

Exodus Chapter 3 v 15 - Chapter 4 v 17

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[0 : 0 0] in chapter 3, where we left off last Sunday morning at verse 15. We looked briefly last week at God's meeting with Moses and how God revealed himself to Moses, particularly as the God who answers prayer. And then we're going to take up from verse 15. We're going to break up the reading because it's quite a long reading. So we're going to go from verse 15 through to the end of the chapter now, and then a little while later we'll go into chapter 4. So from verse 15 of Exodus chapter 3, here is God's word to us today.

God also said to Moses, say to the Israelites, the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you. This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation. Go.

Assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob appeared to me and said, I've watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I've promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey. The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, the Lord, the God of the Hebrews has met with us.

Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God. But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him.

So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go. And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed towards this people so that when you leave, you will not go out empty-handed. Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians.

[2 : 1 6] As I say, we'll come back to that story and that event in a few moments. It's lovely to have Alan and Mandy Cayley with us up from Northcote, south of Grimsby.

I was with them on Monday down there in Northcote and saw something of the work of New Tribes Mission and the premises there and had a lovely time with them and with some of the students as well.

And it's particularly this part of God's Word that we're going to be thinking about this morning. So we're going to read the first 17 verses of Exodus 4.

Remembering that Moses has just received this commission and call from God to go back to Egypt and to be the instrument through which God will set his people free and deliver them from their slavery and bring them into the liberty, freedom and blessing of the promised land.

Moses answered, What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, The Lord did not appear to you? Then the Lord said to him, What is that in your hand?

[3 : 3 5] A staff, he replied. The Lord said, Throw it on the ground. Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake and he ran from it. Then the Lord said to him, Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.

So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. This, said the Lord, is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has appeared to you.

Then the Lord said, Put your hand inside your cloak. So Moses put his hand into his cloak. When he took it out, it was leprous like snow. Now put it back into your cloak, he said.

So Moses put his hand back into his cloak. When he took it out, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. Then the Lord said, They do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign.

They may believe the second. But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, Take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground.

[4 : 43] Moses said to the Lord, O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you've spoken to your servant. I'm slow of speech and tongue. The Lord said to him, Who gave man his mouth?

Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.

But Moses said, O Lord, please send somebody else to do it. And the Lord's anger burned against Moses and he said, What about your brother Aaron, the Levite?

I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you. And his heart will be glad when he sees you. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth. I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do.

He will speak to the people for you. And it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. But take this staff in your hand so that you can perform miraculous signs with it.

[5 : 47] Well, please have Exodus chapter 4 open in your Bibles for a moment. I hope you like to read books.

One of the things, of course, that we are saddened by is that so many people are not reading the classical literature of the past. And we have a lot to learn from classical literature.

If we will read it, it teaches us much. And I just want to bring a little story from a very great classic called Winnie the Pooh. And Winnie the Pooh had run out of honey.

Very bad thing if you know Winnie the Pooh. And so he decided that he should visit his good friend Rabbit in his burrow. It had been a long time since he'd been to see him. And of course, once he got there, he ate all of Rabbit's honey because Rabbit didn't like honey.

He only kept it in case Winnie the Pooh came. And Pooh, after eating all the honey, didn't want to outstay his welcome, so decided he would leave. But he'd eaten so much honey that when he tried to fit through Rabbit's front door, which was a burrow, a hole in the ground, he was too fat.

[7 : 01] And he got stuck. He was trapped. No amount of wriggling, pushing, pulling could move him. He was well and truly trapped. Several days later, when his tummy had shrunk enough, his friends all gathered around, some behind, some before, to push, pull, cajole, in whatever way possible, Winnie the Pooh from the hole.

Out he popped like a cork from a bottle. Flying through the air, he landed in a hole in a tree. Which just happened to have a beehive full of honey in it.

Being Winnie the Pooh, he just began to eat the honey, and so he was once again wedged and stuck and trapped in the hole. I wonder if you feel trapped this morning.

Perhaps you feel a little bit stuck. Maybe in a rut. Maybe in a hole. Maybe just in the circumstances and situation of life.

Moses certainly felt trapped. He felt trapped, surprisingly, by God's command to return to Egypt and deliver the Hebrews from slavery.

[8 : 18] The command that God gave him when he appeared to him in the boiling bush. Now, 40 years ago, Moses as a young man, he was now 80, but 40 years ago, as a young man of 40, he had attempted to rescue God's people by himself.

