

By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

(Hebrews 11:23)

Born in July 1883, Commissioner Catherine Bramwell-Booth was the grand-daughter of William Booth

- Founder of the Salvation Army and until her death in 1987 was 'the Mother of the Salvation Army'
- In 1971, she was interviewed by Michael Parkinson about the possibility of living to the age of 100
- Parkinson light-heartedly told her, 'my money's on you' and was totally wrong-footed by the quick reply
- 'what does that mean?' I think, in reality, the commissioner knew but it made great television

According to the *Guardian* newspaper the number of gambling commercials on TV has rocketed

- Since September 2007, TV advertising has been allowed for sports betting, online casinos and poker
- Whereas before then adverts were only allowed for football pools, the National Lottery and bingo halls
- I would think that it was very unlikely that anyone today was totally ignorant about gambling odds
- So, I am using the expression, 'against all odds' with some confidence
- If it is said that the odds are in favour of something, it means that it is likely to happen
- But if it is 'against all odds' it means that it is most unlikely to happen

The background of the birth of Moses is Pharaoh's edict that every male Hebrew child is to be put to death

- So the birth and survival of Moses is 'against all odds' – but this is not the only such case
- The birth of Isaac was against all odds – his mother was 90, his father older still
- They regarded the prospect of being parents at their age as laughable – Isaac means 'he laughs'
- But while the world-at-large may use the expression 'against all odds'
- The writer to the Hebrews shows a higher power in action and the response of the people, 'by faith'

Much later, when the angel appeared to the Virgin Mary at Nazareth – what he said would come to pass was:

- Against all odds – but Mary received the news in humility and faith
- ‘I am the Lord’s servant ... May your word to me be fulfilled’ (Luke 1:38)
- The themes introduced in the Old Testament culminate many years later in the manger at Bethlehem.

The verses we have in Hebrews are a very condensed ‘life of Moses’, a portrait of the prophet as a young man

- Some years after the death of Joseph, there was a new king of Egypt who knew nothing of Joseph
- The Hebrew people had expanded greatly and Pharaoh, the king, was fearful
- He tried various schemes to stop the Hebrew people from multiplying but without success
- Eventually he issued an order that all male Hebrew babies should be thrown into the Nile (Ex. 1:22)

Despite the command, Moses’ parents they hid their baby for three months

- And then put their baby in a basket (the Hebrew word is the same as for ‘ark’)
- Made it waterproof and floated it on the Nile – one wonders what their ultimate hope was?
- What exactly is meant by ‘they saw he was no ordinary child’ is difficult to say
- In his great speech in Acts, Stephen says that Moses was beautiful or well-pleasing to God (Acts 7:20)
- Could it mean that Moses was so beautiful that his parents believed God has a special plan for him?
- Whatever it means something in Moses’ appearance spurred on his parents’ faith
- For they were undoubtedly risking their own lives in order to preserve the life of their son
- In any event, in their system of priorities they were not afraid of the king’s edict
- And pushed their basket, their vessel, their ‘ark’ with its precious cargo, out in faith
- Moses was rescued from the Nile by none other than Pharaoh’s daughter, nursed by his own mother
- Brought up as a royal prince in Pharaoh’s palace becoming uniquely placed to lead his people

I A PRIESTLY FOREBEAR

In the history of Israel the Exodus would come to hold a prominent place

- Consequently, information about Moses, the earthly leader of the people is very important
- Even the writer to the Hebrews makes reference to the circumstances of his birth and infancy
- At a time when male Hebrew children were to be killed by being thrown into the Nile
- A woman gave birth to a baby boy – she was of the tribe of Levi and so was her husband
- In the early days, the tribe of Levi had no priestly associations, that would not come until later
- But later generations would see in Moses a priestly forebear
- It was Moses who was given the sign of the Passover Lamb (Ex. 12) – an anticipation of Jesus Christ
- One whom John the Baptist introduced as ‘The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ (Jn. 1)
- Later Moses would play the ultimate priestly role by being the one through whom the Law was given
- He was indeed ‘no ordinary child’ and by faith his parents recognised that

The birth of Moses is not simply about the deliverance of one child, it is about the deliverance of a people

- One male child who survived Pharaoh’s vicious edict – was, at the end of the day, just one child
- But as the Exodus story unfolds this is not simply about the deliverance of this one child
- But about the deliverance of a whole people, a nation, not the Hebrew people oppressed in Egypt
- But the Israelites in Canaan, the Promised Land and even that is an earthly sign of something greater still
- For the faith of which the writer to the Hebrews speaks is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ
- The great High Priest and Deliverer, this is the one who was before Abraham
- This is ‘great David’s Greater Son’ – Moses, this child, once condemned to death by Pharaoh’s decree
- Will be the one under whose earthly leadership all Israel escapes not just Pharaoh but Egypt
- And this deliverance from the waters will be surpassed by an even greater deliverance at the Sea of Reeds

