

# Conviction, Moses and Us

**The Servant of God**

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To begin this sermon, we are going to go to Revelation 15: 3 to pick up and get back into the theme of what we were talking about the last couple of weeks.

Revelation 15:3 They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying...

You see the title that is given there: Moses, the servant of God. This appears quite frequently in the Bible; so much so that it almost seems as though it were a part of his name. Mankind, I think, in its vanity, likes to have titles attached to its names. People like to be called the king or the queen, such as Elvis Presley, the "king of rock." People like to be known as the prince or the princess, the champion ("I am the greatest"), Mr. or Mrs. or Miss America, Mr. Universe, Miss Universe, Mr. Clutch, Mr. October, Miss Congeniality, Mr. Personality, and we could go on and on with names that you have seen in news reports from various events around the United States.

I do not think that this is entirely wrong as long as somebody else pins the label on you in honest admiration. At the same time, that one does not let this go to one's head because the Bible does say (and I am paraphrasing here), "Let others sing your praises."

In Revelation 3:15, this is the last reference to the man about whom more is written and who wrote more of the Bible than anybody else except for Jesus. It almost seems as though God has here put His final evaluation about him. It is "Moses, the servant of God."

Of course, Moses is in good company. Yesterday, I tried to find with my computer program if there were anybody else who was given a title somewhat similar to that, and I did find several others. Joshua, Paul, James, and David are all called servants. There are about thirty references to someone being the servant of God. Only two of them are for Joshua; two of them are for David; and one each for Paul and James. All the rest are in reference to Moses. As I said before, it is almost as if it is a part of his name. There appears a statement in Exodus 40:16 that I want to look at for a minute.

Exodus 40:16 Thus Moses did; according to all that the LORD had commanded him, so he did.

I think that succinctly sums up why this title was given to Moses. God gave a command, and Moses did what God said to do. This particular section from Exodus 25-40 shows why he was given that title. The instructions are contained within that section for building the tabernacle, and Moses faithfully followed these instructions. He faithfully followed the pattern that was given him by God on the mount.

There is a great deal of practical spiritual instruction for you and me here. Last week, we saw the connection made by the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 4, where he connected the term *servant* with *steward* as being essentially one and the same. Paul showed that, though a steward has authority that a servant may not have, he is still nonetheless also a servant. A steward may have authority, but he is still a servant. He is still under the authority of the owner. Of course, the owner in this case is Jesus Christ. Paul and the other ministers were stewards, but they were really no better than servants; they were servants, as well.

Paul says in that section that it is required of a steward that he be faithful. We in turn connected this to I Peter, and we saw that every single one of us is a steward of a gift of God or, I might say, gifts of God. It can be one or the other. God, by His grace, has given us something to enable us to serve Him and to serve the entire Body.

Moses was "the servant of God." However, I do not want any of us to get the idea that this implies that Moses did his job perfectly, because he did not. It does imply very clearly that what Moses did do pleased God mightily. That ought to be encouraging to you and me. God would like for us to do things perfectly; yet we see that even though someone that really did things very well did not do things perfectly, he nonetheless was accepted by God. I think this is important because sometimes we may have intense feelings of guilt or discouragement because we are not perfectly faithful to God. Yes, we should strive for perfection, but our salvation does not hinge or rest upon our being perfect but on God's grace through Jesus Christ.

What we are seeing is that conviction is a product of the relationship with God. This is the central theme of these three sermons that I have been giving. We have to see that conviction is not something that suddenly inspires a person to stand up, you might say, for God; rather, conviction is the product—it is the fruit—of a relationship. The relationship about which we are concerned is the relationship with God. It is not something that one has in a flash but a quality that builds through the experience that we have with God, making Him the center of our life.

Why are we convicted? It is because we really come to know Him. Our perception of God's nature, our discernment of right and wrong, our vision of God's purpose—all of those are elements that feed into strengthening convictions that will prove what we are in the day of trial. It is the growth of these elements about which we are concerned, and the growth of those things depends upon the day-to-day faithfulness in the little things. Please get this: Conviction is a product of the relationship with God, and the growth of conviction depends on day-to-day faithfulness in the little things of life.

