

Exodus Chapter 4 v 18 - 31

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[0 : 00] I'm willing to have a baptism service in April.

And I do want to encourage those of you who have not been baptized to think seriously about that if you're a Christian. And encourage all of you to come along to the Bible studies.

If you weren't able to make it on Wednesday then the notes from the Bible study are on the island as it were just at the back there. And also it was recorded so it should be on the website either now or soon for this past week.

And then this week as well notes will be produced and then also it will be recorded as well on the website. It's very important not only if you are thinking about being baptized but also that you might understand what we believe as a church.

Those of you who are considering membership and why we do what we do. And as some of you will know we're just a little bit different to some. In that we are we practice the baptism of believing adults and of the children of believers as well.

[1 : 15] So okay Exodus 4 we're going to pick up from verse 18. Just to remind you where we are. Moses has been in the wilderness in the desert 40 years as a shepherd.

After leaving Egypt God's people had been slaves in Egypt nearly 400 years. And God had said to Moses right I want you to go back and I'm going to set my people free and bring them out just as I promised I would.

So Moses has just received those instructions from the Lord. Verse 18 of Exodus 4. Then Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him let me go back to my own people in Egypt to see if any of them are still alive.

Jethro said go and I wish you well. Now the Lord had said to Moses in Midian go back to Egypt for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead. So Moses took his wife and sons put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt.

And he took the staff of God in his hand. The Lord said to Moses when you return to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I've given you the power to do.

[2 : 28] But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. Then say to Pharaoh this is what the Lord says. Israel is my firstborn son and I told you let my son go so that he may worship me.

But you refuse to let him go so I will kill your firstborn son. At a lodging place on the way the Lord met Moses and was about to kill him.

But Zipporah took a flint knife cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it. Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me she said. So the Lord let him alone.

At that time she said bridegroom of blood referring to circumcision. The Lord said to Aaron go into the desert to meet Moses. So he met Moses at the mountain of God and kissed him.

Then Moses told Aaron everything the Lord had sent him to say. And also about all the miraculous signs he'd commanded him to perform. Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites.

[3 : 34] And Aaron told them everything the Lord had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people and they believed. When they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery.

They bowed down and worshipped. A boy scout or a girl guide or a cub or a brownie. I was never a girl guide but I was a boy scout.

And if you're a boy scout then you know that the motto for being a boy scout is be prepared. Clearly from what you've learned this morning that's something I've forgotten.

Particularly when it means going out in a boat. But be prepared. Preparation. Preparation. It's something which is essential to all of us in every part of life. If you're going to take your driving test to get your license.

Then you'll prepare with hours of instruction and practice. If you're planning to run in a marathon. Then you'll prepare with miles and miles of training. If you're planning to get married.

[4 : 37] Then you'll prepare with months of courtship. We all know how important preparation is when there's a big event coming up. Well, most of you will have heard of the movie series Rocky with Sylvester Stallone.

In the original Sylvester Stallone was an amateur boxer whose name was Rocky. And he had the chance to fight the world champion. To prepare for this most important match of his life.

Rocky, this unknown underdog. Used all sorts of unusual means to prepare himself. To get ready. He chases a chicken around a hen coop to increase his speed and agility.

He runs up and down the steps to keep fit and get fit. And he punches frozen sides of beef in a giant freezer to improve his hitting power.

All because he had a big fight. And he hoped to be ready for it. As we go into chapter 4 of Exodus. We realize that Moses is getting ready for a big fight.

[5 : 41] The fight of his life. He's getting ready for the confrontation with the most powerful man on earth at that time. The king of Egypt, Pharaoh. All of Moses' life up to that point had been preparing him for this most important event.

That God would use him for. From his birth, where he was saved from being drowned. Through his childhood brought up as Pharaoh's grandson in the royal court.

Those 40 years of living as a shepherd in the desert. His recent encounters with God at the burning bush. All these things. God was preparing him.

Making him ready for the big match. And the events that would follow. But Moses isn't quite ready yet. As we saw last week.

Moses was still trying to dodge out of what God wanted him to do. He had all sorts of excuses. Loopholes. For not having to be obedient to God.

