your will be done in my life." The doctrine of God's Providence is not fatalism. It is not like we are robots that follow a preset program. Life is exciting because we do not know what opportunity lies ahead. Think about this: why are you sitting here today listen to this mumbling bald guy? Why do you stay in Memphis? Why did you come to U.S.? Why did you study at a particular school for a certain major? Why did you marry your current spouse? Why do you work for company A, not company B? Look back in your life and it should not be hard to see how God's Providence has been working in your life. If you are a seeker friend, God wants you to know Him. I always tell non-Christian friends that no one will come to the church just because they have nothing to do. In their mind they may just want to get to know some friends, look for a future mate or find some business clients. But if the Lord is not calling them, no one will step into the church door.

3. 神的裝備 God's Preparation

God had been protecting His servant, Moses. Also, out of God's Providence, He kept revealing His plan for Moses. In the whole process God was preparing Moses for his future role. Moses was adopted as an Egyptian. It was more than a special way for God to protect Moses. **Acts 7:22** tells us that it was part of God's preparation for Moses: Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. God sent Moses to the best available place to gain knowledge. Later Moses became the leader to take the Israelites out of Egypt. He had to have leadership and communication skills. He also needed to speak the language to talk to Pharaoh. Moses learned all those abilities in Egypt. But then why God took Moses to Midian? Why didn't God ask Moses to bring the Israelites out of Egypt right away? It was because God had not finished His preparatory work on Moses yet. The Bible tells us that at this point Moses was 40 years old. Moses knew that he was a born Jew. He had compassion for his peers when he saw them suffering under the hands of the slave masters. But he resorted to his own physical strength to kill an Egyptian. Moses had to rely on God instead. We may think that a 40-year-old person should normally be quite mature. But God still had some lessons for Moses to learn. He spent the next 40 years in Midian raising sheep. How might he be feeling? Look at **verse 22**: Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, saying, "I have become an alien in a foreign land." The name Gershom sounds like "an alien there" in Hebrew. I feel bad for Moses' son. When people asked about his name he would reply: "I am an outsider." Can you sense a trace of frustration and helplessness in that name? Moses had hoped to help relieve his

fellow Jews, but now he was in the middle of nowhere. I can imagine that Moses had a lot of time reflecting on his life while being alone in the wilderness. By taking Moses to Midian, God cut off all the Egyptian connections for Moses. He was no longer Pharaoh's adopted grandson but a fugitive. Moses could no longer depend on his own strength and his status in Egypt. He had to lean on God. The passage tells us that there are two more reasons why Moses had to wait. **Verse 23** reads: During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. Moses could safely return to Egypt when the Pharaoh who had wanted to kill him passed away. Meanwhile, the Israelites had to suffer another 40 years before they could be set free. God hears the prayer of His people. But it does not mean that He will respond according to our wish instantly. We have to trust that His way is higher than our way. Each of us is only a tiny piece in the whole puzzle. In the case of Israel God certainly had a plan in mind. Continue to read **verses 24 to 25**: 24 God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. 25 So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them. God cared about His people. When the verse says God "remembered" His covenant it does not mean that God had forgotten something like we always do. Often when I walk from one room to another my mind turns completely blank and I cannot recall what I plan to get or do. Then an hour later there is an "ah ha!" moment and I suddenly remember what I have missed. Young people can identify with me when you come to my age. Our God is the all-knowing Lord and He does not need any to-do list to remind Himself of His plans. A better way to understand "remembered" is that God decided to fulfill the terms of His covenant. God waited till the perfect timing to implement His plan to rescue the Israelites. God is also preparing you to participate in His blueprint. Just like Moses, you may be doing something trivial. It is far from your dream job. You believe you have all the skills, but the golden opportunity never arrives. Your former classmates have all climbed high in the career ladder. You think you have wasted all these years waiting for nothing. God wants you to be patient. Even when it seems that nothing has changed God is preparing the next step for you. But for the time being, He is preparing you for the next task. God does listen to your prayer, but are you listening to Him? Are you spending enough time to cultivate an intimate relationship with Him? He cannot use you if your heart is not right.

CONCLUSION

God accomplishes big plans by connecting smaller things. Before Moses led the Israelites to go out from Egypt he just did what he was supposed to do. When we submit ourselves to God and be faithful in the responsibilities He entrusts us, He can do great things through us. On April 17, a Southwest Airlines flight had an emergency landing in Philadelphia. An engine blew up in mid-air. Pilot Tammie Jo Shults calmly communicated with the control tower, as she descended the plane and made it safely to the ground. Yes, Shults is lady. She is one of the first female pilots who once served in the U.S. Navy. Without surprise, everyone called her a hero afterward. But to Shults, she felt that she was doing what a pilot should do at that moment. The simulations in training prepared her to handle a situation like that. Shults is also a Christian. She said in an interview that sitting in the captain's chair gave her "the opportunity to witness for Christ on almost every flight." Shults has a caring heart for people. After the plane was landed she walked down the aisle to make sure that every passenger was fine. She was saddened when she learned that one traveler died when a window nearby broke open and some debris hit her. On that day, Shults experienced the mighty hand of God working through her. God is the ultimate hero.