When we left off last week, Moses had reached age forty, and he had forsaken his rights to anything Egypt had to offer to commit himself to the destiny of the Israelite slaves. Looking at what he did materially, it was an awesome step. I think that you will agree that, in all the history of the Bible, there was nobody who ever gave up so much material power, wealth, position, honor, social status, you name it, as Moses did. He turned his back on all of it, and it is something that we ought to admire.

We go through such a thing when we begin to accept God's offer and God's challenge. If we would rate it on a scale, maybe we give up as much as he did. I do not know. However, if we looked at the sheer dollar value and the status he had and the power that he had, he gave up

more than anybody else.

Acts 7:23-25 "Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and stuck down the Egyptian. For he supposed that his brethren would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand."

The act that he did here was heroic. It was noble. At the same time, it was also foolish. It was heroic and noble in that he could have just given the Israelites money. Is not that what most of us do today when somebody is in trouble? Especially when we find trouble in the United States, what does the United States government do? They throw money at the problem and say, "Be healed. Be relieved. The oppression is over now because we threw money at you."

Moses could have done that because he was in a position where he could have thrown maybe a great deal of money at them from the treasures of Egypt. Maybe, instead of throwing money at them, he could have relieved some of the oppression by using his influence within the governmental structure of Egypt to help those in government understand and take it a little bit easier on the Israelites and not have the taskmasters beat them or require so much of them. No, he did not do that.

What did he do? Moses gave himself to their plight. He gave his life. He gave his all. That was the heroic and the noble aspect of what he did. The foolish part was that there is no mention in Exodus, in Acts, or anywhere else that he sought God as to exactly what he should do or when he should do it. This is very important in terms of conviction. You can see that because Moses did what he did—giving up all that he did, perhaps leaving the possibility of actually taking over the throne of Egypt—he gave up all of his rights to his Egyptian heritage there to cast his lot with slaves.

He did just the opposite of what Joseph did. Joseph went from a slave to the second highest position in Egypt in the blink of an eye, in a matter of hours. Moses went the other direction. He went from the top to the bottom. Nowhere does it say that he sought God.

However, I think that you will have to agree that, for a man to do that, he must have had pretty strong beliefs, pretty strong feelings about what he was doing. Remember two sermons ago, the sermons about preference and convictions? Remember that the Supreme Court said that a preference can be such a strong belief that one will actually give his life to doing something? Yet it is not a conviction by their definition; it is only a preference, and preferences are not protected by the Constitution of the United States. Only convictions are protected. Thus, this is important to us.

Did Moses have a preference or a conviction? We know for sure that he had very strong feelings, and he was moved to act on what he did. However, we also know from the lack of information in the Scriptures that he did not seek God.

Go to Psalm 103. This is that beautiful psalm that begins "Bless the LORD, O my soul." Think of this in terms of Moses in Egypt, and the Israelites.

Psalm 103:6-7 The LORD executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. [Certainly he did this for Israel.] He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel.

God did make His way known to Moses, but when? When did He make it known?

In Psalm 77: 20, the psalmist is speaking to God:

Psalm 77: 20 You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

God did lead them like sheep, by the hand of Moses and Aaron; but it was forty years later when that occurred. When Moses was forty and he killed that Egyptian, undoubtedly he felt a sense of destiny. He knew certain things. They were at least common knowledge to him, which is why he acted the way that he did. He must have understood in some way that he was the one through whom God was going to lead the children of Israel from their slavery.

Others did not look at it the same way, did they? Maybe some Israelites did feel some of that same sense. Moses felt impelled to do something. However, he jumped the gun—by forty years. That is a long time; that is two-thirds of my life. He jumped the gun by forty years.

The leader, the faithful servant, Moses was not yet ready for what God wanted him to do. He was not yet ready to lead the flock. Moses was acting on his own self-energy. We can see some of his personality here. He was a man who was rash, impetuous, head strong, accustomed to getting his own way. You can see how his environment, sitting, as it were, in the very family of those who controlled Egypt, would have built that. He was a man accustomed to getting his own way.

Later on, though, you know what it said about him in Numbers 12. He would become the meekest of men, unobtrusive, conscious of his own weaknesses, and seemingly seeking guidance from God for every step of the way. We might say that he had the makings of a saint, but not until that strong and self-reliant nature could be broken and he could be shaped and prepared to be used the way God wanted him to be used. It took God forty years to get that man ready, forty years before the convictions would finally be right!