[6 : 42] And obey and do what God wanted for him. And so on his journey from Midian in the desert. As he leaves his father-in-law Jethro. And as he journeys to Egypt.

God has some final fine tuning to do in Moses' life. Before he's ready to stand before Pharaoh. And do what God has next for him to do.

It's important that we grasp and understand a principle here. That we are never ready for what God has for us next to do. Until the time comes.

We often look at God's word and his call upon our lives. And we often think well perhaps when in a few years time. Then I can think about that. Or well I'm just not ready.

I just don't have the gifts. I don't have the ability. I don't have the skills. I don't have the maturity. Or whatever it may be. But God's work in us as believers. Is always to prepare us.

- [7 : 41] For what he has next for us to do. And often. And more often. He will bring that right up to the wire. So that we are just ready when the time is needed.
- Not before. Not before. Samson. That great judge of the Old Testament. Who was known for his amazing strength. Didn't have that strength and power.
- Until the very moment. When he needed it. Here's one incident in Judges 15. As Samson approached the town. The Philistines came out towards him.
- Shouting. The spirit of the Lord came upon him in power. The ropes in his arms became like charred flax. And the bindings dropped from his hands. Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey.
- He grabbed it and struck down a thousand men. Up to that moment. He was bound and tied. Until the spirit of God came upon him. As the Philistines rushed out. So like Moses.
- [8 : 42] We are journeying. In our lives. To the next place. Where God is taking us. The next big match maybe. The next opportunity for service.
- The next step in our growth. In maturity. It may be the step to university. It may be the step into the workplace. It may be the step into a new. Into a marriage or relationship.
- It may be the step of motherhood. Fatherhood. It may be the step of retirement. It may be any number of different things. But God is leading us. And preparing us for that next step.
- And he will provide for us. And prepare us for it. And let me just take an aside there for a moment.
- Maybe some of you here this morning were not Christians. You've not come to that big step. Of putting your faith in Jesus. But God has been bringing you to that place.
- [9 : 37] He's been working in your life. The reason you're here this morning may be. Indeed that God has been drawing you to himself. Speaking to you. You may not have even intended to be here this morning.
- But God is wanting you. To take that big step. Of putting your faith and trust in Jesus. And to a certain degree dear friends. You can't just keep putting it off.
- You just can't keep pushing it back. You need to recognize that God has brought you here. And that now you must make that step. Of faith in him.
- Now maybe what we learn here from Moses may be helpful for you. Whether you're a Christian or not. To see what God is doing. And to take that step.
- To make that move. As Moses does. Leaving as he does. We're told his father-in-law. And going to Egypt.
- [10 : 33] What's the first thing that God does? To help him. What's the first thing that God does? To prepare him. For this next step. This big match. Well first of all. He releases Moses from his past.
- He releases Moses from his past. Look at verse 19. The Lord had said to Moses and Midian. Go back to Egypt. For all the men who wanted to kill you.
- Are dead. After 40 years. Moses is naturally anxious about going back to a country. Where at one time there was a price on his head. At one time he was an outlaw.
- At one time the king wanted him. Well and truly. Executed. Chapter 2 verse 15. When Pharaoh heard what Moses had done. He tried to kill Moses.
- But Moses fled from Pharaoh. And went to Midian. So what does God do? God assures him. That all those who at one time. Were after his blood.
- [11 : 31] Are now themselves. Dead. There's no need for him to worry about the past. Rather than worry. Rather than be anxious.

God tells him. That the past. Is finished. Now God may not speak to us. In such a clear way. We may not get such information. About our past.

But God has given us many promises. In his word to free us. From the things of the past. That may prevent us from moving forward. He has given us many promises.

To assure us that our past mistakes. Our past sins. Our past failures. Are indeed. Left behind. See the reason that Moses.

Had a death sentence over him. Was because he'd been a very silly boy. I'm going to put it that way. He tried to free. The slaves by himself. He'd got into.

[12 : 25] A fight with an Egyptian. And he'd killed the Egyptian. It was his own folly. It was his own sin. It was his own selfishness. His own thoughtlessness.

