

Tuesday, November 4 FINAL: EXODUS 4:18-31

Exodus 4:18-31 takes place after Moses was commissioned by God at the burning bush and was given the ability to perform powerful signs and leads into the start of the main action of Moses' ministry in verse 30.

Moses' trip to Egypt was not without its challenges, including a near-death experience, at the hand of God, no less! After escaping death due to his godly wife's discernment, quick thinking and swift action to resolve the issue, Moses meets his older brother, Aaron, in the wilderness at the mountain of God (Sinai/Horeb), tells him everything God told Moses and shows Aaron all the signs God commanded Moses to do. Then Moses and Aaron carry out the commission by gathering the elders of Israel, speaking God's words to them and performing the signs God taught Moses.

Today's passage consists of 5 short, but important encounters:

- 1. An encounter with Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, in Midian**
- 2. An encounter with the Lord, also in Midian**
- 3. An encounter with the Lord at a lodging place on the way to Egypt**
- 4. An encounter with Moses' older brother, Aaron, in the wilderness at the mountain of God (Sinai/Horeb) on Moses' journey to Egypt**
- 5. Moses and Aaron's encounter with the elders and the children of Israel in Egypt**

MOSES' FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH HIS FATHER-IN-LAW, JETHRO IN MIDIAN

In verse 18 Moses obeys God and begins preparatory steps toward carrying out his commission. This process included going to his father-in-law, Jethro, ~~the priest of Midian~~, to ask for permission and blessing to return to Egypt and packing up his wife, Zipporah, and sons on a donkey and making the long trip from Midian to Egypt.

Although this is not something we would necessarily do, it was required in Moses' day and culture as an act of courtesy and custom. J. Alec Motyer, states, "...Moses put his request to leave to the head of the family (18) and did so in a way that Jethro could most easily accept.

To have announced that he had been called to bring Israel out of Egypt would surely have been a recipe for colossal family misunderstanding and even argument, possibly prompting Jethro's incredulity and certainly exciting his fears for his daughter and grandsons."

Moses exercised courteous discretion within the bounds of truth, following the Lord's commandment (Ex. 20) to honor one's father and mother. Moses carefully chose a combination of truth, courtesy and consideration, recognizing Jethro's headship and with a desire to avoid Jethro's alarm.

Let's look at the origin and history of the Midianite people. After his wife, Sarah, died, Abraham married a woman named Keturah, who bore him six sons, the 4th being Midian (Gen. 25:4; 1 Chron. 1:33). Their nomadic descendants came to be known as the Midianites, distant relatives of the Israelites who often oppressed Israel (Judges 6:2). Although the Midianites were descended from Abraham, they were not part of God's chosen people. Jethro was a Midianite priest, who served idols initially, but turned from idols to worship the one true God at some point. Jethro's other name, Reuel (2:18), means, "friend of God."

(Bruckner) Jethro welcomed Moses into his house when Moses fled from Egypt after having killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew. Jethro had given his daughter, Zipporah, to Moses and provided him with a home and constant employment for 40 years. (2:20-21; 3:1) Moses' generous father-in-law may have been the closest thing Moses had to a father. Moses spent precious few years with his Hebrew birth parents as an infant and young child and most of the rest of his first 40 years in Pharaoh's palace. I believe Jethro liked and supported Moses, wanting the best for him, and Moses respected Jethro. In Exodus 18 we read that Jethro continued to support Moses by taking Zipporah and their two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, out of harm's way, when Moses sent them home, and then returned them to Moses later.

After Moses became the leader of the Israelites, Jethro was a source of wisdom and guidance for Moses (Ex. 18:17-24), a wise and respected older man in Moses' life. In chapter 18:13-27 Jethro gave Moses some helpful administrative advice, which helped Moses when he became overwhelmed with the task of judging the Hebrew people.

Isn't it like God to guide and provide for his children no matter how difficult the circumstances, and despite our sin, waywardness, rebellion and attempts at self-sufficiency sometimes through unbelievers?! AND, isn't it like God to be working in all circumstances and people's lives even when we don't see it?