I want you to think of this, because we are always in such a hurry. We are so impatient to get things over with. We want to do it right now. What Moses did was well meant; but it was based almost entirely on his own emotions, his pride, and his feelings of strength. He was very, very premature.

We can look back on this, and we can see that the iniquity of the Amorites was not full yet. Does this ring a bell with you? We are supposed to look around, watch what is going on in the world; and we are supposed to look for this in principle, are we not—that is, for the time of the end? We would like to think that things really are bad, bad, bad in the world. Has there ever been so much violence on the street? Is the iniquity of the Amorites full yet? No, it is not. Not yet. As bad as it is, not yet—or God would have intervened. It is not yet time.

Not only that, but Israel's anguish over their slavery had not yet reached its peak. It was not at the place yet where they were willing to repent at least as much as they were able and give up the gods of Egypt to at least make a pass at giving their loyalty to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was forty years away.

This brings up a point that is very important: God has His timetable, and we have our own. Moses obviously was not on God's timetable yet, but he was going to come to be on God's timetable. I want you to think about this, because this is important to having right convictions. If we are on God's timetable, then our convictions are going to be right.

I want to show you a principle. We are not going to expound this very much, but go back to Genesis 18 to see this principle about God's timetable for things. I just want you to see that God has His, and we have ours. Things really click when we are on the same timetable as He is. God is speaking here, and He says,

Genesis 18:14 "Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you..."

God was working things out in Abraham and Sarah's life, and He had His own schedule for bringing Abraham and Sarah to the development where He could use them the way He wanted them.

Is this unusual? No, it is not unusual at all. We all operate according to time schedules; we all set priorities about things. Why, when you go to school, the teacher has maybe 180 days in which to get across the information, the knowledge, and so forth to the student each year in order for him to be able to advance to the next level, the next grade. Are teachers operating somewhat in the same way as God? Yes, they are.

God says within Himself, "It is going to take Me so long to do this, and I am going to bring Abraham and Sarah through a series of training programs until their faith, until their convictions, until their character, is to the point that I can really use it. Then, at the appointed time, Sarah will have the child."

Abraham and Sarah had to cooperate with this, did they not? They had to yield to God's way. They had to exercise the faith that they had. I think, if they were really tuned into God and God was the center of their life, they were going to see in this process of time and the exercises through which God was putting them (what we call tests or discipline or chastening) that progress or change was taking place in their lives. It was positive and good.

Genesis 21:1-2 And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

"At the set time." If you want to make an interesting study, you will find this all through the

Bible.

Exodus 9:5 Then the LORD appointed a set time, saying, "Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land."

In that case, the wait was short. It was only one day—but "at the set time." Next, let us look at a very common one of which you should be aware.

Psalm 81:3 Blow the trumpet at the time of the new moon, at the full moon, on our solemn feast day.

If you look at the King James or in a Hebrew interlinear Bible, it says "at the set time." The holy days occur right on schedule. It is God who sets the schedule. It is God who set the holy days at a set time. Is it not interesting that, as these holy days are fulfilled, the literal fulfillments occur right at the set time? The ones with which we are probably most familiar are Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost because they already, in that sense, have been fulfilled. The Holy Spirit came when? It came "at the set time"—right on the day of Pentecost.

Psalm 102:13 You will arise and have mercy on Zion; for the time to favor her, yes, the set time, has come.

Daniel 8:17 So he came near where I stood, and when he came I was afraid and fell on my face; but he said to me, "Understand, son of man, that the vision refers to the time of the end."

It was not going to unfold until God said. That is, until God gave permission for things to unfold at the time of the end.

Daniel 8:19 And he said, "Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time of the indignations; for at the appointed time the end shall be."

It is appointed. Do you remember what Jesus said when He was asked "When will the end be?" He said, "It is not for you to know the time or seasons." Even He did not know it. It is something that God kept to Himself. He has set it, though; the Scriptures say so.

Mark 1:15 And saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

You will find throughout the Bible *set time*, *appointed time*, *in the fullness of time*, and terms of that nature showing that God is directing the operations of His purpose and the plan that He has for carrying these things out.