That got him into that place. But God says to him now. The past is done with. Those who wanted to kill you. The consequences of your sin. In one sense. Are covered over.

See God does not want our past. To hinder us from moving forward. God has a future for us. He has brought us through the things of the past.

They shape us. But they are not to control us. Or to hinder us. For with God there is forgiveness. Full forgiveness. For the past. Yes there's consequences.

Yes we've got to live with ourselves. Yes there may be things that we have to. Deal with. Because of how we've lived in the past. The way we've behaved. Or the mistakes we've made.

[13 : 22] But. God assures Moses. That those things now. Can do him no harm. Do you have skeletons in the cupboard? We all have.

I've got a whole set. Past mistakes and sins. They can still cast a cold shadow over us. But you see.

With God. They do not have the power to control. They do not have the power. To prevent us from moving forwards. God wants to assure us. That he has set us free from those things.

That we do not have to keep harping back to them. And whether the. Whether the devil reminds us of our sins. And condemns us. God does not. For he has assured us. That in Christ. There is no condemnation.

There is forgiveness. The Apostle Paul remembered very well. What his past life was like. That he had been really an awful man.

[14 : 19] But he assured Timothy. That actually the past. God had turned for good. He says to Timothy. Remember. Though I was once a blasphemer. And a persecutor.

And a violent man. I was shown mercy. Because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord. Was poured out on me abundantly. Along with faith and love.

That are in Christ Jesus. And so he concludes. Here is a trustworthy saying. That deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world. To save sinners. Of whom.

I am the very worst. If you haven't got. Anything in the past. That you are ashamed of. Then.

I am sure that you have. Then Jesus assures us. That there is forgiveness for that. He assures us. That he can be released from that. And it may not just be our sins.

[15 : 16] And our failures. It may be our fears. Or whatever they are. So. First of all. God releases. And sets Moses free. From his past. That he can move forward. The second thing is.

That he gives Moses. A reality check. His next preparation. Was a reality check. Verse 21. The Lord said to Moses. When you return to Egypt. See that you perform before Pharaoh.

All the wonders I have given you. The power to do. But I will harden his heart. So that he will not let the people go. Moses had these signs.

We saw them last week. Wasn't it? He could throw down his staff. And it changed into a snake. And he picked it up. It was turned back to a staff. Put his hand inside his coat. And when it came out. It was leprous.

Diseased. Put his hand back in again. And remember it came out whole. God was showing him. That he was the God. Who had the power. To equip him. And enable him. To do the task. That was set before him.

[16:10] But even with these signs. Even with these miraculous signs. That God would give. To Moses. In front of Pharaoh. Pharaoh would not. Immediately. Set the people free.

So even though Moses was going. As God commanded him. God was saying. Be realistic. It's not going to work out. Straight away. It's not going to be easy.

It's not going to fall into place. Straight away. His message and his signs. Are going to be rejected. By Pharaoh. Now I'm sure. For many of you.

That a little light has gone on. Because you're saying. Hold on. What about this phrase. Where God says. I will harden his heart. What's this all about?

Now during the next several chapters. And the meetings that Moses has. With Pharaoh. We find that the hardness of Pharaoh's heart. Is a recurring theme. Over in chapter 7 and verse 14.

[17:08] God tells Moses. Pharaoh's heart is unyielding. And then over in chapter 8. In verse 15. When Pharaoh saw that there was relief.

That's from one of the plagues. He hardened his heart. So what's it all about? What does it mean? Well the human heart. Is naturally hard to God.

That's what the Bible teaches us. Ephesians 4.18. Tells us that men and women. Who are ignorant of God. Men and women. Who do not know his love. And grace in their hearts. And lives. Have hardened their hearts.

He says this. They're darkened in their understanding. Ephesians 4. Separated from the life of God. Because of the ignorance. That is in them. Due to the hardening of their hearts.

Our hearts are naturally hard to our God. We don't want him to be the God of our lives. We want to please ourselves. We don't want to do the things that he wants us to do. We don't want to acknowledge that we failed and sinned before him.

