

Sermon Text for February 10, 2019

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Exodus 2:11-15a, Acts 7:23-29

"Who died and made you king?"

This is another one of those Sundays where we are able to take inventory and see that the state of the church is healthy, very healthy. Since 2011 we have taken on _____ new members and this class represents one of the largest that we have taken on. It is an exciting Sunday to worship and celebrate God and all that God is doing in the life of this church. With celebration and growth comes responsibility to ensure that once people have made a decision to join the life of this church, then that decision is matched with a church's desire to see them plugged in and involved in the life of the church. Our purpose is not simply to get people on board at all cost, that is not what we are about. We are about getting people on board who are committed to a life of service and dedication for His kingdom. So, get ready to get involved and get ready church, to get people involved.

Today, Stephen continues in his retelling of the Moses story. Last week we saw that nothing happens by chance. God is tirelessly at work behind the scenes making sure that His plans are coming to fruition in the life of those who seek Him, and those who do not seek Him he does not abandon. He works even harder to ensure that all of us will have opportunities to make the right decisions at the right time. I pleased with how many people came up to me after last Sunday and told me how they were that person who felt that God had given up on them, that they could not see Him at work behind the scenes. God is always working to bring us back to him in a deeper more full relationship.

This week we are going to see how as Christians sometimes we set up a false justification in our hearts and our minds that if the end result is going to be for the glory of God then what happens to get there will not matter. As long as the result is positive, how we get that result doesn't really matter. How many people we hurt along the way, how cruel or inhumane our policies may be, as long as we make the church great, well, that is all that really matters. No, that is not the case. Moses felt that was the case. As long as the Israelites see that I care for them, how I treat other people doesn't matter, in fact, if I treat other people unjustly for their advantage, maybe I can score some points. This happened with Moses and his own people as we see Stephen explain it to see.

READ SCRIPTURE

One of my favorite stories from our time in Moscow had to do with frozen chickens. We had partnered with a grocery store named Auchan who gave us in one load that we had to pick up 500 frozen chickens. Now, that is spectacular and we went through about 500 frozen chickens a month between the 120 refugees that we served with food bags, our 80 mixed race Russian children, our 180 African student ministry and our elderly Russian population that we served daily in our Soup Kitchens. Now, it is great to have a need met, but the logistical issue was where do we store 500 chickens. Our US Embassy families were gracious enough to allow us to store a few hundred there and stored the rest in our social center where we had easy access.

The person responsible for our food ministry was a man named Kifle Solomon, from Ethiopia. The day came when I had to get our frozen chickens to use at our Soup Kitchen for the Russian elderly and Kifle asked me if I could go get them from the Social Center. I went there took out these frozen chickens and noticed that the plastic bags in which they were individually wrapped had all been opened, but they were frozen and were closed again. I was curious about that so I called Kifle and asked him: why were these bags opened? He responded, we had about 4 days where we had no electricity and so the freezer wasn't running. When I opened the freezer to check on the chickens I noticed that they smelled really bad. So I had some of the guys open up all the bags, wash the chickens, put them back in the bags, and then put them back in the freezer. They should be fine, because I washed them.

I really thought he was kidding, but then I realized he wasn't, Kifle, have you served any of these chickens to people yet? No, you are the first. Okay, we are going to throw all of these away. You can't fix rotten chicken by washing it clean. His desire was pure, the end result was clear, we need to give to hungry people chicken that they can cook and have for a week. From then on whenever we ran into a problem I would tell people, just wash it, it should be okay after that. What an example that the ends do not justify the means with food, and certainly not with people or life situations.

I really enjoyed telling the beginning part of the Moses story and seeing it for the first time again because we assume so much from the story because we've seen it so many times and heard it a number of times as well. How neat it was to see them place the basket exactly in the spot where they knew it would be found.

Today we have some similar details that probably have gone unnoticed. In Exodus you see a 40 year old man step out of his castle probably for the first time because he wanted to see his relatives. You get the idea that Moses was probably pretty well protected and probably a whole lot spoiled.

When he does he for the first time sees the way that his people are treated. The Israelites were slaves so their freedom and dignity were nowhere to be found. Moses was first shocked, but then he got angry.

He sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew then look at vs. 12 he looked this way, and that, he saw no one, killed him and hid him in the sand. This was pre-meditated murder. At the end of these verses he flees because Pharaoh is seeking his life and his own people, this is key don't support him. In fact when he tries to make things right they don't trust him and basically say, well, who died and made you king? How do you have the right to decide a person's life, even if you thought that it was for the good of someone else. There is a capital punishment lesson in that statement, but that is not where we are going with this sermon.

Stephen gives us a very different perspective on this Moses account. If you look at vs. 25 of chapter 7 you will see that it is central to the passage. It gives us an explanation as to why Moses killed the Egyptian and what he hoped to accomplish from that act.

Moses assumed, according to Stephen, that by killing the Egyptian and defending his people then the people would understand that God through him as a type of savior, was rescuing them, but they didn't get it. What happened was that this act was so radical, so offensive that it was not able to be interpreted as a help but rather as someone who was trying to play God or be the one in charge. The question of who died and made you king can really be translated as: you are completely overstepping your boundary. The end result of not being oppressed is good but the way you got there didn't allow me to understand it.

There is discussion again in our politics about socialism and the danger that it poses. I lived in a country for 5 years that still bore the scars of a socialist state. Now, don't get me wrong, on paper the Soviet Russia had a wonderful, I would even say a biblical vision of what the world could be like. They would never have called it biblical, but think about it.

Who doesn't want to live in a world where everyone is treated equally and works equally hand in hand. Where no one takes advantage of the system and everyone gets what they deserve and get it equally. That is not American, right? An egalitarian state is not far from Jesus' command to sell all that you have and give to the poor and our first century church's having everything in common is not far from the ideal that they had.

But a perfect vision strived after by an imperfect people creates a situation where the ends are beautiful but the means destroys the nation and a people. The gulags, the oppressions, it all collapsed because the means used to achieve those ends were destructive.

This is true in this Scripture as well. Moses tried to show the people that he was sent by

God to liberate them which he was. The means that he used to show this, premeditated murder, worked against that command completely. It wasn't until God showed him the means, the staff, the plagues, all of which was God's doing, not Moses' were the people able to understand, and even then not perfectly.

This can be applied so easily in our own life. We are Christians and as Christians, just as luck is not in our vocabulary, so the term the ends justify the means demands and requires a big no. How you arrive at your goal at the vision has to be as important as your vision. It does not make sense for a Christian to disregard the means and just focus on the ends.

The reason why is because in Jesus Christ our salvation is the ends, but the way that it came about, the means to that salvation is absolutely crucial in defining who we are as believers. His life of perfection, of sacrifice, of joy and love were part of the means that produced the desired end. His suffering under Pontius Pilate and his death upon the cross is so important to how and why we identify ourselves as Christians. Jesus' resurrection, his glorious resurrection, is a crucial step in all of the events that ultimately lead to our salvation.

In the case of Jesus Christ the means are so important to understanding the ends. The same is true for us as Christians today. We often think the ends justify the means. If we are providing for our family then it is okay to not be home and not spend time with the family. If the family is happy and in an upwardly mobile state then it is okay to have an occasional discretion with our money, our sex, with other activities that really don't matter in our mind as long as we are successful.

What goes for the individual can and must be applied to a nation, especially if it considers itself a Christian nation. The ends never justify the means because it is in the means, the details, the people where you see God's hand at work. The current understanding is that we must do all things in order to make this nation great. Our God does not want us to disobey his commandments of loving your neighbor in order to achieve this human made goal of greatness. If we have a prosperous nation and most people are doing well then it is okay to keep down the voiceless and oppress the weakest links of society.

If the crops prosper then we can enslave the field hands. If the church is growing then we can sacrifice theology and true love and obedience to Christ for approaches and techniques that please people. What we learn today is that as Christians the means are just as important as the ends. Why? Because no one died and made us king so we had better be sure that what we do, even if it makes sense to us, will make sense to others.

The ends ultimately are not up to us, they are up to God. What we are able to put our

hands on are the means, that which it takes to get from point A to B. Point B is up to God.

Moses ends up fleeing when he is confronted with his action that were not justified. He ran away. No one understood him. He knew what God wanted him to do, he knew the ends but didn't know how to get there.

Allow yourself to have goals, visions, and strive for them aggressively, but always remember that as Christians how we arrive at our goals is just as important as arriving. Amen.