The main event in the book of Exodus is God saving his children from Pharaoh and taking them out of Egypt to worship Him. At the same time, God was working in the life of Jethro and his family in Midian. While visiting Moses and hearing all God had done for Israel, Jethro said, "Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people." Jethro brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Jethro before God. (Ex. 18:10-12) This seems to point to Jethro's conversion! Having seen the miracles God did for Israel, he forsook his worship of idols, converted to worship Yahweh and took his faith back to Midian. God sent Moses to Jethro's house 40 years earlier to begin the process of saving members of this Midianite family as well as tasking them with the care of Moses while God completed His work of preparing and equipping Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt.

Moses, even after making the decision to return to Egypt and having begun the process and preparation to do so, had doubts and fears about the whole mission. He may have been overwhelmed by the task ahead of him but also by possible events prior to the main mission. Would he be arrested, imprisoned or executed? Knowing Moses concerns and anxiety, the Lord continues to patiently comfort, assure, remind and encourage Moses with the words, “Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.” (vs. 19)

Moses did not go “into battle” without protection or preparation. He obeyed and actively trusted God by setting out for Egypt with the staff, as God had directed. This staff began as Moses’ shepherd’s crook (Ex. 4:2), but God set it apart to display His miraculous signs before His people and before Pharaoh. Motyer says, “The staff was a visible way of arming himself with the power of God, assuring himself that the Almighty God was with him and reminding himself of the convincing signs that would win him acceptance.” We too ought not go into the battle of the Christian life unarmed. Eph. 6:10&11 charges us to “...be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.”

(Bruckner) During **MOSES’ SECOND ENCOUNTER IN MIDIAN**, God enabled Moses’ understanding by revealing the future (4:21-23)

God spoke to Moses about what *would unfold* once he arrived in Egypt, including conversations and important themes to come and the wonders God would perform. The Lord gave Moses additional instructions for his meeting with Pharaoh, saying, “...see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power (vs. 21a). God also revealed His hardening of Pharaoh’s heart (vs. 21b), which shows God’s power over the enemies of His people and illustrates that we cannot convince anyone to respond to God’s word and come to faith and obedience to God without God’s drawing them.

God also expressed His desire that His firstborn son, the children of Israel, be freed by Pharoah or Pharaoh's first-born son would be stuck down. Verses 21-23 clearly demonstrate God's sovereignty over and planning of the sequence of events to come. This must have given Moses comfort and strength as he stepped out in faith to trust and follow the Lord and carry out His plan.

God's providence and provision permeate the book of Exodus. We see it very clearly in regard to Aaron. J. Alec Motyer, writes, ... "Aaron is not a 'miraculous' divine intervention but a provision long since prepared with the necessary gifts and now emerging from the shadows by divine prompting... The whole story of Aaron (vs. 14, 17) makes him a striking example of the '**anticipatory providence of God**': born 3 years before Moses, grown to adult life with the necessary gift which was recognized and developed, and now setting out from Egypt before Moses left Midian, so that they might meet 'at the mountain of God.'" God sent and provided Aaron at just the right time, with just the right gifts to assist Moses.

Motyer writes (pp.78-79) "...Moses future... was not a haphazard conglomeration of 'events' nor a chance sequence of 'one thing after another'. Moses' future, like ours, was known by God and under his control (the "I will" in verses 21b & 23b) and guaranteed to eventuate in salvation (cf. Acts 14:22, Rev. 7:13-15).

What a wonderful reminder of how God works in our lives also! Nothing in our lives is random, haphazard or without purpose despite how it may appear, especially when the fulfillment of God's plans in our lives takes longer than we expect or desire! I am praying for the salvation of some of my children and desire that God would accomplish this sooner rather than later, but must continue to pray faithfully, relying on His perfect will and timing.

(Bruckner, 1) God's goal was to allow His first-born son, Israel, to worship Him and the obstacle was Pharaoh's refusal. (Love and Justice)

Although the **Father/son relationship** between the Lord and Israel is primarily used in the NT, the first time Israel is called the Lord's son is in this passage. This relationship began at this time in history when God delivered and redeemed his people from Egypt (Ex. 6:6). Unlike children of natural descent, this Father/son relationship originates from divine decision, selection and election. (Eph.1:3-6; James 1:18). Salvation by grace leads to adoption (John 1:12, Gal. 4:4-7) This is a great mystery as we contemplate his gracious favor toward us despite our sin and unworthiness. In the book of Exodus, the work of salvation was done at the Passover, which we will study in chapter 12, when the Lord's firstborn sons were kept safe under the blood of the lamb. There sonship and salvation were inextricably linked!

