

Sermon for August 23, 2026
"Basket Case"

Exodus 2:1-10

Israel was a basket case. They had prospered in Egypt. For hundreds of years they grew as a nation. In fact they grew to the point that the Egyptians were afraid of them. "There are more of them than there are of us! What will happen if they decide to rise up?"

So Pharaoh decided to impose some population control to take care of the "Hebrew problem." He attempted to coerce the midwives of the Hebrews to kill the boys born to them. This would mean that the following generation would be born to Egyptian men by Hebrew women. The Hebrews as a people would cease to exist. They would be absorbed into Egypt.

But it didn't work. The midwives were too brave and too smart. At great personal risk they avoided carrying out Pharaoh's orders, and God blessed them and the Hebrews continued to grow. So Pharaoh took it a step farther. He ordered all the boys born to the Hebrews to be killed by throwing them in the Nile.

At the beginning of chapter 2 of Exodus the focus shifts from the geopolitical workings of the Egyptian empire to one couple having a baby. If I were a movies director, chapter one would be broad shots of events in large rooms and outside near the Nile. Then chapter 2 would begin with a shot of a couple in a small hovel having a baby and hiding it from their overseers. Moses was born under a death sentence. His crime was treason against Pharaoh by being born Hebrew and male. So his family hid him as long as they could.

But children grow. You can't contain them forever and the danger that he would be discovered grew. So they decided to find a way to save Moses. They made a basket, an ark, of reeds and pitch, and put Moses in it, and ironically, they did what Pharaoh had said to do, they cast him in the Nile.

Moses' sister kept an eye on him. Providentially, or maybe according to plan, the daughter of Pharaoh came and saw the baby in the basket. Her heart goes out to him and she adopts him. Again ironically, or providentially, his own mother ends up nursing him till he is weaned. Then he is brought to Pharaoh's daughter to be her son. Pharaoh had said to cast all the boys in the Nile. In the end the Nile, the means of Israel's extinction, became the means of Moses' deliverance. It also placed him in the house of Pharaoh as a Prince of Egypt where he could eventually address the powers that oppressed his people and say, "Let my people go!"

Moses was a basket case. He seems destined to drown in the Nile as many others in his generation did. He was a helpless baby condemned by a ruthless empire that was enslaving his nation of people. What hope did Moses have?

Yet this was no run of the mill nation of slaves. These were the descendants of Abraham and Sarah. These were a people who placed their faith in the God that made Egypt and the rest of the universe. This nation were the ones who began as a barren elderly couple believing in an impossible promise of many descendants. They had endured family troubles, persecutions, famine, and most recently 400 years of slavery, and God had made this hopeless band into a great nation.

Now, God was about to deliver them. They were a basket case; a helpless people in a hopeless situation. Pharaoh was systematically killing off a generation of their sons, but some of these helpless hopeless people decided to save one boy. His family hid him and put him in an ark and watched him as he floated down the Nile. He was delivered from the death sentence imposed by Pharaoh, and he eventually, after a long journey, was used by God to deliver the whole nation.

God specializes in making the impossible, possible. God took a barren couple and made them a great nation. God loves taking on basket cases. People like Abraham and Sarah. People like Jacob, a lying cheater, and making them people of faith. People like Moses, a child born under a death sentence; an enemy of the Egyptian Empire. Yet God delivered him and made him a great deliverer.

God took Moses where he was, one baby boy among a generation sentenced to death, and God put him where he needed to be: in the court of Pharaoh as a Prince of Egypt. God not only delivered him but used him to deliver the whole nation of Israel. Moses was a basket case but God can use a basket as an ark to bring deliverance. God can turn a basket case into a miracle of deliverance.

Araminta Ross was a basket case. She was born with 2 strikes against her. She was a slave, and a woman. We know her better by the name she took when she became free: Harriet Tubman. She escaped slavery and then made repeat trips into the south to free over 70 other slaves: one of the most successful conductors on the Underground Railroad. She was given the nickname Moses for like Moses she led many to freedom. Yet, that was not the end of her freeing work; she also worked for women's suffrage though she died in 1913 before women got the vote. Like Moses she led many out of slavery, but never saw the promised land of the vote for herself. God took a slave and made her into a Moses; a great deliverer

Israel was a basket case. Moses was a basket case. Harriet Tubman was a basket case. Are you a basket case? Sometimes our lives can be filled with basket cases. People can be caught in cycles of addiction or abuse or poverty. They can feel helpless and hopeless. Sometimes our financial situation or careers or family relationship, even our country, can seem like a basket case.

If you stop and think about it the whole human race is a basket case. We like to think we are masters of our own destiny, but we are really at the mercy of the universe. The whole human race could be wiped out by a meteor or a microbe. Spiritually we are a basket case. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and the wages of sin is death. We are incapable of saving ourselves. We have offended the moral order of the universe and are too far gone. We are hopeless.

However God specializes in hopeless cases. God took a basket case like Moses and made him a great deliverer. God delivered Moses through the Nile and God delivered Israel through the Red Sea. When God chose to come in the flesh, God became as a basket case. Jesus was born to a couple displaced from their home by an arbitrary governmental edict. He was born homeless in a barn already a refugee. He was born to a people who had been subjugated by empire after empire for centuries, and as Jesus passed through death, he made a way for us through his death and resurrection to have true righteousness and hope.

Cast yourself in the ark of God's grace, in the river of life, and let God lead you where you need to go. Let the God of Abraham and Sarah, Miriam and Moses, Jesus and Harriet Tubman bear you up. Admit your helplessness and hopelessness, and acknowledge God's power. God can deliver you from sin, from oppression, from the troubles and trials of life. God can give you hope and bear you up.

Then God can turn you into a deliverer. God can use you to deliver others. God used Moses and Jesus and Harriet Tubman. God can do the same for you if you will put your trust in the Almighty.

God is a God of basket cases. Place your basket cases in God's hands. Then stand back and watch God work a miracle!