

The Book of Exodus



4. Trust and Obey Exodus 4

Last week we saw how that God does things in His time and even though Moses had made a mess of everything in Egypt, God could turn his minuses to pluses and still use him. For Moses it was 40 years of obscurity after 40 years of Egyptian privilege. They were his wilderness years as it were. But they were preparation for him. Here he was in Midian, tending someone else's sheep when he had been educated to be a leader and had probably had responsibility in Egypt. Not a hero's life, but all part of the shaping of Moses, the national hero – by the grace of God! However, it was happy obscurity as a shepherd with a wife and children, until the day God came into his life as he tended Jethro's sheep in Horeb. God was gracious to him, but from the way Moses spoke at the burning bush, you wouldn't have thought so.

Last time we read how God commissioned Moses to return to Egypt and lead His people out and for Moses, a man groomed for leadership, it should have been his big break. But he was awkward and unwilling and it continues in much the same vein for about half of chapter 4. This is as much a passage on the patience and purposes of God as it is on grace. Yet we'll see how God had patiently prepared for this man *and* all his weaknesses. So on one hand we think "crossing God isn't a very bright thing to do" but on the other we see a God who understood Moses' dilemma. He had a life, a family and was educated enough to see the gravity of what he was being asked to do – and that for Moses generated fear and uncertainty.

Yes, God did become angry with him and rightfully so, but we also see how Moses uncertainty was dealt with, and in the case of the call of Aaron, God had already groomed Aaron as a man of God before this event – and he didn't argue with God when called: he just got up and went out to meet Moses!

So Moses wasn't unjustified to be fearful, but why was God so angry? Because He'd given Moses privileged information – the opportunity to know His name and showed him some really amazing miracles. And Moses still wouldn't trust that God was powerful enough to be with Him when he returned to Egypt.

We already started to consider Moses' first fear last time – that the Israelites wouldn't listen. He had suffered their rejection once and now he was a nobody appearing from the desert claiming God's authority to lead. Would they listen?

Last week it was God's name of authority that Moses got. This week he got three killer miracles to display God's power. Note it was three miracles because not everyone believes straight away for the reasons we explored this morning. We think miracles work – but they only do when minds are open to them. Incidentally, the people listened to Moses, saw the miracles and accepted his authority easily. Why? Because he wasn't the same man who left Egypt 40 years earlier and neither were they. He had his encounter with God, they had cried out for help. God matched the two perfectly.

Sometimes we face massive discouragement in life or in church. You know how it is. We really believe that God has called us to something and it all looks OK but things don't work out and we become discouraged. All I can say is, if you are called, never gave up because sometimes the hard times shape us for God's time and God's place where we work out God's purposes. It's about par for the course for ministers. If you have a call and things seem to have been thwarted and you are discouraged – don't be God can and will still use you. Listen for the call – answer that call. Incidentally Moses was 80 when he finally got his: you are never too old for the purposes of God!

You'd have thought that some killer miracles would have convinced Moses but no – it was a long time since Moses had stood in the courts of Pharaoh. And he wasn't confident: *10 But Moses said, "No, LORD, don't send me. I have never been a good speaker, and I haven't become one since you began to speak to me. I am a poor speaker, slow and hesitant." 11 The LORD said to him, "Who gives man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or dumb? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? It is I, the LORD. 12 Now, go! I will help you to speak, and I will tell you what to say." 13 But Moses answered, "No, Lord, please send someone else."*

That's the watchword of many Christians still: "No, Lord, please send someone else." You're called – so God equips. And Moses wasn't going to be let off the hook – he gets Aaron as his assistant. Then God gives the final command - you and Aaron are going to Go to Pharaoh – and what did Moses say? What excuse did he make? None. The penny had dropped. So he's told to pick up his staff and off he goes.

Sometimes it takes a while for the penny to drop – for that eureka moment to come. The problem is we are so set in our thinking that we can't embrace the implications of what God wants us to do. I've already said on a number of occasions that if we want to go forward in mission, we need to look at what God has given us to harvest. And there they are prodigals, families. Apart from a few people, the penny doesn't seem to have dropped. They are there. It's like a beach full of fish which we can pick up but we still think that we should be deep sea trawling. God is patient and ready to make us fishers of men as the penny finally drops – clink!

So Moses returns home and tells Jethro he was returning to Egypt. Here was his first sign of trusting God. At Horeb it was in his head – but now he was going to go. It's when we trust and obey that God responds and Moses got his assurance that what he was doing was right: *18 Then Moses went back to Jethro, his father-in-law, and said to him, "Please let me go back to my relatives in Egypt to see if they are still alive." Jethro agreed and told him good-bye. 19 While Moses was still in Midian, the LORD said to him, "Go back to Egypt, for all those who wanted to kill you are dead."* He hadn't thought of that on the mountain – what if there is still a warrant out for my arrest? Dealt with before he had even thought about it. Remember when God calls: he always smooths the path ready for us!

But trusting and obeying means just that. He went off to Egypt and in the meanwhile we get this bizarre story about circumcision. More liberal theologians are confused by this. They say this passage is obscure and the product of it being badly stitched up by the people who edited it up from lots of bits. They can't see how it fits. Strange, but it looks a bit obvious to me!