God saw his peoples' slavery and cared about the hardship of their lives, but **His priority for them was spiritual**. They were living in spiritual darkness (Ex. 2:23-24), held captive and dying, and only a similar measure against Egypt's first-born would purchase Israel's freedom. Here God acts as a parent defending His children. Israel had adopted the ways and gods of the Egyptians and needed to leave Egypt in order to free themselves from idols and return to worshipping the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

When God's children cried out to God with a prayer for deliverance, God answered. He wanted to restore their relationship with Him through worship. One meaning of worship is serving as a servant. Israel was the Lord's servant, but in Egypt Israel was functioning as Pharaoh's servant. Pharaoh was insulted when Moses explained the sonship of Israel to him because he believed he alone was the "son of the gods." God was taking

the initiative to save His people and bring them back to serve and worship Him, when they couldn't do it themselves.

As we live our lives surrounded by the world, do we worship the one true God, or do we slide into worshipping the gods that surround us? God calls us to be in the world, but not of the world.

What is worship and why is it so important? All of life is worship for God's children. Worship is acknowledging that God is God and we are not. It's believing that God is worthy of our praise and desiring to have no other gods before Him. (Ex. 20:3) It's confessing that we need God and the blood of Jesus to secure our salvation from sin, eternal death and separation from God. Our heart's desire is to follow Him and to serve Him with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength. That sounds like a tall order, which is why God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit are indispensable in our Christian lives.

In verse 21 the Lord told Moses to do all the miracles that were in his power before Pharaoh. God wasn't just throwing around his powerful signs before Moses earlier in the chapter and wanting Moses to use whichever miraculous tools he had in his toolbox that he thought would work to sway Pharaoh. God's miraculous revelations were purposeful, for the mission he sent Moses on, and God wanted Moses to use all of them. God gave Moses everything he needed in his interactions with the Israelites and with Pharaoh, not too much and not too little, but exactly what Moses needed. Did it seem pathetically silly to Moses to face the world's superpower by throwing down a staff, displaying and curing a leprous hand and turning water into blood?

His was not to reason why but to obey!

This truth comforts us as we look at challenges in our lives and wonder how we will ever get through certain situations and may not know how to proceed! We rarely know the specifics of God's plan for our future

or see how He will use present circumstances to prepare us for future life and ministry. However, we can trust Him for his ordering of our lives and be encouraged as we see how God prepared and guided Moses and Aaron and many others before us. Sisters, we need to share personal testimonies of God's leading, guiding and preparation in our lives with one another to encourage each other along the path of life and faith!

J. Alec Motyer writes, "All that was required of Moses was to do what he had been told to do, which is another way of saying that it was up to the Lord to perform the work (3:8) and He would do so in his own way (Judges 7:7), with Moses fitting into the divine scheme as instructed." How many times do we want to set the agenda, thinking we know what's best, and ask God to fit into our schemes?

MOSES' THIRD ENCOUNTER in verses 24-26 seems to come out of nowhere, with no apparent reason. Although God had told Moses it was safe to return to Egypt in vs. 19, God acted toward Moses in an unsafe way without apology or rationalization, exercising his freedom to take back the life He had given Moses. God met Moses and sought to put him to death because he had not circumcised his son, which was a father's responsibility.

Why had God not addressed this issue with Moses before he left for Egypt? Perhaps God gave Moses time to complete this, but when Moses was enroute to Egypt and still hadn't fulfilled this requirement, God had to intervene. Moses needed to be in a right relationship with God before continuing in God's service. God told Moses he would be as God to Aaron (4:16) and to take God's staff and perform miraculous signs in His name. Moses needed to be personally obedient to God and to leave behind what was displeasing to Him before God allowed Moses to serve as His mouthpiece. Moses is about to tell Pharoah that the first-born sons of Egypt will die. In preparation for speaking this sobering message to

Pharoah, Moses is forced to consider his own death and the death of his own sons.

