

October 16th, 2022

# The School of Affliction

Exodus 2:15b-22

## Summa Theologica

Last time we saw how when Moses rose up and sought to deliver his people by killing the Egyptian, his own people hated him for it. When Stephen retells this story in **Acts 7:35** we read “This Moses, whom [Israel] rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer...” So let’s consider the lay of the land. God’s people are being brutalized. They are made slaves, their first born male children are slaughtered, so God raises up Moses—a prince of Egypt—educated and trained in Pharaoh’s own house to deliver the people. And what happens? They reject him. This was the history of all of Israel. This was the whole point of Stephen’s sermon to the Jews. **Acts 7:51-52** “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.<sup>52</sup> Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?” Israel persecuted the very deliverer God sent to save them.

## The incomprehensible love of God

So what does God do? What would you do? Children what would you do if you tried to save a woman from getting beat up by a robber, but the woman starts screaming at you and hitting you when you start to help her? You’d probably say “...if you don’t want to be helped, then I won’t help you.” But that is not what God does. Here’s the incomprehensible love of God: *instead of abandoning His people, He afflicts the deliverer.* He strips Moses of His royalty, and sends him to live in the desert for 40 years, so he can share in their suffering.

## The deeper magic

Again we find that God is telling another story, a deeper story than merely Moses and Israel. God is showing us the gospel in Exodus. There was One coming who would be stripped (as it were) of His own reputation and royalty.

He would had to leave the palace of Heaven and enter into affliction in the wilderness of this world. We rejected His salvation from His Heavenly Throne Room, so God sent Him from Heaven to share in our affliction, to become a Man of Sorrows. As the author of Hebrews says “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup> *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses*, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (**Hebrews 4:15-16**). Beloved you do not have a Christ who *merely* knows the affliction you suffer. You have a Christ who put on flesh and *shared in your affliction*. That’s the story here in Exodus 2. God afflicted Moses so he could share in the sufferings of His people Israel. God sent Moses to the school of affliction, so that He could learn to sympathize with his suffering people.

### *The Big Idea...*

God appoints His deliverers to great affliction so that they can tenderly sympathize with His suffering people

★ Our Doctrine

★ Our Duty

★ Our Delight

## I. Our Doctrine

### Was Moses afraid?

So recall in **v.11-12** that Moses went out to see the burdens of Israel, he finds an Egyptian taskmaster beating a slave, so he kills him. In **v.13**, he goes out the next day, finds two Hebrews fighting and he says to the man in the wrong “Why do you strike your companion?” Pick up with me in **v.14** “He

answered, “Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” *Then Moses was afraid*, and thought, “Surely the thing is known.” [v.15] When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh...” Stop. Here we read that *Moses was afraid*, that’s why he fled. But in **Hebrews 11:27** we read “By faith he left Egypt, *not being afraid of the anger of the king*, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.” How do we reconcile these passages? Simple. Remember that Moses left Egypt twice. He left Egypt the first time here after killing the Egyptian *and* he (along with all Israel) left Egypt a second time after the God sent the last plague (**Exodus 12:37**). Moses being afraid of the king *here* in **Exodus 2:15** is *his first departure*, and Moses not being afraid of the king (**Hebrews 11:27**) is his second departure.

### What strengthens faith?

It’s *not* that Moses had no faith here. Moses *had faith* that God sent him to deliver Israel (**Acts 7:25**). Moses *had faith* as he looked on the burdens of his people (**Hebrews 11:24-25**). Moses had faith before He fled to Midian. But it was a weak faith. It was a faith that God was going to purify in the wilderness. Beloved, isn’t this how our own faith works? As those loved by God, we really do have faith in Christ and in His Word, but we often find that our faith is so weak and pitiful. We are easily frightened but what we see and hear in the world. How does God strengthen our faith? Through affliction. **Romans 5:3-4** “...we rejoice in our sufferings [our afflictions], knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup>and endurance produces character, and character produces *hope*.” Affliction produces hope or faith. Saints who have been afflicted the most, have the strongest faith. Why? Because they have learned through suffering that no matter what happens to them, God always remains faithful. Though the flood waters come, God delivers an ark. Though a famine strikes the land, God sends the birds to feed his servants. Though the wilderness journey takes 40 years, God preserves the shoes on their feet and the clothes on their backs. Though the Savior is crucified and all hope seems lost, He is raised from the dead on the

third day. Affliction is the one great strengthener of faith. One reason God sent Moses into the wilderness was to strengthen his faith. When he returns, he defies the the most powerful man in the world.