I believe we have the word of God here and the intent of God is behind his inspired word and in the context of the passage it makes eminent sense. In fact the tide of much theology is swinging back to the notion that people didn't shove little bits of text together badly to make up these this and other books in the OT, but rather they were the work of thoughtful godly people inspired by the Holy Spirit. Therefore we should look for unifying ideas throughout – and we find no problem in seeing them in Exodus. Therefore we see the ways and purposes of God through His word.

This is a passage about trust and obedience that fits in with Moses' call. Moses had listened to God, had decided to obey Him – but His life wasn't right before God before entering Egypt. He had not circumcised his son. It was the command to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It was the mark of the covenant and Moses had not affirmed that covenant in circumcision. The result was harsh; God threatens to kill him unless he does – so he gets his wife to do it! The phrase "you are a husband of blood to me" is a bit obscure. What does it mean? Perhaps she wasn't pleased with what she had to do. Perhaps she thought that all this would end in blood. But Moses was prepared to trust and obey.

Do we all feel fired up to seek God's mind and are prepared to do what is necessary to be the fishers of men or whatever, then we also need to deal with the things in our life which separate us from God. Sin that we have never dealt with or issues we still need to get sorted before God. Let's come before Him this evening, confessing our sins and yielding our lives to our Lord Jesus Christ.

But once Moses obeyed he found everything in place – Aaron ready to meet him at Horeb and a people who believed what Moses was saying quite readily. If you remember, Moses made more of a fuss about that than about meeting Pharaoh. It went smoothly. Why? Because after all the umming and arrhing Moses trusted God and obeyed.

And us. The same principles are true today. If we want to see the blessing, we need to do the trusting – and the obeying. Belief only real when we trust God and act on it and find God IS faithful on all occasions.

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Scripture Quotes TEV*

4:1 Then Moses answered the LORD, "But suppose the Israelites do not believe me and will not listen to what I say. What shall I do if they say that you did not appear to me?" 2 So the LORD asked him, "What are you holding?" "A walking stick," he answered. 3 The LORD said, "Throw it on the ground." When Moses threw it down, it turned into a snake, and he ran away from it. 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Reach down and pick it up by the tail." So Moses reached down and caught it, and it became a walking stick again. 5 The LORD said, "Do this to prove to the Israelites that the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to you." 6 The LORD spoke to Moses again, "Put your hand inside your robe." Moses obeyed; and when he took his hand out, it was diseased, covered with white spots, like snow. 7 Then the LORD said, "Put your hand inside your robe again." He did so, and when he took it out this time, it was healthy, just like the rest of his body. 8 The LORD said, "If they will not believe you or be convinced by the first miracle, then this one will convince them. 9 If in spite of these two miracles they still will not believe you, and if they refuse to listen to what you say, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the ground. The water will turn into blood."

10 But Moses said, "No, LORD, don't send me. I have never been a good speaker, and I haven't become one since you began to speak to me. I am a poor speaker, slow and hesitant." 11 The LORD said to him, "Who gives man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or dumb? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? It is I, the LORD. 12 Now, go! I will help you to speak, and I will tell you what to say." 13 But Moses answered, "No, Lord, please send someone else." 14 At this the LORD became angry with Moses and said, "What about your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. In fact, he is now coming to meet you and will be glad to see you. 15 You can speak to him and tell him what to say. I will help both of you to speak, and I will tell you both what to do. 16 He will be your spokesman and speak to the people for you. Then you will be like God, telling him what to say. 17 Take this walking stick with you; for with it you will perform miracles."

18 Then Moses went back to Jethro, his father-in-law, and said to him, "Please let me go back to my relatives in Egypt to see if they are still alive." Jethro agreed and told him good-bye. 19 While Moses was still in Midian, the LORD said to him, "Go back to Egypt, for all those who wanted to kill you are dead." 20 So Moses took his wife and his sons, put them on a donkey, and set out with them for Egypt, carrying the walking stick that God had told him to take. 21 Again the LORD said to Moses, "Now that you are going back to Egypt, be sure to perform before the king all the miracles which I have given you the power to do. But I will make the king stubborn, and he will not let the people go. 22 Then you must tell him that I, the LORD, say, "Israel is my first-born son. 23 I told you to let my son go, so that he might worship me, but you refused. Now I am going to kill your first-born son."

24 At a camping place on the way to Egypt, the LORD met Moses and tried to kill him. 25 Then Zipporah, his wife, took a sharp stone, cut off the foreskin of her son, and touched Moses' feet with it. Because of the rite of circumcision she said to Moses, "You are a husband of blood to me." And so the LORD spared Moses' life. 26

27 Meanwhile the LORD had said to Aaron, "Go into the desert to meet Moses." So he went to meet him at the holy mountain; and when he met him, he kissed him. 28 Then Moses told Aaron everything that the LORD had said when he told him to return to Egypt; he also told him about the miracles which the LORD had ordered him to perform. 29 So Moses and Aaron went to Egypt and gathered all the Israelite leaders together. 30 Aaron told them everything that the LORD had said to Moses, and then Moses performed all the miracles in front of the people. 31 They believed, and when they heard that the LORD had come to them and had seen how they were being treated cruelly, they bowed down and worshipped.