II A PRACTICAL EXPEDIENT

It's hard to believe that my early childhood memories are now half a century ago

- I have never been in any doubt that I was blessed to have believing parents
- My parents were good parents, not perfect parents, and I have not been a perfect parent either
- And if you feel the same, at least you might take some consolation from your faith
- Moses was blessed to have believing parents – for them to hide him from the Egyptians was an act of faith
- Godly parents cannot pass on their faith to their children but they can share it with them

Moses' parents trusted God rather than fearing Pharaoh – it is a reminder that faith can overcome fear

- The writer to the Hebrews mentions this against the background of the persecution of Christians
- Who are in a danger of 'shrinking back' from the road of faith – but this is not 'ivory tower' faith
- Where beliefs seem rather insulated from the practical concerns of everyday life
- Moses' mother clearly decided to hide her son in the one place no Egyptian would look – the Nile itself
- This is where the Hebrew boy babies were supposed to be thrown – in one sense she obeyed
- But she did so with the help of a papyrus-reed container (she may have easily bought this as made it)
- Which needed water-proofing with tar and pitch – it was effectively a small 'ark of salvation'
- There is no suggestion in the story that Moses is being abandoned to death in this way
- He is being left, like a baby deposited on the hospital doorstep, in the hope that he will be found and saved
- There is no suggestion that Moses was deliberately placed where the Egyptian princess would find him
- Indeed to be discovered by the Egyptians was, in one sense, the worst possible outcome
- But when the basket is discovered by one of Pharaoh's many daughters – the response of Moses' sister
- Is one of faith and not of fear, as she steps in with a most practical consideration of nursing the baby
- No doubt already having in mind to enlist her mother for the task

III A PROVIDENTIAL OUTCOME

Moses in the bulrushes was undoubtedly one of the popular stories in Sunday Schools of former days

- And while there were many faithful Sunday School teachers – my Dad and many of mine included
- The limitation was that we grew up knowing the story but not where it fitted into the big picture
- But the writer to the Hebrews knows where it fits into the bigger picture – not only chronologically
- But also in the plan of God's salvation of a people to bear his name

When the princess found the reed basket and opened it to find the beautiful baby crying – she had compassion

- In the right place at the right time, presumably having been on some kind of watch in any event
- Miriam (Moses' sister), probably acting as if she were just passing, was given the right words to say
- The consequence that the child was returned to his own mother and she was paid wages for feeding him
- Was a dramatic turn-around from a situation in which she thought she might not see him alive again
- Again the godly parents had the opportunity to put their faith into action – to teach Moses his identity
- To teach him about his people and to teach him about the God of his forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob
- It is what I call 'a providential outcome' – but it was not the result of his parents doing nothing
- Rather it was a result of their determination to respond in faith to the crisis that faced them – in short it is

'a beautiful illustration of the connection which should always exist between the diligent use of means and a pious trust in providence. Instead of sitting down in sullen despair, or passive dependence on divine interposition to do all the work, everything is done which can be done by human agency' (Bush).

One of the interesting things about the narrative of Moses' birth and infancy is that it does not mention God

- And yet, the writer to the Hebrews takes up this story as one of the great examples of faith
- The only conclusion to which the reader of the Exodus passage can reach is one of faith
- In the providence of God, Moses has both the heritage of Jacob and the privilege of Egypt
- And as the narrative unfolds the tension between those two factors will be seen at work

The escape of the Hebrew people from Egypt is against all odds

- Saving Moses, the one whom we later discover is God's appointed leader of Israel, is against all odds
- The likelihood of someone being educated in the court of Pharaoh and equipped for leadership
- And then being ready to lead the Israelites out of Egypt is against all odds
- But we could go on – the possibility of a child, Jesus, being born to a virgin mother is against all odds
- And it is because it is against all odds that it has to be 'by faith'

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews is addressing Christian people who are in danger of shrinking back

- While it is still the case in modern Britain that our major challenge is not persecution so much as apathy
- Through faith in Jesus Christ we are putting our hope in someone, against all odds
- For the means by which Jesus has promised to bring his eternal kingdom are also against all odds
- And the plan of salvation through his being born into a humble home, eventually becoming a teacher
- Being crucified and after he was dead being buried look as if the situation is completely hopeless
- The resurrection is, of course, against all odds – and the plan of salvation by the preaching of the cross
- Is foolishness, certainly to those who are perishing (1 Cor. 1:18) – but it is his work as our High Priest
- Our task now is to respond practically believing that the providential outcome is in God's hands