

Moses Returns to Egypt

Text: Exodus 4:18-31

Introduction:

1. Suggested outline for Exodus chapter 4:
 - Moses' Stubbornness towards the Call (Vs. 1-17)
 - Moses' Submission to the Call (Vs. 18-23)
 - Moses' Stumbling block in the Call (Vs. 24-26)
 - Moses' Supporter for the Call (Vs. 27-31)
2. After Moses' two questions (Chap. 3) and 3 objections (Chap. 4), he finally submits to the call of God and takes steps to return to Egypt. This section recounts Moses' departure from Midian (4:18-23) and his arrival in Egypt (4:27-31), together with his near-death experience along the way (4:24-26). The key word that is repeated over and over again is "return" (Vs. 18, 19, 20, 21).
3. Today we follow Moses return to Egypt and learn some valuable lessons.

I. **MOSES' STUBBORNNESS TOWARDS THE CALL (VS. 1-17)**

Moses raised three excuses for not accepting God's call.

A. THE SCEPTICAL AUDIENCE EXCUSE – LORD, THEY WON'T LISTEN OR BELIEVE! (VS. 1-9)

B. THE SPEAKING ABILITY EXCUSE – LORD, I CAN'T SPEAK WELL! (VS. 10-12)

C. THE SOMEBODY ELSE EXCUSE – LORD, PLEASE SEND SOMEONE ELSE! (VS. 13-17)

II. **MOSES' SUBMISSION TO THE CALL (VS. 18-23)**

Moses now takes steps to obey the call of God in his life. His willingness to step out in faith is rewarded with further assurance and instruction from His God. We see Moses:

A. Appeal to Jethro (Vs. 18)

1. The Principle of Moses' Appeal (Vs. 18a)

Moses returns from Mount Horeb to Jethro and communicates with him about his desire to return to Egypt. This represented a spirit of:

a. **Courtesy** – Moses could have said, "well God Almighty has called me so I am going to just up and leave" but he was respectful and gracious to the man who had not only given him a wife but who had provided employment for him for 40 years. Moses' did not have an autonomous spirit because he had received a call from God nor did he let the call of God go to his head!

b. **Cooperation** – a call of God does not negate the need to seek to work respectfully and cooperatively with human authorities. In fact, it is wisdom to check in with those in authority over us for counsel as we seek to follow God's will for our lives. A call of God in your life does not negate your duty to the human authorities He has placed in your life.

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- c. “Jethro had taken him in while a fugitive from Egypt, had given him his daughter to wife, and had provided him with a home for forty years. Moreover, Moses had charge of his flock...It would, then, have been grossly discourteous and the height of ingratitude had Moses gone down to Egypt without first notifying his father-in-law. This request of Moses manifested his thoughtfulness of others, and his appreciation of favours received. Let write and reader take this to heart. Spiritual activities never absolve us from the common amenities and responsibilities of life. No believer who is not a gentleman or a lady is a true Christian in the full sense of the word. To be a Christian is to practice Christlikeness, and Christ ever thought of others.” (Pink)
- d. Note: Some believers are most discourteous in the way they handle authorities in their lives. I have witnessed multiple believers leave church in a most discourteous way. They wouldn't do it to their secular employer or local sports club but they will do it to the church!
- e. Question: What if Jethro had tried to stand in Moses' way? What should Moses have done in that scenario? Answer: Pray, appeal but ultimately obey God! God is the highest authority and His will must be supreme in our lives. However, we should at least communicate with earthly authorities in our lives about how we feel God is leading and afford them the opportunity to offer us their counsel and support as we pursue God's will.

2. The Presentation of Moses' Appeal (Vs. 18b)

- a. Some have suggested that Moses was dishonest in how he presented the situation to Jethro as he only asked to return to Egypt to see how his brethren were doing. At this point it appears Moses chose not to disclose the full details of his calling to Jethro.
- b. Moses was not being dishonest. What he presented to Jethro was true. No doubt he sincerely wanted to check on his family's welfare. Further, at this point, Jethro had not yet come to faith in Israel's God. That would come later. So, it was probably wise of Moses to not try and explain every aspect of God's will for his life with him.
- c. Note: Some people wrongly think that to be honest you have to tell others just about everything but that is not true. There is a place for privacy in the Christian ministry and sometimes it is wise to keep some things between you and the Lord, at least for a season.

3. The Permitting of Moses' Appeal (Vs. 18c). Jethro tells Moses he could “Go in peace”. It would have been a help to Moses to know he was going with Jethro's blessing.

B. Assured by God (Vs. 19)

Having determined to obey God, Moses is now blessed with further assurance from God.