Even in this, God was gracious by allowing time for Moses' wife to understand the underlying issue and to act quickly and decisively. She discerned a spiritual problem which originated with God, not with Satan, and she acted faithfully. Zipporah knew their son had not been circumcised and that this was an offense against the will and word of God. She took a flint and circumcised their son and touched Moses' feet with the bloody foreskin, trusting God would credit Moses with her act of obedience and spare his life. God accepted this unconventional fulfillment of His covenant requirement, and Moses recovered.

Moses was blessed with a wise wife who loved him and acted on his behalf. Once Zipporah realized that Moses was safe and God had spared him, Motyer (p. 80) writes, "She greeted him with a loving cry as though to say, 'Moses, you're back with me! You're my bridegroom and husband all over again. Instead of taking you from me, God has given you back to me because of the blood of circumcision. My bridegroom of blood!...' It's just as if we have got married all over again and you are my bridegroom once more.'"

Why is circumcision so important to God that it warranted killing Moses over his uncircumcised son? The law of God is a serious factor in the life of His commissioned servant. This incident was a warning to Moses that those who serve God need to be obedient to Him and obey His commands.

In the New Testament, Gentiles are given the sign and seal of the Holy Spirit at conversion. For God's chosen people in Moses' day, circumcision held particularly important significance in their relationship with God. The God of Abraham commanded circumcision as an "everlasting" covenant" in Genesis 17:1-14. Zipporah's action showed

that she was committed to the God of Abraham and His everlasting covenant with Israel. Her action confirmed Moses' identity as a Hebrew, though he was raised in Pharaoh's house and took a Midianite wife. God sent Moses to birth His firstborn nation and therefore Moses must have a circumcised family. Uncircumcision was not an option.

In other words, this was a serious offense, and Moses had not taken it seriously or acted to rectify his omission. God had given fathers the responsibility of circumcising their sons (Gen. 17:23-27, 21:4). We assume Moses was circumcised during his first 3 months when he lived with his biological parents, who were Israelites from the tribe of Levi.

In Genesis 17:12, God institutes circumcision, and establishes the covenant. A covenant is a sacred agreement between God and a person or group. God's covenant signs signify the gift and sealing of His promises to his people and mark those to whom the promises apply. Just as the sign of God's covenant with Noah was the rainbow (Gen. 9:11-17), the sign of God's covenant with Abram was circumcision, (a sign of grace). The Israelites are commanded to circumcise their sons on the 8th day. This sign set Abram and his family apart from all other peoples and indicated that God had given his promises to them alone. It also called Israel to live under the grace which the promises expressed. It's a sobering reality that Moses was no different from the Egyptians without the shedding of blood.

We too are right with God through blood: through the blood of Jesus, and His covenant promises. Without Christ's blood, shed for us and covering our sin, we also, are outside of the covenant promises and are separated from God for eternity.

In the covenant, (Gen. 17) God promised Abram:

- **1. Personal transformation**, including a new name, Abraham
- **2. Family expansion** (you will be exceedingly fruitful, I will multiply you greatly, you will be the “father of a multitude,” kings shall come from you
- **3. Spiritual security** “I will be God to you & to your offspring after you.
- **4. Land possession** (Gen. 17:4-8) I will give you and your offspring the land of your sojournings, Canaan, a fertile land, flowing with milk and honey, for an everlasting possession

What did God require of Israel to keep the covenant?

We read in Genesis 17: (9,10b,13b,14), “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations... every male among you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between you and me... so shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin... shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.

Moses did not seem to take God seriously or realize the gravity of his own offense and negligence, ~~downplaying the significance of circumcision to God and to his people.~~ Did Moses look lightly at personal transformation, family prosperity, spiritual security and territorial possession nor realize these were the most important needs in his life and the life of his family?

Moses was jeopardizing the covenant between God and his family along with all of its benefits for eternity.

Alec Motyer says (p. 81) “This is why disobedience is such a serious matter: it is acting as if we had no need of God, his grace and his pledges.

In other words, it is nothing short of a sort of enacted atheism.” In the book of Numbers, 20:7-12, we read that because of another act of disobedience, God prevented Moses from entering the promised land of Canaan. I can’t imagine the disappointment Moses felt when God told him he would not enter the promised land after the long and exhausting journey bringing the Israelites out of Egypt and then wandering in the desert for 40 years.