He had been something of a dashing figure, a man of some energy and fortitude. But now, 40 years later, now after being in the desert, settled as a shepherd, looking after his father-in-law's sheep and goats, Moses was unwilling to move.

And so, in chapter 4, as Moses and the Lord God speak with one another, we see Moses trying to wriggle free from God's command.

Feeling himself trapped, unwilling, and perhaps unable to move, he attempts to get out of what he considers to be a tight spot by bringing three excuses to God why he should not obey God's call.

And these three excuses that Moses speaks about and brings before God really reveal that Moses is not trapped by God's command, but in fact, he is trapped by other things which are far more ensnaring and restrictive.

[9 : 42] You see, God's command, God's word, God's truth, is actually liberating and freeing. That's really a word that keeps coming up all the way through the New Testament.

Jesus himself said, you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. And James, the writer, says this, the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it will be blessed in what he does.

The law that gives freedom. Paul writes to the Galatians, it was for freedom that Christ has set us free. Now there's a very common misunderstanding around about today.

It's this misunderstanding that if you become a Christian, you surrender your freedom. freedom. You give up your liberty. You become somebody who is restricted.

You become somebody who is tied up. You become somebody who is trapped. But in reality, the opposite is correct. To obey God brings freedom.

[10 : 55] To do God's will sets us at liberty. To resist God's will is actually what binds us and ensnares us.

When we become a Christian, when you put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, an amazing thing happens. We are set free by obeying the gospel. Paul in Romans in chapter 6, as he writes to the Christians there, reminds them of this truth.

Thanks be to God, he says, that though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.

That's the gospel. You have been set free from sin. Sin is what enslaves people. Sin, which many think of as freeing, doing what you want, doing what you like, doing what you enjoy, is actually what ensnares and enslaves.

When we become a Christian, sin's mastery over us is broken and we are set free from doing those things which lead us away from God, which lead us in the way of everybody else, which is following the crowd down the road of destruction.

[12 : 17] All of us as Christians believe that truth. All of us as Christians believe that when we put our faith in Christ, we were set free from sin through obeying the gospel, through obeying God's word.

The sad thing is that for many of us there is a concern now that after obeying the gospel and finding the freedom that comes from doing so, we now shrink back from obeying Christ in our daily living.

God's word and we have become Christians, we prefer to put up like Moses excuses so that we don't have to obey God, we can neglect his law, we can in one sense no longer follow his directions.

Christians. So I want us to look at Moses because Moses here is someone who is struggling with, wrestling with God's command and is putting up excuses which I believe are very common to us, but showing in those excuses that actually his disobedience is because he himself is trapped, because he himself is enslaved by those things that God wants to free him from and they are the same things that trap many people today.

The first thing we see in verse 1 is that Moses is trapped by his fear of people. What if they do not believe me or listen to me?

[13 : 49] Says Moses. He's afraid of the response of the elders of Israel when he goes back to Egypt. Elsewhere in Proverbs and chapter 29, the book of Proverbs is a wonderful book, it's full of common sense and it says this in Proverbs 29, 25, fear of man will prove a snare, a trap.

If we're afraid of what people think of us, it's really restrictive, it's a great trap, we're bound up, fear binds, God's love frees.

Moses is afraid that people will not believe him when he tells them that God has sent him to them. For many people that's probably the most popular excuse for not obeying the gospel and not obeying God.

What will people think of me if I become a Christian? What will people think of me if I did that in my workplace? What would they think of me if I didn't go with the crowd?

What would they think of me if I spoke in this way and I didn't speak in that way? What will people think of me? We are so afraid and so trapped by people's acceptance of us that we will ignore God's word, his commandments just so that no one will think of us as being religious or a fanatic or a Bible basher or whatever.

[15 : 15] Moses is trapped. I wonder if you are. Well how does God deliver Moses? Because what we see not only are the excuses of Moses but how God delivers Moses from those traps, from those fears, how he springs him from those snares.

And the first thing we see here of course is that from verses 2 and following God gives to Moses three signs of his power. First of all he turns his staff into a snake and then back into a staff again, verses 3 and 4.

God shows that he can give life to the lifeless. His is life to give, his is life to take away. He is the life-giving God.