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1. A renewed commission – “Go, return into Egypt”. God now issues the command “go” to Moses for the fourth time. Moses was already taking steps to go but God in mercy confirms his call again.
2. A revealed consolation – “for all the men are dead which sought thy life”. This would have been comforting for Moses to know as he had fled for Egypt in fear of his life 40 years earlier. Exodus 2:23 reveals that the Pharaoh who had tried to take Moses’ life was now dead.

C. Accompanied by Family (Vs. 20)

1. This verse presents a touching picture of Moses and his family setting off for Egypt. Moses puts his wife Zipporah and his two sons Gershom and Eliezar on an ass and then leads out with the rod of God in his hand.
2. It is a reminder of how a man of God’s calling affects his whole family. They journey with him to the front lines of the battle in the will of God. Such a calling comes with great privileges but also great pressures for the preacher’s family.

D. Advised by God (Vs. 21-23)

God now provides Moses with some additional instructions concerning his calling. God provides further revelation to Moses concerning:

1. The hardheartedness of Pharaoh (Vs. 21)
 - a. God commands Moses to perform the miracles he had given him before Pharaoh. The three signs would not just be for the Israelites (Vs. 2-9) but for Pharaoh as well.
 - b. God had already revealed to Moses that Pharaoh would have a negative response to the message initially and that only after God had poured out his judgments upon Egypt would he be willing to let the people go (Ex. 3:19-20). Here God further enlightens Moses as to the root cause of Pharaoh’s response. It would be on account of his hardness of heart. The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart is a major theme in Exodus and is mentioned at least 19 times. Sometimes it says Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Sometimes it says his heart was hardened without specifying who did the hardening. Then there are instances where God directly hardens Pharaoh’s heart.
 - c. This would be a judicial hardening. That is, God would harden Pharaoh’s heart as an act of judgment against Pharaoh and to provide an occasion for the display of His wonders in Egypt.
 - d. Keil writes, “As the earthly sun produces difference effects upon the earth, according to the nature of the soil upon which it shines, so the influence of the Divine Sun of grace manifests itself in different ways upon the human heart, according to its moral condition.”
2. The message for Pharaoh (Vs. 22-23)
 - a. The source of the message – “And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, **Thus saith the LORD**” (Vs. 22a) Preachers need to get their sermons from the Scriptures! Don’t waste the people of God’s time with the latest opinions of men. We need “thus

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saith the LORD” not “thus saith me” in our day. Open the Book of God and preach! This significant phrase “thus saith the LORD” appears for the first time in this verse. According to Henry Theissen’s lectures in Systematic Theology, phrases like “The Lord said”, “Thus saith the Lord” and “the Word of the Lord came unto me” occur more than 3,800 times in the Old Testament.

- b. The specifics of the message (Vs. 22b-23) Moses was to present Israel to Pharaoh in terms of a firstborn son.
 - i. The firstborn son in ancient world held a special rank and position in the family. God was revealing to Pharaoh the specialness of the whole nation of Israel and **warning** him that if he did not let Israel go, He would judge Pharaoh by slaying his firstborn. Warning of judgment is a part of the message that must be preached. The criteria for the judgment was on how Pharaoh treated God’s son (“Let my son go” Vs. 23). Whether a man goes to heaven or hell is determined solely on what he does with Jesus Christ, God’s Son. Receive Christ as Saviour and you will enjoy heaven for eternity. Reject Christ as Saviour and you will burn in hell for eternity.
 - ii. “At the very deepest spiritual level, the Exodus is a story about sonship, about a Father’s love for His only son. Israel’s deliverance is the true history of a loving Father who rescued His children so they could be together as a family. See Hosea 11:1. To Pharaoh, the Israelites were slaves, but to God they were beloved sons... Not long after He was born, Jesus Christ was sent down to Egypt, where he remained until the death of King Herod. His subsequent return to Israel reminded Matthew of the Old Testament promise, “Out of Egypt have I called my son” (Matt. 2:15, quoting Hosea 11:1). Christ fulfilled Sonship perfectly, in contrast to Israel who had failed.” (Ryken)
 - iii. Salvation picture: God redeemed Israel, his son out of Egypt. In like manner through redemption and the new birth, we can become sons of God. John 1:12 “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become **the sons of God**, *even* to them that believe on his name:”

III. MOSES’ STUMBLING BLOCK IN THE CALL (VS. 24-26)

A strange and intriguing incident now occurs as Moses and his family were journeying to Egypt. It highlighted a problem in Moses marriage and family that needed to be resolved before Moses could fulfill his calling in Egypt.

A. The Incident at the Inn (Vs. 24-26)

1. God’s Anger towards Moses (Vs. 24).
 - a. Moses and his family were on their way to Egypt and they stopped at an inn for the night and there God sought to kill Moses as an act of judgment.