### The land of Midian

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Look halfway through v.15. Moses "...stayed in the land of Midian." Stop. Midian was well over 200 miles away from Egypt. Who were the Midianites? They were the sons of Abraham's second wife Keturah (**Genesis 25:1-4**).

- It was the Midianites who sold Joseph into slavery at Potiphar's house (**Genesis 37:36**).
- It was the Midianites who, led by Balak, hired Balaam to curse Israel (**Numbers 22:1-7**).
- It was the Midianite women who led Israel astray into sexual immorality and Baal worship (**Numbers 25:1-9<sup>1</sup>**).
- It was the Midianites who God commanded Moses to pour out His vengeance upon (**Numbers 31<sup>2</sup>**).<sup>3</sup>

So any Israelite reading this history of Moses after the fact would see how thick the irony is here. Moses was rejected by his own people, but was accepted by Israel's enemies. This is another foreshadow of the gospel. When Christ came into the world, the Jews, as a whole, rejected Him. The Apostle Paul says in response to their rejection in **Acts 28:28** "Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen." So another

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<sup>1</sup> The LORD commanded Moses to strike down them down for this - Numbers 25:16-17

<sup>2</sup> cf. Josh. 13:21

<sup>3</sup> Later the Lord handed Israel over to the Midianites because of their disobedience, and the Midianites oppressed Israel (Judges 6). Then God raised up Gideon to put down the Midianites (Judges 7-8). Consequently the destruction of Midian became a song and a story of renown (Psalm 83:9; Isaiah 9:4; Isaiah 10:26; Habakkuk 3:7). Yet there is a future promised for Midian that they would come to the LORD - Isaiah 60:6

reason God sent Moses into the wilderness—into Midian—was because the gospel is for all nations. The covenant promise God made to Abraham was that “...all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him” (**Genesis 18:18**).

### **Moses finds a wife**

What did Moses do when he arrived in Midian? Look at the end of **v.15** “And he sat down by a well.” Wells are massively significant in Scripture.

- In **Proverbs 5:15**, husbands are commanded to drink water from your own well a euphemism meaning to be satisfied with their wives
- In **Song of Solomon 4:15** the Bride is called “a well of living water.”
- In **Genesis 24:10-15** Abraham’s servant found Isaac’s wife Rebekah at a well
- In **Genesis 29:1-12** Jacob found his wife Rachel at a well
- In **John 4** Jesus met the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well and He asked her where her husband was. She said she didn’t have one. He pointed out that she had five husbands and the one she was living with now was not her husband. What was Jesus doing? He was offering Himself to be her True Husband—meaning He would save her.

And what happened to Moses here at this well? He found himself a wife. Please look at **v.16-21** “Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock. <sup>17</sup> The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and saved them, and watered their flock. <sup>18</sup> When they came home to their father Reuel, he said, “How is it that you have come home so soon today?” <sup>19</sup> They said, “An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds and even drew water for us and watered the flock.” <sup>20</sup> He said to his daughters, “Then where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread.” <sup>21</sup> And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah.”

### **The character of Reuel**

By this we discover both the character of this Midianite family, and the character of Moses. **First**, we discover the character of this Midianite family. It seems they were worshippers of the True and Living God. Reuel, who is the priest of Midian, literally means “friend of God” or “shepherd of God.” Later when Israel finally leaves Egypt, Reuel—also called Jethro—meets them and not only confesses his faith (**Exodus 18:10-11**), but he offers sacrifices to God (**Exodus 18:12**).<sup>4</sup>

### The character of Moses

**Secondly**, we discover the character of Moses. Moses sees these 7 women being treated harshly. **v.17** says “The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and saved them, and watered their flock.” For the third time in just a few verses Moses defends the defenseless. **1)** He defended the slave from the Egyptian (**v.12**); **2)** He defended the weaker Hebrew from the other Hebrew aggressor (**v.13**); and **3)** He now defends these women from these wicked shepherds. But he doesn’t *merely* save them, **v.17** says that he also “watered their flock.” In other words, Moses protected *and* provided for them! Reuel was so impressed with Moses character that he offered his daughter Zipporah to be his wife. And then for the next 40 years Moses is a shepherd in the wilderness.