We see that Moses was premature; there were things that he did not know. As far as we can see from the Scriptures, he did not seek God. He went out and did what he did forty years too soon. I do not mean to imply that every single little thing in our lives is happening at a set time, but I think the Scriptures do show that God is working within a general framework of time for each one of us. Most of the time, we seem to be on "fast time" compared to God.

I think that God reveals a general principle, though, that we need to take into consideration. Do you not want to work within time schedules? Do you not also set times for the things that you do and want to accomplish? Sure you do. Why? We do this in order to bring harmony to our plans and to avoid confusion.

God is not the author of confusion. I do not think that you can show me anybody who is more "ordered" than God. Thus, He sets times that He is going to have certain things accomplished. Remember this, which can be very encouraging: We are His workmanship. God is a Creator. Even as teachers in school, He has a time schedule that He is following so that, at the end of certain times, things are accomplished in our lives.

That is why He says—He promises—that He will never give us a trial, a temptation that is beyond our ability to bear, because at the time schedule that He is working out, we would not have reached the place where we could do certain things. However, He is moving us in that direction so that we can. He will always give something to us that is within the framework of our ability to accomplish what He allows us to do. As long as we yield to Him, whatever it is involving His purpose will get done.

I want you to think of this because, if it is not within His purpose, then anything else in life is of very little account. The only things in life that are really important are those things that are important to God's purpose. Everything else, though it may seem important to us, is minor by comparison.

Again, I want you to think of this in relation to Moses. He was not on the same time schedule as God. He did not look upon things as really being under control, but they were—because God runs His universe. It was not out of control. However, Moses, looking at it carnally, said, "It has to be done right now!" and he rushed out and did something that resulted in the death of a man. He was not ready, and God was not ready.

Have you ever done anything by getting out in front of God, in your enthusiasm, in your belief? What usually happens? The same thing that happened to Moses: It fell apart. It failed.

Using the test given by the Supreme Court that I gave you in the first sermon of this series, there is a way to tell that Moses' beliefs at the time were merely preferences. Go back to Exodus 2.

Exodus 2:11-15 Now it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brethren and looked at their burdens. And he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. So he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. And when he went out the second day, behold, two Hebrew men were fighting, and he said to the one

who did the wrong, "Why are you striking your companion?" Then he said, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us: Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" So Moses feared and said, "Surely this thing is known!" When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well.

How does this compare with what it says about Moses in Hebrews 11:27? It says there that he "feared not the wrath of the king." He did fear here, did he not? Look at this again:

Exodus 2:12 So he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one [was looking]...

That is very interesting in light of the Supreme Court's test.

Exodus 2:14 Moses feared and said, "Surely this thing is known!"

Exodus 2:15 Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh...

Suppose Moses believed that what he was doing was God-ordered; that is, that he—Moses—was going to be the one to lead Israel out of Egypt. Remember the Supreme Court test. This is one of their tests. If you have a conviction, it means that you believe that what you are doing or what you are saying is God-ordered. The Supreme Court said: "Who can argue with God?" You cannot argue with God. Therefore, what Moses did here was based upon a preference because he feared. He did not really have the conviction that what he was doing was right. He looked this way and that.

Can you remember what the Supreme Court said? If you are concerned about what other people think about you, you have a preference—not a conviction. If a person really believes that what he is saying and what he is doing is God-ordered, it does not matter what people think. It does not matter what people say.

In order to see this kind of conviction, you have to go all the way to Christ maybe—at least, just at this moment in the sermon. We are going to see, however, that later on Moses had that conviction, even though right now he did not. Now he was afraid of people. He was afraid of what they would think of it. If he really had the conviction, he would not have cared.

Flash back to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Did they care what other people thought about them? No, they did not. They did not look around to see if anybody else was going to stand with them. They stood while everybody else kissed the ground. They did not care what the most powerful man in the world—Nebuchadnezzar—thought of them, because they believed that what they were doing was God-ordered—and who can argue with God? You do not bow down to an idol. They told Nebuchadnezzar, "We do not care if you give us another chance. We are not going to bow down, because our God has said, 'You shall not bow down yourselves to an idol.'"

When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did that, they had convictions. When Moses did what he did in Exodus 2, he had preferences. Moses needed to be prepared for the job that he was going to do. You might say, "Yeah, but Moses was going to kill a man here. Would that not make a difference?" That is a pretty big step—to kill a man.