[18:08] We don't want to acknowledge that he's our judge before whom we must stand. We just don't want God. We put up our hand. We put up the barrier. Our hearts are all hard.

And Pharaoh's heart was naturally hard as well. The only way that your heart and mine can be changed. And if you're a Christian this morning this is what God has done. Is that God in his wonderful love and mercy has softened our hearts by his Holy Spirit.

He's done what we can never do. He's turned our hearts from stone to flesh. He's given us hearts to see just what we are like. And to see the wonderful forgiveness that is in God and to receive it.

Now only God can do that. God has the right to soften a heart or leave it hard. That's his sovereign choice.

He doesn't have to soften every hard heart. But he chooses to soften many. But those that he doesn't soften he leaves them hard. So in one sense what God is saying to Pharaoh about Pharaoh is this.

[19 : 12] His heart is hard and I'm just going to let it stay hard. I'm not going to allow it to soften. I'm not going to allow it to yield. I'm going to let his heart continue in the course that he has gone.

Let me say to you that's probably the most devastating and awful thing that God can ever do for a person. Is to leave them with their hard heart. And let me say to you dear friends.

If your heart is hard and you know that you have not softened. You are not soft towards God. If you know that in your heart you have not trusted and turned to him. That's a terrible, terrible thing.

A terrible place to be in. And I would plead with you and I'd say to you. Call upon God to soften your heart. He will do it. He is a merciful God.

All who call on him he will save. Don't stay hard. Don't let God leave your heart hard. Ask him to soften it.

[20 : 14] You see you and I are responsible for our own hearts and our own actions. We can't blame God for that. We can thank him and praise him when he softens it and makes it tender.

But in one sense what God is doing here for Moses is this. He's forewarning him. He's giving him a reality check. You see when we set out to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we set out to live for him. When we take that next step of obedience. We can be sure this. It's not going to be easy. Plain sailing. Following God is not popular.

Doing God's will is not going to win you the acceptance and respect of many people. But wonderfully. God is so great.

And so faithful to his promises. That even the hardness of men and women's sinful hearts cannot stop him for accomplishing his purposes in us and for us.

[21 : 11] Yes Moses will have difficulties. But God is bigger than those difficulties and will bring him through those difficulties. It's part of his preparation.

It's part of his dealing with and working in the life of Moses. Sadly many people have unrealistic expectations about what it means to be a Christian.

People are told be a Christian and life's problems will disappear. Be a Christian and all will be well and you'll never face any troubles again. It's not the case. Jesus made it very clear to his disciples in this world you're going to have trouble.

If we think it's easy to follow Jesus, to trust and obey. Then we've forgotten that Christ's teaching fully understood takes in the fact that we must take up our cross and follow him.

And the cross is a painful, torturous instrument of death. The way of the cross is the way that Jesus went. The way of rejection and difficulty and hardship.

[22 : 17] But it's God's way. It's the Christian's way. It's the way to glory. There is no other way. Except by the cross. And yet wonderfully again in God's great purposes and love for us.

It's through those difficulties and trials that our faith is strengthened. That our walk with God is built up. Here's Peter as he writes to Christians who faced all sorts of persecution.

He speaks about their trials. It says, It says, It says, It says, Thou for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

So God is preparing Moses. Following me, Moses, I think he knew it already anyway, is not easy. We need to be realistic. But we also, of course, need to have our eyes set upon the Lord as he leads us and works in and through these things for our blessing.

Now that's a difficult passage, isn't it? God says Pharaoh's heart is going to be hardened. We come to an even more difficult and tricky little event here, which is put in verses 24 to 26.

[23 : 40] And you may, when that was being read, if you've not heard it before, you may have said, What on earth is going on here? Now let's remember that Exodus is written by Moses himself.

So he's included this. We know it's a real event. He's included this. As all these events are true historical events, Moses includes it and he must include it for a reason. He must include it for us to understand something.

And I believe it's important for us to understand in this thought process we have of God's preparing him for what he has yet to do.