### Moses’ affliction in body and soul

But despite Moses’ bravery, his love of justice for the oppressed, and his faithfulness, the wilderness proved to be a school of affliction. Consider the 30,000 foot view. Where did Moses live before Midian? Not just in Egypt, but in the palace. He had servants. His servants had servants. He could indulge himself in any conceivable pleasure. He had nearly unlimited power and unlimited wealth. But when he arrives at Midian, he has nothing. The only possessions he had were on his person. He had no home, no place to lay his

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<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, as Calvin points out, we cannot suppose this family was pagan because Moses would not consented to marry a pagan woman. [John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. II*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 52]. Remember Moses was a believer (**Hebrews 11:24**), one who was self-consciously aware that God sent him to deliver Israel (**Acts 7:25**).

head. He was no longer a prince, but a poor nobody.<sup>5</sup> He had to sit by a well where people gather hoping to find hospitality. And this must have been such an affliction. We get scared when inflation threatens our creature comforts. But Moses lost everything, including every person he ever knew. And the painful thing was that Moses *knew* what God called him to do. **Acts 7:25** says that Moses *knew* God had raised him up to bring salvation to Israel. But now his own people are hundreds of miles away and they hate him. And Pharaoh wants him dead. It was a nightmare. It's so heavy on his mind, that he even names his son after his affliction. Look at **v.22** "She [Zipporah] gave birth to a son, and he called his name Gershom, for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land." 'I am a stranger in a strange land.'<sup>6</sup> Moses felt in his soul what it was to be an outcast. In the prime of his life, all his education, all his training now seemed to be wasting away in the desert. What was God doing? Why would God choose this?<sup>7</sup> Matthew Henry says here "Egypt accomplished him as a scholar, a gentleman, a statesman, a soldier but he lacked one thing, in which the court of Egypt could not befriend him."<sup>8</sup> What is that one thing? Affliction.

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<sup>5</sup> Even the 7 daughters of Reuel understood this. They told their dad that he was an Egyptian. How did they surmise that? "It could have been for any number of reasons. Moses' language, or dialect of Semitic, would have given him away; so would his clothing or his being clean-shaven (as the Egyptians were in contrast to the Asiatics). In other words, his general appearance and demeanor as one who had lived in the court of Pharaoh for many years would have stood out starkly against the background of a desert, tribal environment." John D. Currid, *Exodus Vol. 1: Chapters 1-18*, (Darlington, England, : Evangelical Press, 2000), pg. 71

<sup>6</sup> He does not "compare Midian to Egypt, for he was but a sojourner in either land; but wherever he may dwell, he declares himself a stranger, until he should obtain the inheritance which God had promised." Calvin, pg. 56

<sup>7</sup> "Egypt accomplished him as a scholar, a gentleman, a statesman, a soldier but he lacked one thing, in which the court of Egypt could not befriend him. he must know what it was to live a life of communion with God; and in this he would be greater fathered by the solitude and

<sup>8</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary In One Volume: Genesis to Revelation*, (Grand Rapids, MI, : Zondervan Publishing House, 1961), pg. 74.

## **Our doctrine: God places his servants in the school of affliction**

That brings us to **our doctrine**: *God appoints His deliverers to great affliction so that they can tenderly sympathize with His suffering people.* Consider just a couple proofs of this doctrine throughout Scripture.

### **Proof #1: God appointed Joseph's affliction**

Joseph was the favorite son of Jacob. God gave Joseph cryptic dreams indicating that Joseph would one day sit on a throne (**Genesis 37:5-11**). This prophecy was the result of Joseph *through the power of God* saving the known world from the 7 year famine. But before Joseph acted as Savior, what did God do to prepare him? He afflicted him. **Psalms 105:17** says that "[God] sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave." It wasn't ultimately his brothers who afflicted Joseph. It was God who appointed it. This was Joseph's own testimony. He tells his brothers in **Genesis 45:8** "It was not you who sent me here, *but God*."