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- b. It is clear from the account that this was on account of Moses neglect in circumcising one of his sons, likely the youngest. We know this is the case as after Zipporah had performed the operation God “let him go”. This hostile attitude on the part of God was occasioned by his neglect to circumcise his son; for, as soon as Zipporah cut off (circumcised) the foreskin of her son with a stone, Jehovah let him go. (Keil & Delitzsch)
 - c. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant given to Abraham and was binding on all his descendants (See Genesis 17). The sentence of death was pronounced upon those who neglected circumcision as a breach of the covenant. Genesis 17:14 “And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.”
2. Zipporah’s Anger towards Moses (Vs. 25-26)
- a. Zipporah takes a sharp stone (probably a stone knife) and quickly performs the circumcision rite on her son then in a dramatic show of exasperation, flings the foreskin she has just cut off at her husband’s feet, and insulting him by calling him a “bloody husband” because of the circumcision.
 - b. Clearly Zipporah had a bad attitude towards this requirement of God and likely had opposed Moses in performing it on her second son after seeing it done on the first son. She clearly didn’t want to submit to this. She probably viewed it as an unnecessary requirement for following Jehovah God.

B. The Instructions from the Inn

There are some valuable lessons we can learn from this incident in the life of Moses. We divide them into two categories – lessons for ministry and lessons for marriage.

1. Ministry Lessons

- a. God is a holy God and blatant disobedience is displeasing to Him and can bring His hand of chastening into our lives. We need to serve God with reverence and godly fear (Heb. 12:28-29). The Bible warns that some sins can even lead to death for the Christian – “There is a sin unto death” (1 John 5:16). Some of the Corinthian Christians had come under the severe chastening hand of God for their flippant approach to the Lord’s Table (1 Cor. 11:30). If you compromise as a preacher God may not kill you physically but he might kill your ministry!
- b. The ministry is a high calling and those called need to take their obedience to God seriously. We who preach the Word of God to others must be careful to live the Word ourselves! We should not be critical of a church that puts some godly standards in place for service to a Holy God in the local church. How could Moses go and preach to God’s covenant people in Egypt while there was a glaring area of compromise in his own life. We are living in a day when the standards for ministry have been lowered way beneath the Biblical requirements as set out in 1 Timothy and Titus. Illustration: The surgeon going into the operating room will be required to be much cleaner and exact in

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regulations than the average man going about his mundane duties. There are some places in life where tolerances are extremely small. In the electrical part of a computer, tolerances are reduced to microscopic allowances. So, it is spiritually.

- c. For those called to the ministry, make sure your wife is fully on board with every aspect of your calling before you launch out. Make sure you are of one heart and one mind on doctrine and biblical convictions or it will re-surface later in your ministry and cause problems. If there is an area of disagreement on the Word of God, it needs to be resolved before you step into the front line or the devil will exploit that weakness to destructive effect in your marriage and ministry. In the O.T. context, God allowed Moses to go on to Egypt and fulfil the first part of his ministry without his wife and children but the N.T. qualifications for the ministry of the Gospel are higher. If a pastor's household is out of order, he can't minister (See 1 Tim. 3:4-5; Titus 1:6).
 - d. A call to serve God is a call to die to self. In the New Testament, circumcision has to do with the operation of God in dealing with the flesh life in the believer (See Col. 2:10-12). "In this particular case the act of circumcision pictures the cutting of the flesh. If the servant fails to do this and allows his body to control him, letting the flesh direct his actions, he will be disapproved for service." (Grant) "The inn incident reveals "a deep secret, in the personal and domestic history of Moses. It is very evident that Zipporah's heart had, up to this point, shrunk from the application of the knife to that around which the affections of nature were entwined. She had avoided that mark which had to be set in the flesh of every member of the Israel of God. She was not aware that her relationship with Moses was one involving death to nature. She recoiled from the cross. This was natural. But Moses had yielded to her in the matter; and this explains to us the mysterious scene "in the inn". If Zipporah refuses to circumcise her son, Jehovah will lay His hand upon her husband; and if Moses spares the feelings of his wife, Jehovah will "seek to kill him." (C.H. Mackintosh)
2. Marriage Lessons
- a. Husbands need to exercise spiritual leadership in the home and this will at times mean giving time to helping their wives if they are struggling with surrender in a particular area of the Christian life. Evidently Moses had left this issue to sit and fester in the background, probably for the sake of temporary marital peace but in the long run the problem didn't go away. One way we can love our wives as husbands is to seek to be a sanctifying influence in their lives with the Word of God (Eph. 5:25-26). That will sometimes involve taking the time to lovingly help the wife understand something from God's Word. Perhaps Zipporah didn't see the value of circumcision because Moses had not taken the time to explain its spiritual and covenantal significance for the Jewish people?