Then he gives him another sign which is that he tells him to put his hand inside his cloak and remove it and it is leprous. Now leprosy even today is a horrendous and awful disease, incurable in many ways and often fatal and in the Bible and in the days of Moses it was something which ostracized you from the whole of society.

What does God do? God shows Moses that he is the God who is able to restore and to heal. He is able to change and bring wholeness.

[16 : 43] And then finally he tells him about another miracle which he is to perform. He doesn't actually perform it there in front of him but he assures him that should he need this miracle it will happen that he can take water from the Nile pour it onto the ground and in the pouring out of the water it will become blood on the ground.

As I say Moses doesn't witness that then but he does later of course. God has the power to change to transform anything and any situation.

Now why has God given him these three signs? Why has God shown him these three things about himself? What's the purpose of these miracles when dealing with Moses' fear of man?

Well what God is showing Moses clearly is this that God is greater than men. And women. God has the power to do anything. He's got the power to do those things that human beings cannot do.

In other words if we want to be set free from the fear of people of their acceptance of their popularity of pleasing them the only way we can do is to have a proper fear of God.

[18 : 00] Fear him ye saints and you shall have nothing else to fear is one of the lines in one of the hymns that we sing. God is greater than anybody else more powerful than any human being.

He's the one above all else that we are to be concerned about. Concerned about his will. What pleases him? What does he want? In the end we need to ask ourselves a simple question.

It's the acid test really of whether we are a Christian but also it's the acid test as well as whether we are walking as we should do before God as Christians.

Whose favour do I really want? Who do I really want to please by the way that I live? People around about me? Myself even?

Or the Lord? Whose favour do I want? I wonder if you're able to answer that question. Able to answer it honestly between yourself and God.

[19 : 06] So Moses is trapped. He's afraid of what people will think of him. He's afraid of how people will deal with him. God says look don't fear them. Fear me. Fear me and you'll have nothing else to fear.

The second excuse that Moses brings up before the Lord is this. He's trapped by his feelings of inadequacy. Verse 10 Moses said to the Lord after the Lord has shown in these incredible miracles and shown him how powerful he was.

He brings another. Oh Lord I've never been eloquent neither in the past nor since you've spoken to me. Your servant I'm slow of speech and of tongue. He feels inadequate to do what God has called him to do.

To go and speak to the people and ultimately to speak to Pharaoh. It may well be that Moses had a stutter or speech impediment or just lacked the self confidence to be a public speaker we might say.

He felt that such a failing such an inadequacy released him from obeying God. You've asked me to do this God but I can't actually do it therefore I won't do it.

[20 : 12] Winston Churchill, that great leader of the 20th century, we're told as a young man had a very bad stutter. If you've ever seen the film The King's Speech you also know of course that King George VI likewise had a very bad stutter.

But he overcame it did Winston Churchill so well of course that his public speeches during the Second World War gave great hope to the nation in the face of the most darkest of days.

Now there can be genuine reasons why we feel inadequate to obey God's word. We may have physical limitations or disabilities.

We may have mental restrictions or emotional handicaps if I can put it that way. We may feel that these things these inabilities these weaknesses perhaps they may be weaknesses which we can look to in our marriage or weaknesses in our home life or weaknesses in our circumstances financially or whatever it may be we can look to these things and we can feel that they are grounds by which we need not obey God's word.

I just don't have the resources physically I don't have the ability I don't have the skill I don't have the education I don't have all sorts of reasons we can say well when God speaks to us we ignore or reject his command.

[21 : 36] Now not just talking about preaching or being a missionary or about outward evangelism or that way in the streets talking about everyday life we may feel we've got nothing to give in God's service but we can't use our weaknesses as excuses for not obeying God we can't use our weaknesses we can't use our failings we can't use them to say well Lord when you're calling me to be a faithful person in my job situation I can't do it when you're calling me to pray to read my Bible to be an example between my children to serve in the church in some capacity or other whatever it may be we can't use those excuses why not because it comes down again to what we really want when you think about this man Zacchaeus lovely story isn't it in Luke's gospel Zacchaeus was we're told vertically challenged in other words he was a short person and of course that could have mean that it was very difficult for him to see Jesus he could have said well