### **Proof #2: God appointed Paul's affliction**

The Apostle Paul was the greatest human being that has lived in the last 2,000 years. God made him the instrument of salvation for millions upon millions souls. God had appointed him to turn men and women and children "from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins" (**Acts 26:18**). But oh did God afflict him. The Lord said in **Acts 9:16** "I will show him how much *he must suffer* for the sake of my name." It was God who appointed all of Paul's affliction. God was behind the thorns in Paul's life (**2 Corinthians 12:8**).

### **Experimental sympathy**

So here's the question: *why* does God appoint this affliction? It's not because God is capricious or cruel. God appoints this affliction for the sake of those he is saving. God's sent Moses into the school of affliction *so that* he could learn how to pity and sympathize with God's people in their sufferings.



Children, boys and girls how are muscles built? Are muscles built by lying in bed all day? No muscles are built when we exert ourselves with great effort: by lifting, sweating, and exercising. In other words, muscles are built by pressure. Now how is compassion and pity and sympathy built? It is built by living an easy life without any problems? No. Compassion and pity and sympathy for others is built when we experience affliction and suffering ourselves. Moses up to this point had a life of relative ease. He was a prince, not a slave. He didn't live in the slums, but in the palace. It's true that Moses was concerned with the burdens of his people, but he never *experienced* them. That's what the wilderness was for. God appointed affliction so that Moses would not only know about their suffering *but so that he would feel it in his bones*. Yes God wanted Moses to trust in Him and be brave as a lion. But He also wanted Moses to be as tender as a lamb. Only then, would he be ready to deliver Israel. That's **our doctrine**: *God appoints His deliverers to great affliction so that they can tenderly sympathize with His suffering people.*

## II. Our Duty

### Informatory Use

Our **first duty** is to *reinterpret* the affliction we face in our lives. There are many of you that are in the school of affliction right now. Some of you are in the prime of your life. You had hopes for what would become of your future, and now that hope has vanished like the sun behind dark thunder clouds. Why would God afflict you like this? Doesn't He know you are in the prime of your life? What is He doing?

God is building pity and compassion and sympathy in your heart for others.

Listen carefully to what the Apostle Paul says in **2 Corinthians 1:3-4** "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God

of all comfort, <sup>4</sup>who comforts us in all our affliction, *so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*” God did not save you for your *own personal comfort alone*. Yes it is true that we do find personal comfort in our salvation. **Romans 5:1** says “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” There’s no greater comfort than that! If you have placed your faith in the Son of God, if you have received and rested upon Him alone for salvation, then your sins are forgiven and you have peace with God. You could walk out that door right now and get hit by a semi-truck and all would be well. But God didn’t save you *merely* for your own personal comfort. God saved you so that you could also comfort others. How do we learn to comfort others? Through our own affliction. The ability to comfort and sympathize with other is born in pain. Consider that loved ones: that God has appointed you this affliction, not because He delights in your agony, but so that through your affliction, you can show pity and sympathy to others. Reinterpret your affliction. And now let me show you how.

### III. Our Delight

#### The omniscience of the Son of God

The Son of God, as Jehovah, the Second Person in the Trinity knows everything about you. He knows the number of hairs on your head (**Luke 12:7**). He knows every single tear you will ever shed (**Psalms 56:8**). All of your days are numbered in His book (**Psalms 139:16**). He knows every word you will ever speak before you speak it, and every thought you will ever think before you ever think it (**Psalms 139:2-4**). God the Son knew all these things about you from eternity. But He did not *experience* them. Moses knew about the burdens of His people but he did not experience those burdens while He was in the palace. God sent him into the desert, so that he would share in the blood, sweat, tears of the very people that God sent him to deliver.

### The experimental sorrow of Christ

Likewise God the Son knows every burden that you will ever have without ever leaving the palace in Heaven. But Father wanted Him to know your burdens, my burdens *experientially*. **Hebrews 4:15** says “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” Beloved take that in. Father made His Son to put on weak human flesh, so that He could sympathize with you.