I want you to think of Moses forty years later. That same Moses, taking orders from God, marched before the Pharaoh and condemned to death tens of thousands of people; and he did it without quailing before him. He did it absolutely without fear, because now Moses was convicted that if God ordered him to tell the Pharaoh all of his firstborn were going to die (or even before, that all of his cattle were going to die), there was nothing Moses could do to change that; and he stood by the strength of his conviction that what he was telling Pharaoh was God-ordered. He did not just run up to Pharaoh and say, "Pharaoh, I have this message," and then run out before the soldiers got him.

Do you see the difference between a preference and a conviction? It took God forty years to get that man there! I am going through this to help us to be encouraged. God is not done with us yet. When He gets us to the place where He can use us, whatever the test might be, we will be ready because God says we are ready. Otherwise, we would not be going through this. He would deflect it aside, because He does not want to give us twelfth grade trials while we are still in the first grade. We have not advanced to that yet.

Moses went out and did what he did when he was forty like a first grader trying to do the work of a twelfth grader. He did not have the right convictions yet. It was noble, but it was misplaced. Forty years later, the difference was in his faith. He now had the right convictions because he knew God; he knew himself; he knew God's purpose; he knew God's plan infinitely better than he did forty years before. The reason he acted as he had before was that he was out in front of God—acting on the basis of his own human strengths, which were considerable.

The Moses that we see forty years later was a far different man. I do not know exactly what happened. I do not know the steps, the chastening, the disciplines, the schooling, or whatever it was. I do not know what God did to Moses out there while he was shepherding those sheep. Whatever it was, God gradually changed him into a useful servant—mostly by taking the pride out of him.

Now look at Exodus 3:10. This is right after that episode with the burning bush. God spoke to Moses, told him that he was standing on holy ground and to take his shoes off, which Moses dutifully did. Now Moses is going to receive his commission:

Exodus 3:10 "Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

"Come now, therefore, and I will send you..." The time had come. Before, Moses thought he was ready, and he impetuously promoted himself to do the job. "Here God, I will do it." He did it without waiting for God. Now, however,

Exodus 3:11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

Look at the difference. Before he promoted himself. Now he says, "God, who am I?" What a change! What a change has taken place in this man's thinking! He not only hesitates about going, but we are going to see that he almost seems petrified about the prospects of going. This is a true principle of those who have been humbled in their field of expertise.

When we are young, we foolishly think, in our vanity, that our strength is going to be able to carry us sailing through any problem. We are deceived by our own ignorance. "The pride of a young man is his strength." We foolishly, like Moses, get ourselves into things because we rush in where angels fear to tread. We think that our strength will somehow carry the day. When we really come to understand, though—usually after years of experience—we realize how little we know, and that there is so much more already that we do not know.

This is clearly seen by people who are truly humbled by people in, let us say, areas of science. They think that they know something, let us say, when they are twenty-five. They have graduated from high school. They have graduated from college. Maybe now they have a master's degree, and they are working on a doctor's degree, and they are learning a great deal. However, after maybe twenty years of experience of dealing in the field of chemistry or biology, the way they look at themselves then is that now they realize there is a great deal more that they do not know than what they already know from the accumulation of schooling and experience. They begin to see God's creation and the Mind that created all these things in a much different light.

That is what has happened to Moses. In those forty years, that impetuous spirit of his has been dissolved away; and now he is seeing the power of Egypt in its true light. "Oh, boy! I do not want to do that! Send somebody else. I mean, that is dangerous, God." You know that Moses did not actually say these things, but that was behind his thinking. "That is dangerous. A guy could get killed doing those things. Even if I do not get killed, I might get thrown in prison." Or, "God, I am going to be made to look like a fool before those people."

Is this not what encumbers and constrains us, as well? We worry, and we have fears that we are going to look foolish before friends and relatives if we obey God—whether it is keeping the Sabbath, whether it is tithing. How many of your relatives have castigated you because of tithing? "Here you are having a tough time making your income stretch, and yet you are tithing to that church." It seems awfully dumb to them, but what is our feeling in it? Are we fearful of what they will think about our doing those kinds of things?

You see, now Moses more fully recognized his weaknesses as compared to Egypt; and he is quailing at the thought. God has to now overcome Moses'