I'm short there's a great crowd I can't see Jesus I can't get to Christ well that's just the way it is no Zacchaeus climbs the tree doesn't he teach our children the story but what we're learning from Zacchaeus is this whatever the disability he overcame it such was his passion and desire to see Christ it was stronger than his inadequacy now Moses is answered by the Lord and the answer that he gives to Moses is the answer that he gives to you and I concerning our feelings of inadequacy our fears the things that trap us and keep us from living that Christ life which brings glory to him as we talk with the children makes our light so shine that men may see our good works and praise our father verse 12 sorry verse 10 verse 11 rather Moses said to the Lord oh Lord I I've never been eloquent neither in the past nor since spoken to your servant I'm slow of speech and tongue the Lord said to him verse 11 who gave man his mouth who makes him deaf or mute who gives him sight or makes him blind it is not it is it is it not either Lord now go

I will help you to speak and teach you what to say we're directed again to look at God rather than ourselves or others or even the task before us or the command before us God commands us to do something we can be sure that God will provide for us and supply for us the ability the skill we need to do it God never expects us to do anything that he cannot enable us to do none of the commands of God are impossible with God for with him all things are possible Paul and Philippians I can do all things through him who gives me strength it's God who made the tongue it's God who made the mouth it's God who made the eyes it's God who made every part of us he will give us whatever we need to perform the task that he has set before us whatever he calls us to do he will give us the grace to perform here's Paul

Paul felt himself to be very weak in a certain area we're not sure exactly what but he cried out to God and God said to him my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness so Paul says I will therefore boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on me that's why for Christ's sake I delight in weakness in insults in hardship in persecution in difficulties for when I'm weak then I am strong see God does not give us his grace in proportion to our strength but in proportion to our weakness God delights to use those who like Moses feel themselves to be inadequate and powerless and helpless one of the great handicaps to many people becoming a Christian is this they think they're good enough or they think they have enough of they can trust in themselves and depend upon themselves it's only when we know our weakness it's only when we know our sinfulness when we know our failings that then we look to God for the grace we need and so it is in the

Christian life if we want to live for Christ and follow him the weaker we feel the better God is able to use us it doesn't mean that God cannot use clever people don't know any sorry God cannot use clever people God cannot use good people God cannot use skilled people he does God delights to give his grace to those who are weak think about your salvation dear friends those who are Christians this morning how did you become a Christian did you become a Christian by your own goodness by your own power by your own strength by your own ability I hope all of you are saying no because that's the reality isn't it God gave us the faith to believe the gospel God raised us from the dead God awakened and quickened us and dealt with us and moved in our lives God is the one who saved us salvation is of the Lord but the wonderful thing is as we go on in the Christian life it's still of the

[27:18] Lord it's still by his power it's still by his grace it's still by him working in us it isn't that God says right now you're a Christian off you go did you see that incredible series on life with David Attenborough and those little goslings being thrown out the nest and falling about 150 500 feet or something Christian life isn't that God doesn't kick us out the nest say right off you go you're on your own now mate and the wonderful thing about our God is that he who began a good work in us carries it on to completion here's Paul as he writes to the Philippians notice this incredible balance and he's talking about obedience again therefore my dear friends as you have always obeyed not only in my presence but now much more in my absence continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling weakness in other words for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good pleasure he is the one who is doing it and dear friends one of the things that we are to do is to work out our salvation with fear and trembling it doesn't say work out your salvation with strength and confidence fear and trembling recognizing our own weakness feeling our inadequacies saying like

Moses Lord I'm no good at this it's God who works in you it's as we act as we trust as we look to him as we depend and rely upon him then we are given the grace then we are given the ability then we are given the strength then we are given the help but Moses still has another excuse perhaps as I've been speaking to you and particularly perhaps those of you who are not Christians and you say well I've still got another excuse it's not just that I'm trapped by what people think of me or will think of me if I say I'm going to become a Christian it's not just that I feel I'm not worthy or good enough or even that I think I'm actually so good I don't need to here's Moses verse 13 it's there's a sense of humour in it I think and irony in it I think we've all said something like it oh Lord please send somebody else please send somebody else why me see

Moses is trapped if I can put it that way by his own defiance that's the big problem isn't it it's not my inadequacies that's the big problem it's not really in one sense that I'm trapped because I want people to really like me and I don't want to upset them and I want to keep them on the right side I want to be popular what's the real problem my heart's so sinful it's our defiance that's the real problem isn't it it's the hardness of our hearts it's the sinfulness of our hearts we don't really want to do what God wants us to do we want to please ourselves here's Moses I don't want to go you called me and I put all these excuses before you but in the end I just don't want to do it he's trapped by his own hardness of heart his own defiance and that explains why God is angry verse 14 the Lord's anger burned against Moses see God's not angry with weakness he's not angry with weak people

