



Myth Made Fact with Dr. Louis Markos

Lesson 12: Oedipus the Scapegoat

Outline:

Oedipus the Scapegoat

- Pentheus had a granddaughter named Jocasta and she had a brother named Creon.
- Cadmus also had a son named Polydorus. Polydorus had a grandson named Laius.
- Jocasta is the great granddaughter of Cadmus. Laius is the great grandson of Cadmus. Jocasta and Laius marry.
- Jocasta and Laius hear a prophecy that their son will kill his father. Laius pins his sons feet together and has the boy left to die. Oedipus means swollen foot in Greek (because his feet were pinned together).
- The shepherd took pity on the boy, and he had a friend from Corinth, and so he gave him to the herdsmen.
- The shepherd turn the baby over to the King and Queen of Corinth.
- Oedipus goes to the Oracle of Delphi to ask about his birth. Before he could even get to the sacred space of the altar, the Oracle repels him saying, “Leave, you are a polluted man for you will kill your father and marry your mother.”
- Oedipus runs until he comes to a crossroad of three roads. He runs into a hunting party. Oedipus kills the whole hunting party, including Laius, except one who runs back to Thebes.
- At another crossroads, Oedipus met the Sphinx.
 - What animal is it that walks on four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon, and three legs evening? (Man – Oedipus gets the answer).
 - The Sphinx kills herself and Oedipus goes to Thebes.
- Oedipus returns to Thebes. The kings had died and they have a beautiful queen. Oedipus and Jocasta are married and have four children.
 - Antigone, Ismene, Eteocles, Polynices
- A plague falls upon Thebes. They send to the Oracle of Delphi to find out about the plague. They find out the plague is because there was no justice over the murder of Laius. We need to bring justice.
- Oedipus leads the search, and Oedipus finds out that he has murdered his father and married his mother. He puts out his eyes in horror and is led into exile by Antigone and Ismene.

Oedipus the King, the plot



- What made a tragedy great was its plot. Aristotle explained that someone like Sophocles would take the story and perfect it. He would imitate it in such a way to perfect it. To condense it down to its essence.
- The play should take place in one day, one local, and one plot (unities).
- Things happen causally rather than chronologically.
- It starts in the middle of things. He is already married to Jocasta, had four children and Thebes is being destroyed by plague.
- Before the play opens, Oedipus has already sent Creon for the Oracle and Tiresias the blind prophet.
- In a moment of dramatic irony, Oedipus says, “I will avenge Laius as if he was my own father.”
- Creon says to leave the unknown as the unknown. In walks Tiresias, and Oedipus insults Tiresias to persuade him to speak. Tiresias says, “You are the killer that you seek.”
- Later, Jocasta tells Oedipus that there is no truth in prophecy. The two think they have defeated their fate.
- A messenger comes to Corinth with news from Corinth. Oedipus finds out that his father has died, so he is now King of Thebes. This is the same messenger that brought Oedipus to Corinth. He tells Oedipus that he is a foundling.
- The shepherd shows up, and he is the very shepherd who was supposed to leave Oedipus on the hill.
- Fate closes in. Finally the shepherd is forced to tell him the truth. Oedipus runs to Jocasta, who has killed herself. Oedipus puts out his eyes.
- He forces Creon to send him into exile.

The difference between the story of Oedipus and the plot of Oedipus the King:

- The story is a horrible story, of a man who commits two of the worst taboos.
- The plot is about a man who discovers late in life that he killed his father and married his mother. The plot is about self-discovery. He presses and presses until he brings about a tragic knowledge that destroys him.
- This is a man who has the courage to follow the truth wherever it leads.
- This is the story of a man who has no free will.
- Here is the power of Sophocles’ plot. He found the half day in the life of Oedipus where everything he does is motivated by his own choice.
- We see a kind of will that chooses.

Greek Tragedy, and a strong tie to the Bible

- The word tragedy in Greek means the song of the goat, the song of the scapegoat.
- In Leviticus during Yom Kippur there would be the sacrifice of the heifer and the sacrifice of the goat. The high priest would put his hand on the goat’s head and by so doing ritually transfer the guilt of the community onto the goat. Then they would exile the goat, thus the scapegoat.



- Many of the greatest heroes are actually scapegoats.
- Jesus is a pure scapegoat. Oedipus bears the weight of his community. He is polluted, but he is being used by the gods to take away the sin of the community by taking on himself.
- The focus on the need for a scapegoat is one of the ways that God prepared the pagan world for the coming of Christ.