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- b. Wives need to be careful not to have a spirit of resistance to godly leadership in the home. If your husband is trying to lead the family in obedience to the Word of God, give him your support! In this account it appears that the resistance to obeying God in the area of circumcision came from Zipporah but God was going to chasten Moses, not her! It is a reminder that if you stand in your husband's way as an obstacle to his obedience, you may bring the Lord's chastening hand upon him as the head of the home. "If Zipporah refuses to circumcise her son, Jehovah will lay His hand upon her husband; and if Moses spares the feelings of his wife, Jehovah will 'seek to kill him.'" (C.H. Mackintosh)
- c. Husbands and wives need to strive to be of one heart and one mind spiritually. You may have little differences of opinion on domestic issues from time to time but you can't afford to be divided on doctrine and biblical convictions. Both need to be fully surrendered to the Lord and His Word. If either spouse is not prepared to follow the Lord fully it will bring strain on the marriage and even the chastening hand of God.
- d. Mum and Dad need to remember that when they disobey God, the children under their care also suffer. I would imagine that it would have been difficult for young Eliezer to be caught in the middle of this spat between Mum and Dad!
- e. The good news is that problems like this in a marriage are not insurmountable. Praise God that Zipporah and the boys were restored to Moses at a later date. Jethro, as father-in-law, had a part in this. Praise God Jethro was a help and not a hindrance to Moses and Zipporah. Exodus 18:1-5 "When Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father in law, heard of all that God had done for Moses, and for Israel his people, *and* that the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt; Then Jethro, Moses' father in law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back, And her two sons; of which the name of the one *was* Gershom; for he said, I have been an alien in a strange land: And the name of the other *was* Eliezer; for the God of my father, *said he, was* mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh: And Jethro, Moses' father in law, came with his sons and his wife unto Moses into the wilderness, where he encamped at the mount of God:"

IV. MOSES' SUPPORTER FOR THE CALL (VS. 27-31)

These verses detail how God fulfilled His promise to Moses to provide Aaron as his assistant/helper in the ministry (See Vs. 14-16). Let's consider several points about this ministry partnership.

A. The Providential leading in the Partnership (Vs. 27)

1. In this chapter we see the hand of God working in the hearts of both men to bring them together as a ministry team. They were a long distance apart and there was no modern means of communication. There was no facetime in those days!

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2. God was working in Moses heart in Midian about Aaron partnering with him to minister (Vs. 14). At the right time, God moved in Aaron's heart in Egypt to journey to meet Moses in the wilderness. John Butler writes, "For both of these men's paths to cross would require surrender on the part of both men to God's directions. If Moses does what God tells him to do and Aaron does likewise, they will meet in a place conducive for going over God's plan. Both men did obey God. Aaron went into the wilderness as instructed by God, and Moses headed for Egypt as instructed by God. Then they met at Mount Horeb. Do what God says, and you will meet the right people at the right time and in the right place."
3. Interestingly, Moses and Aaron would travel back to Egypt after meeting together at Mount Sinai. Why didn't God just leave Aaron in Egypt to meet Moses when he arrived? Clearly this was an important exercise to separate Aaron to join with Moses in his calling. It would give Moses and Aaron the opportunity to unite on the mission before it was carried out (Vs. 28).
4. Note: Some wonder how two brothers could work together in ministry. The key thing is that the partnership be of the Lord. The Lord clearly put this together.
 - a. Nehemiah worked with his brother Hanani (Neh. 7:2).
 - b. There were at least sets of brothers chosen as a part of Christ's twelve apostles – Peter and Andrew, James and John (Luke 6:13-16).
5. Illustration: NBC pastoral team.

B. The Principle of the Partnership

So often in Scripture we see the principle of two working together in the Lord's work. For example:

1. Ecc. 4:9 "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour."
2. Christ sent the disciples out two by two (Mk. 6:7; Luke 10:1).
3. God raised up Paul and Barnabas to work together in Gospel ministry (Acts 13:1-4).

C. The Practical workings of the Partnership (Vs. 28-31)

1. Moses was the leader (Vs. 28).
 - a. Moses communicates to Aaron the vision he had received of the Lord. Moses had heard from the Lord and Aaron would now share in helping Moses carry out the Divine mission.
 - b. Moses had a clear commission from God – "Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD who had sent him..." (Vs. 28).
2. Aaron was the supporter (Vs. 29-31)
 1. God calls some like Moses to be the primary leader but he calls others like Aaron to the role of second man. Both are important and vital ministries.
 2. Moses and Aaron journey together to Egypt, gather the elders, speak God's Word to them and perform the Divine signs. The people believe and respond with worship to God for his grace and compassion.

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Conclusion:

1. Are you yielded to God's plan for your life? Moses struggled initially but praise God in the end he surrendered to God's will for his life.
2. Is there an area of the Christian life (something God requires) that you are struggling to submit to? Yield to God. His way is always best.
3. Have you considered that your calling might be to be a supporter rather than a leader in God's work? Are you yielded to that possibility?