God doesn't despise as we do weak people or fearful people God isn't angry with fearfulness and anxiety and people who are trapped and people who are struggling God understands that he's gracious with that but he's angry with sinful rebellion he's angry with hardness of heart he's angry with people who say I will not believe I will not have this Jesus to rule over me I will not follow do you know what even when he is outright rebellious and disobedient God's still so gracious with him isn't he is that the real reason behind your neglect of God's commands is that the real reason why you are not living for Christ 100% obeying his word following him being that witness standing up for him not compromising obeying his word when he speaks about giving of time or energy or money is that the real reason behind this sort of half heartedness actually

I don't really want to live whole heartedly for Jesus I like things the way they are like Moses I don't really like living in a desert and I don't really like the smell of sheep but actually it's comfortable it's safe I don't really like being sat on the fence as it were but you see I don't want things to change I don't want to take that leap of faith I don't want to try something new it's scary you see God is as I said incredibly gracious though we're told that his anger burned against Moses there's no sign of it there's no thunderbolt from heaven against Moses to strike him down there's no even rebuke against Moses from the Lord's mouth that would slay him or turn him rather what do we find God has already prepared Aaron to be his mouthpiece what about your brother

[33 : 14] Aaron the Levite I know he can speak well he's already on his way to meet you and so on see God has all the bases covered we're always looking for loopholes in the law ways out of things God God God he knows how we will react he knows our hearts their sinfulness their stubbornness yes their inadequacies their failings their fears and he will always give us that way through to obey his will and to do his word and to turn from our sinful disobedience again Paul as he writes to Corinthians 1 Corinthians chapter 10 verse 13 he reminds them of this truth God is faithful he will not let you be tested beyond what you can bear but when you are tested he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it

God is gracious to us he doesn't want us to continue in our disobedience he doesn't want us to continue to be trapped in our fear or inadequacy or in our hardness of heart he wants us to be free from those things and in his goodness and his love he knows that obedience to his word is the place of blessing and freedom as we read there from James in chapter 1 listen again the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues to do this not forgetting what he's heard but doing it he will be blessed in what he does again one of the great lies of the world is this you're happier and blessed pleasing yourself living for yourself but the reality is as we look around about us that more and more men and women are unhappy and miserable and downright grumpy as they live for themselves the joy and the freedom and the blessing that comes from obeying

God is something that they shall never know and so I close dear friends what is God calling you to do what has God been speaking to you about has he been calling you to put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ as your savior you have been putting it off and putting it off laying up excuse after excuse after excuse let me say this to you dear friends none of those excuses wash with God they may wash with you they may make you feel better about yourself they make you feel like well I don't need to become a Christian I don't want to become a Christian but none of those excuses wash with God and God is patient and he has given you time and time again to turn to him he has spoken to you time and time again of his willingness to forgive of his desire to receive and accept but there will come a point dear friends when

God will get angry and the time of his patience and the time of his grace will be over and you will don't wait till then don't put it off till then don't keep relying on those excuses but come to him now obey the gospel now turn from your sin now put your faith and trust in Jesus now who has done everything for you and receive the love the forgiveness the joy the peace the life the liberty and perhaps dear Christian friends I don't know what God's been saying to you what area of your life particularly he's been laying his finger upon or talking to you about your commitment to him your walk with him your faith in him your future your job your relationships you know and again perhaps you too have been putting it off putting it off with excuses well when

I'm a bit older or when this happens or that happens or when I feel more confident or sure of myself don't put it off dear friends now is the day now is the time of his favour desire decide today that you will no longer run from him you will no longer remain trapped in the inactivity of fear of inadequacy of stubbornness rather decide to trust him to provide you with the grace the strength the help that you need to walk in the freedom of obedience say again to him Lord everything that you want me to be give me the grace and strength that I might be and that's what I want us to do now I want us just to take a few moments to respond to God's word in prayer and the quietness of our own hearts it may be that prayer of repentance and faith that's needed that calling to him it may be that there's repentance dear

[38 : 34] Christian too in my heart and yours about our stubbornness and our excuses but put set your eyes upon Jesus he's the one who's able to give you the grace for all these things let's do that now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy to the only wise God our saviour be glory and majesty power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord before all of time now and forever more amen