Procrastination and disobedience can be closely linked and bring serious consequences. I can live in a casual way in regard to my relationship with God and his commandments and be quick to excuse myself for delays and failures. God is patient, which may be the reason He gave Moses more time to obey him while on the journey to Egypt rather than trying to kill him back in Midian before the journey began. Obedience is primary and disobedience is a serious matter to God and has consequences for us as He acts for our good and for His glory. We read in 1 Samuel 15:22b “...to obey is better than sacrifice...”; and in John 14:15, “If you love me, keep my commandments.”

Ladies, this is sobering. Are we negligent in our relationship and obedience to God? We are his children, and He has saved us!

May we be diligent to follow and obey Him and to give Him first place in our hearts and lives.

We can now see, after considering the signs and promises of the covenant and the vast importance of circumcision, that God’s act of seeking to put Moses to death was actually an act of divine mercy and grace because it moved Moses onto the path of obedience which then enabled him to serve God and his people by carrying out the commission God had given him. This near-death experience was the final piece of the puzzle in Moses’ preparation to serve.

Hebrews 12:6 reads,

“...the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives.”

Moses moves forward with the promise of Aaron’s help and God’s miraculous act of providence to bring them together (vs. 14-16), as well as Moses possession of God’s staff, which demonstrated God’s power (vs. 17) and God’s continuing words of direction and comfort throughout the process and lastly, God’s covenant promises, personally acknowledged when circumcision of Moses’ son was completed.

We read **Moses Fourth & Fifth Encounters with Aaron and with the Elders and Children of Israel** in verses 27 to 31. Moses obeys God and meets Aaron at the “mountain of God” (Sinai) and tells him everything the Lord told him and performs all the signs with the staff. Then Moses and Aaron gathered all the elders of Israel and shared God’s words and signs with them and with the children of Israel. Tony Merida writes(p. 32), “Moses worried about this meeting, but it proved to be an easy win since it was God’s plan.” Moses’ concerns about having been away from Egypt for 40 long years, being a lowly shepherd, not being well thought of by the Israelites to whom God wanted him to talk, quickly disappeared when Moses obeyed God. May we be quick to pray, “your will be done, Heavenly Father, and please help me to trust and obey you.”

The response of the people was belief and worship just as God said it would be! This was a big turning point for the children of God as they believed God’s words through Moses and Aaron, reinforced by the signs, and were encouraged that The LORD had visited them and had seen their affliction and had a plan to rescue them. James Bruckner says, “God was creating a new sociality among a new people by taking them on a journey

into the wilderness for worship, for formation as a people in the laws of Sinai, and to teach them trust in the Lord's providing and protecting hand." (p. 55) God has also come to us in our slavery and freed us through Christ.

In the time of Moses, God's chosen people, as well as Pharaoh and the gentile nations, experienced and saw confirmation through the working of multiple miraculous signs and plagues, that the God of Israel is the One True and powerful God. Many times, in the book of Ezekiel, written later than Exodus, God states that his actions on earth are ordained "so that all flesh shall know that I am the Lord."

Having a great vision of who God is gives us the encouragement and motivation to attempt great things in His name. We can serve Him boldly without excuses and reluctance because He is the great God who accomplishes His purposes through weak vessels. We are not limited by what we can do, rather we can trust His promises and watch what He will do in and through us for His kingdom.

During the challenging process of accepting God's commission, preparing for the journey and travelling back to Egypt and carrying out the commission, God was gracious, patient, faithful and fulfilled His promises to Moses, guiding and providing for him every step of the way, and **the people believed and worshipped!** What a wonderful way to end this chapter! Enjoy it now, because next week things will get worst before they get better and we will see the fickleness of the children of Israel when increased hardship comes upon them and their expectations of God's timeline for deliverance are not realized.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, We thank you for who you are, for your great love and sacrifice for us; for your leading, guiding, anticipatory providence, grace, and everlasting covenant with your people.

Please strengthen us through the power of your Holy Spirit to live in faith and to trust you no matter our circumstances. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen!