

Title: God's Call on His Son

Text: Exodus 4.18-31

Theme: God's plan is not subject to revision

Series: Exodus #6

Prop Stmt: God's calling is irrevocable and complete obedience is not optional.

Read Text:

The preaching ministry of this church is taken very seriously. We gather to hear from God and to respond to God. We hear from God as He has revealed Himself in His Word. Therefore, preaching is the communication of a message that finds its sole source in the Scriptures. That message is taken from the text through careful study and interpretation. In short, expository or expositional preaching starts with the text and then communicates that to the audience.

It is my conviction, and one that is shared by not only the leaders of this church, but by many of you, that because God communicated and preserved His Word as a collection of books, that His Word, normally should be preached in that manner. Therefore, we do not look to TV series, or new movie releases, or hot new trends for inspiration for a sermon series, so that we have something hip and trendy to talk about. God's Word is already relevant and powerful. Like a hammer that breaks stone and a scalpel that can open the heart, the Word of God is both powerful and precise. Therefore, it is my normal practice to start at the beginning of a book, and to preach through the book from chapter 1 and verse 1 to the end. By doing that, I am cooperating with what the Holy Spirit directed these men to write. All Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable. Consistent, expositional preaching protects you from hearing topics that are hobby-horses to me, and consistent expositional preaching also forces me to study and enables you to hear texts, that normally I would not be inclined to preach. Such is the case with this text.

One of the benefits of preaching this text is that for the most part I will not work real hard at keeping you awake. Though I am questioning whether Moses ever had to teach this section of his own Pentateuch to the junior department in Sabbath School, this text has a clear purpose. Genesis tells us the story of creation being more than how the earth and the universe came into being. God made the world in order to create a people that He would call to Himself. But these people sinned. They needed a savior. They needed to be rescued. At the end of Genesis these people are in Egypt. The opening scene of Exodus shows that they must be rescued. Their external slavery becomes a powerful illustration of our internal bondage. This is a book about calling, saving, and rescuing to be a people with whom God lives. (It summarizes the Bible). In the previous section, Moses is wrestling with the call that God has placed on his life. Although he questions and objects 5 times, this section opens with Moses going back to Egypt.

Verse 20 essentially summarizes the section by saying that Moses and his family started back to Egypt. He was not returning as the fugitive who had been on the run for 40 years after committing murder. He was not returning as the long lost son of Pharaoh's daughter. He was the return of the king. And he had the staff to prove it. In his hand

was not a shepherd's staff, it was the staff of God. By the sounds of verse 30, he used that staff right away, and just as God said, "they believed". Not only that, but "when they heard that the LORD (note spelling) was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshipped."

So, the text begins with the return and it ends with a successful meeting and response on the part of the Israelite elders. But in the verses between, we have what appears to be some strange sounding events, that in reality impress upon us, how serious God is, that we carry out His Call on our lives, His Way. This section breaks down into four parts. Therefore, the message has four points all related to the Moses returning to Egypt.

1. **God Provides the Way to follow His Call.** (18-20)

Moses obviously had some time to think about the Divine summons that he was given. Whether he made up his mind at the burning bush or along the way he realized that he really had no choice, we don't know. But by the time he got back to his father-in-law, his mind was made up. But, look at how verse 18 begins. His explanation to Jethro had nothing to do with leading the nation of Israel out of Egypt. He simply said that he wanted to go back and see if any of his own people are still alive. "Go back and see" is eerily similar to 2.11 when Moses "went out to see" his own people. Moses asks Jethro permission to return. In his response, we see how God provides another step for Moses to return.

A. **Jethro's blessing** (18)

Why did Moses not tell Jethro the entire story? The text does not say. Moses wrote what he said, perhaps he said more, but if he did, he probably would have included it. My opinion is, that Moses did not tell about the mission that God had called him to, simply because he was a meek man, and was still coming to terms with the enormity of the task himself. To tell others (especially a father-in-law for whom you are working and with whom you are living) about an overwhelming mission like this, when you don't know yourself exactly how you are going to pull it off, is asking a lot. Moses simply tells part of the story, and Jethro gives his blessing. The next time Jethro sees Moses (chap 18), Moses has about 2 million people with him. Who would have known?

But, at this point, the Lord removed this obstacle, but another threat was still lurking.

B. **Diminished threat**

The reason that Moses left Egypt was because he had killed an Egyptian who was attacking an Israelite. Moses had to run for his life. Moses was a fugitive. It doesn't matter that it had been forty years. That's easy for us to say, "aw, 40 years, who would remember?" Moses did, no doubt. He had no way of knowing if that story was still in circulation and if there was still a price on his head. What impresses me is that at this point Moses appears to be ready to obey the call without the assurance that his life was no longer in jeopardy.

In fact, while we see in these verses how God provides the way for Moses to obey God by removing the obstacles, the message that is conveyed in verses 18-20 is: You don't need to fear the Egyptians! Do you see the point?! Your job is to obey. God will take care of the rest.

So (v.20), Moses puts his wife and sons on a donkey and heads west, back to Egypt. Like Abraham before him who started toward Mt. Moriah on a mission that he did not understand, and like the millions who would follow his footsteps and staff without knowing exactly how everything would work out, Moses took the first step. It's one thing to step out in obedience when it is just you. But when you put your wife and sons on the donkey, when you ask 2 million people to follow you, it is a lonely walk.

John Bunyan was born into a turbulent time in England's history when whoever was on the throne determined the official religion of the nation. This had all sorts of consequences on who could preach, where they could preach and what could they preach. In the middle of that changing landscape, John Bunyan was imprisoned for preaching without state approval. He was actually imprisoned twice; the second imprisonment being the time when he wrote "Pilgrim's Progress." John had been married for 10 years when his wife died. He was left with four children under the age of 10, one of whom was blind. A year later he re-married, and year after that, he was imprisoned. His second wife miscarried in the process. In order to gain his freedom, all he had to do was promise not to preach. That was it. But he would not sin against his conscience. He would not go against the call that God had on his life. To sit in prison and take the consequences is one thing. To watch the affect of this on your family is quite another.

Our souls are enriched by the conviction of this man. When he was asked to recant, and to promise not to preach he said,"

If nothing will do unless I make of my conscience a continual butchery and slaughtershop, unless putting out my own eyes, I commit me to the blind to lead me, as I doubt not is desired by some, I have determined, the Almighty God being my help and shield, yet to suffer, if frail life might continue so long, even till the moss shall grow on mine eyebrows, rather than thus to violate my faith and principles.

Yet this man was not a robot. He agonized over the affect this was having on his family. When you have a child who has some difficulties that many other children do not, you as a parent are often fiercely protective and tender to their vulnerabilities. John was no different. Referring to the times when his family would have to leave after visiting him in jail he said,

The parting with my Wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place as the pulling of the Flesh from my bones; and that not only because I am somewhat too fond of these great Mercies, but also because I should have often brought to my mind the many hardships, miseries and wants that my poor Family was like to

meet with should I be taken from them, especially my poor blind child, who lay nearer my heart than all I had besides; O the thoughts of the hardship I thought my Blind one might go under, would break my heart to pieces.

His strength came from relying upon “Him who is invisible.” Brothers and sisters, that is our heritage. And some of you know of the journey. You are asked by a boss to compromise what is right and true. All you have to do is agree, but you don’t, because it would be dishonoring to Christ. And you wonder what the consequences will be. Like Moses, you take a very lonely step of obedience in shoes that only you can walk. But know this, you don’t walk alone.

I look at the last phrase in v.20 and assume based upon its place in the text that there is so much that is said here. Yes, Moses is alone with his wife and sons, but in his hand is the staff of God. How many times did he question himself only to look at that staff again? How often did the comfort from that worn and familiar piece of wood in his hand remind him of the extraordinary things that God can do through ordinary things? But it does segue into the next point. Along with providing the way, God provided the resources.

2. **God Provides the Resources to follow His Call.** (21-23)

He had already told Moses not to fear the Egyptians because God has taken care of it. Now in essence he says, don’t fear the Pharaoh. The timing of these instructions recorded in these verses is not given to us. It was either before he started on his trip or along with the way. Either way...

A. **God gives clear instructions.** (21)

Here is what you do: “When you return to Egypt, 1) perform before Pharaoh all the wonders (notice these words) *I have given you the power to do.*” Yes, it looks like you are walking into an intimidating situation. But, the truth is, Pharaoh is the one who will be intimidated, not you. But, then God goes on. He already alluded to this back in 3.19, but now God gives more information. So far, Moses passed the test of the burning bush and the test of going back. Now comes an enormous challenge. God gives us resources to follow his call even when He puts us in challenging situations.