So it's puzzling. At a lodging place, verse 24, on the way, the Lord met Moses and was about to kill him. Well, why would he do that? It was God who'd sent Moses to go to Egypt.

He was on his way in obedience to God, going to Egypt, and God meets him and is about to kill him. Why? The answer is to remember what God had said earlier about himself and his relationship to God's people of whom Moses was one.

[24 : 52] Remember, God had reiterated again and again that he is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There in chapter 4, verse 5. This, said the Lord, is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, has appeared.

He said it in chapter 3 on several occasions as well. We remember, of course, that he is such a God and that is the reason why he remembers his covenant promises to them.

Back in chapter 2, God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. So this God is a God who meets with his people and deals with his people through a covenant.

A covenant, as you remember, is an agreement that God has made with people to bless them, to help them, to look after them, and they have responsibilities in that covenant, to obey him, and to follow him, and to seek him.

So the God who is sending Moses now to Egypt is the God of the covenant, who is sending Moses to deliver his beloved people, because he has promised to do so.

[26 : 04] God is faithful. He is the faithful God. And he is sending Moses to perform his act of faithfulness.

Now Moses is not just God's servant in being sent to rescue these people. He is one of the people himself. He is one of the people himself.

He is one of those who is in covenant with God. And God's covenant with his people had a sign. Which was circumcision. Back in chapter 17 of Genesis, when God makes this covenant with Abraham, he tells him that on the people's side they are to do something.

God will keep his promises, but the sign of his promises was this. You shall undergo circumcision. And it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. Every male among you shall be circumcised.

For the generations to come, every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised. So, God is the God of the covenant. He is sending Moses back to the people of God, that they might be restored into a right relationship with God in the covenant.

[27 : 21] That he might fulfill his promises to them. When a child was circumcised, the person doing it, or the family who were doing it, the parents who were doing it, were saying, we believe, God, that you are faithful to your promise.

We believe that you are the covenant God to us and to our children. Now, Moses knew all of this. He'd been brought up by his mother when he was earlier. He knew what it was to be a Hebrew.

He knew and understood these things. But he'd not obeyed God. He'd never circumcised his son as God had commanded. He'd left him without that sign of God's covenant.

He was in one sense saying, I have forgotten and I have not kept God's promises and I have not kept his covenant. So, God meets him now and he won't let him go any further forward until the matter is sorted out.

Zipporah, who is Moses' wife, clearly understands what's going on, even if Moses doesn't. And so she circumcises her son, strangely, taking the blood of the foreskin and touching the feet of Moses.

[28 : 35] That we don't fully understand. But we do understand that she circumcises him in keeping with God's promises. That shed blood of the son now becomes the means by which Moses is spared from death.

That's why we're told, verse 26, at that time she said, bridegroom of blood, referring to circumcision. She literally receives Moses back as her husband a second time because he would have died and been lost to her if it hadn't been for the blood that was shed by her son.

Let's just simplify this a bit. God calls for obedience. Moses hadn't been obedient. Therefore, he needed to be obedient before he could move forward.

It had to be put right. See, what God was teaching Moses and preparing him for is this. You have to restore what's been neglected. If we're going to go on to the next step that God has for us, his purpose for us, we can't leave undone those things we know that we should have done.

Perhaps there are people that we must forgive, that we still bear a grudge about. Jesus has said very clearly in the Lord's Prayer, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

[30 : 02] Have you forgiven them? Perhaps there's that need for repentance. We have sinned and we have got it wrong in the past, but in our hearts we've never repented of it. We've never brought it to God and said, God, I'm sorry for the way I acted and behaved in that way.

We've allowed that sin to stay there and it's been a bugbear to us, but our pride, our arrogance, our hardness of heart perhaps has kept us from repenting.

Perhaps there is a relationship that we have with somebody or something. Perhaps we're not living honestly and openly before God in the world around about us.

We're being dodgy in the way that we act towards our taxes. We're being dodgy in the way we act in our relationships. We're living in a sort of on the fence situation. We need to put that right before we can move forward.