As God the Son, He could not feel any pain.

But as the God-man—possessing a human body and a human soul—Jesus Christ could be afflicted, could suffer, could die.

Why would God the Son ever do that? Because He has loved you with an everlasting love. Like Moses who both saved and served the women at the well, the Son of God came to save and to serve you. **Mark 10:45** “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” He has saved us by His atoning work on the cross and His glorious resurrection. And He served us and continues to serve us by becoming our Great High Priest—God in human flesh—dealing gently with us since He himself is clothed in our own nature. John Newton says here:

“[Jesus] has an [experiential] sympathy. He knows our sorrows, not merely as He knows all things, *but as one who has been in our situation*, and who, though without sin himself, endured, when upon earth, inexpressibly more for us that He will ever lay upon us...What, then shall we fear, or of what shall we complain? when all our concerns are written upon his heart...when He pities us more that we can do ourselves...”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> John Newton, *Letters of John Newton*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2015), pg. 278

## Hortatory Use

So I exhort you loved ones, *mediate* on the afflictions of Christ. **First** meditate on who this Person is. It is inconceivable that Moses would have given up all the pleasures in Pharaoh's court to willingly be afflicted with his people. But it is infinitely more mysterious *why* the Son of God, though He was rich, would become poor for our sake. This miracle exceeds the creation of the universe. Meditate on that greatest of all miracles. That God would become man. That the Creator would become creature. That He who was subject to no pain, no weakness, no infirmity would put on flesh in order to endure temptation, and the attacks of sinful men and devils, to cry and shed His blood, to face the terrible wrath of God, and to die as a hated man. Meditate on that.

**Secondly**, meditate on your afflictions in comparison with His afflictions. Some of you have suffered greatly in your life and some of you are suffering greatly now. But what are your afflictions in comparison to His? As a believer, you will never face the wrath of God. You may experience the bitterness of sin, the assaults of Satan, pain in your body, betrayal, you may even be called to die a martyrs death. As a believer you will be called to share in the sufferings of Christ (**Phil. 3:10**). But as a believer you will never suffer the wrath of God as Jesus Christ did. Your afflictions are under the kind and watchful eye of your Heavenly Father. But Christ's afflictions were under a Holy God who can not look upon evil with approval. Jesus suffered more under the wrath of God upon that cross than the accumulated sufferings of all men. He was a damned man and a cursed man. Meditate on that.

**Thirdly**, meditate on yourself. Why would Christ suffer for the likes of you? Just as Israel had rejected Moses the prince of Egypt, so you, before God shed His love abroad in your heart, rejected the Son of God in Heaven. You were an abominable sinner before Christ saved you. You were dead in sin, blind to the light, you hated God and His Christ and you loved your sin. As a sinner, as a child of the devil you were utterly unworthy of anyone's love and care. And yet Christ looked upon you with pity. He looked on you with care and great concern—and though you had no love for Him—He loved you and laid down

His life for you. “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”<sup>10</sup> Meditate on that.

**Fourthly**, meditate on your future state. What is your current affliction compared to the glory that is waiting for you. “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (**Romans 8:18**). Loved ones, God will pay back all of your tears with pleasures at his right hand forevermore. In a very short while you will be in the presence of God where there is fullness of joy. Consider how unspeakably happy you will be. You will hear a voice from the Throne “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup>He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”<sup>11</sup> Meditate on that.

### **Summa Theologica**

Loved ones, as we close consider what we have heard this morning. God appointed Moses to suffer in the school of affliction so that he could suffer with his people. That’s who our Savior is. God the Father wasn’t content with Jesus just knowing about our sufferings, He wanted our Savior to experience them. We have a Great High Priest who can sympathize in our sufferings. And that is why we also are afflicted, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. Dear friend, if you have not yet trusted in Christ Jesus, your sins are not forgiven, and the wrath of God abides on you. All your afflictions in this life are but a foretaste of the eternal misery that will come upon you in the Final Judgment. Today is the day of salvation. Your sins can be forgiven by the God-man. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. If you trust Him, if you believe on His name, you will be saved.

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<sup>10</sup> 1 John 4:10

<sup>11</sup> Revelation 21:3-4