It may well be, as we've thought already this morning, that we need to be baptized. Baptism doesn't make us a Christian, but if we are Christians we should be baptized. That's the New Testament successor to circumcision, part of the covenant.

[31 : 11] God is speaking to you about that. Then speak to somebody else about it. We can't go forward to the next job until we've completed the one that's been left in hand.

Pilgrim's Progress, Pilgrim and Hopeful are walking along God's pathway and they see this side gate that says Bypass Meadow. They went down it and if you know the story they've got all sorts of trouble, made a mess of things, but before they could get back onto the path they had to go back through the gate they'd gone through.

They had to go back from where they started. A bit like the game of Monopoly, go back to go. Do we have to go back? The things undone in your life and mine, people we've not put things right with, things that we've not repented of, things that we've not restored.

That's what God was saying to Moses. One last thing here, one last thing which is a bit more obvious and clear I hope. God is preparing Moses for the work by reuniting him with his family.

Reuniting him with his family, particularly with his brother Aaron. Verse 27, the Lord had said to Aaron, go into the desert and meet Moses and that's what they do. Aaron leaves Egypt, meets the brother he's not seen for 40 years.

[32 : 32] What an amazing reunion. He may well have thought that his brother was dead. He never thought that he'd never see him again. There they are, reuniting, united. And Moses tells Aaron all about the things that are done.

And of course, if you remember, God had said Aaron would go with him and support him in the work of bringing God's people to liberty. And then Moses goes back to Egypt.

Verse 29, and brought together with the elders of the Israelites, performs those miracles, and they receive him and believe him. What's going on here?

The Lord is giving Moses the support he needs, the fellowship he needs, the encouragement he needs. He's making him aware of the fact that, look, it's not just up to you, Moses.

You're not on your own. You're part of God's people and you need one another. And that's something that really is so basic, but something that we, dear friends, living in this individualistic society, need to regather and re-grasp as Christians.

[33 : 37] We need each other in the local church. That's why God has placed us in a local church. That's why we are part of a local church. Not so that we can simply be together on a Sunday morning, but that we might support one another, that we might carry and help one another, that together we might go forward.

Church is not about this one going forward and that one being behind. It's about all of us moving together as the people of God. We can hold one another back, but we can also spur one another forward.

We proceed together. That's why we need to be in fellowship with one another. That's why we need to be in membership with one another. That's why we need to be committed to one another. That's why we need to be spending time together whenever we can and encouraging one another.

We know the commands of the Bible. We know what God has said to us. He encourages us and stirs us. In Hebrews 10, he says, don't give up meeting together, but encourage one another all the more as you see the day approaching.

Encourage one another. Help one another. As we look forward to the day when Christ will return, we're all heading for that goal. And if we neglect one another and the meeting together of one another and the support of one another, then we're going to miss out.

[35 : 05] So let me ask you just as we close, are you ready for God's next step? Are you ready to take that step? Are you ready to go where he leads?

Are you ready to go assured of the fact that your past is behind and forgiven as far as he's concerned? Are you ready to deal with those real difficulties and challenges knowing that he goes with you?

Have you done the things that should be done in your life before the Lord? Have you sorted those things out before him? Have you looked to him in repentance?

Have you sought his help? Dear friends, are you leaning upon and resting in and looking to the support and help of the local church? That God has provided for you a family that you don't have to do it alone.

You know, Moses must have been so encouraged as he closed chapter 4 of Exodus because there we find when they heard the people, they believed, they believed Moses' message, when they heard what the Lord was concerned about them and seen their misery, they bowed down and worshipped him.

[36 : 15] All of Moses' fears must have disappeared. All of his anxieties must have gone. So far, God had proved himself faithful. So far in your life, dear friends, God has proved himself faithful.

Therefore, you can trust him with what's to come. Have you taken that step? Have you put your faith in Christ? Don't put it off. Don't hang back.

Don't say, well, next week or next time. God has brought you to this place. God has been speaking to you about where you should be going next in your involvement in the life of the church, in your involvement in your relationships.

Then don't put it off. Step out in faith. Obey him and let him prove himself the covenant faithful God. Well, let's sing together that glorious hymn with the promise.

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