B. **God gives us challenging situations.** (21b)

“*But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.*” Now, stop the movie for just a second. If you are Moses, what are you thinking? God?!?! I need you helping the cause, not hurting it! What are you doing? I need you to make things smooth, not difficult. At some point in this series, I will preach on the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart because there are 10 passages that say that God hardens Pharaoh’s heart and 10 passages that say that Pharaoh hardens his own heart. I will probably do this around the 6th plague since that is where the text changes from Pharaoh hardening his own heart to God doing it. Here, God is giving to Moses a big picture view of what is going to happen and in so doing he says something that though it may initially sound hard, is an incredible

statement of the jealous and protecting love of God for His own. Pharaoh was considered to be a son of the gods. Now, Moses is to tell Pharaoh that Israel is the first-born son of God and when Pharaoh refuses to let them go and worship God, Moses is to tell him that God says, since you are attacking my firstborn son, I will kill your firstborn son. And that is exactly what happens. Firstborn is a reference to preeminence and honor. God is very jealous of His own. He may put us in challenging situations, but He never ignores us.

Now, these next three verses relate an event that seems as strange as it does uncomfortable. I looked and looked at this, and prayed as I studied, for understanding and insight. I was not encouraged at all to read some OT scholars who in commenting on this passage said, “These verses are among the most difficult in the Book of Exodus.”¹ Another said, “Few texts contain more problems for the interpreter than these few verses which have continued to baffle throughout the centuries.”² So, do we just skip them and go on to verse 27? No, though the event may appear to be crude and unrefined to our ears, the Spirit of God directed Moses to include this account, because there is a truth here that we need to surrender to, that is as powerful as it is personal.

3. **God demands His call be followed His Way.** (24-26)

When God reaffirmed his covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17, God established circumcision as a sign of His covenant with Abraham and with the nation of Israel that would come from Abraham’s line. In v.12 of that chapter, God is very specific. Every male born into your family, and every foreigner who becomes part of your nation, must have this mark. It is to be done when the child is 8 days old. To refuse to do that is to break the covenant.

All we have in this text is the story as it is related to us by Moses. The text does not say which of the two sons is in view. The text does not say why this procedure had not taken place. We can speculate about Moses being in Midian, and about his wife’s lack of understanding or agreement, or Moses reluctance all we want. The subject was clearly not a secret between them. Zipporah knew exactly what had to be done. But the fact is, Moses had failed to obey a clear command of God, and now, he was going to back to Egypt to lead the nation of Israel out of the land of Egypt and had not obeyed a very basic command that a member of the nation of Israel was obligated to do. God demands that his call be followed his way. But we think that if we perform some good things for God, that He can be appeased, bought off, bribed sort of. Won’t God overlook our disobedience, if we are doing something good to make it up? After all, Moses is putting his life on the line by going back to Egypt, why make this such a big deal. Like Uzzah who touched the Ark of the Covenant in order to keep it from falling and was struck dead, this scene is so clear in its message and in its place in this text. Moses, you don’t have to fear the Egyptians and you don’t have to fear Pharaoh. But you have to fear Me! And your fear and respect of me is seen in your obedience to my commands.

¹ John I Durham, Word Biblical Commentary, p. 56.

² Brevard S. Childs, The Book of Exodus, p. 95.

Does that sound harsh to you? Is that what Zipporah meant when she said “Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me.” Moses, if you are going to save this nation, then your son has to be marked as one of them, even if it results in some blood. Now, you can see a picture here, can’t you? In order for God to save His people out of every tribe and nation and language, he sacrificed His Son who was marked as one of us, and who paid the ultimate price for us. Yes, it was a serious life-threatening command that Moses had to follow. But it was also a life-giving picture of God’s serious commitment to saving.

4. **God Keeps His Promises** (27-31)

These final five verses summarize the rest of the trip without going into too much detail. After the event described in verses 24-26, I believe that Moses went on alone and Zipporah and the two boys returned to Midian, and would be reunited with Moses later on. God, as he promised, sent for Aaron. God, as he promised gave them favor with the elders of Israel. God, as he promised gave power to perform miraculous signs in their presence. God, as he promised led them to believe. And the entire chapter concludes with all of them bowing down and worshipping God.

They know that God knows.
They know that God is concerned.
They know that God has sent a Savior.
They know that this Savior has power to save.
They know that God is worthy of their worship.

At this point, we can say, “so far, so good.” But, the call to follow God does not come with a promise for smooth sailing. But it does come with the promise that God keeps His Word. The reason we can stand so confidently on God’s Word is because He is serious about His Word and serious about your joy and trust in Him. He keeps His Word. When he warns, he follows through. When He promises His presence and to carry out His plan, He follows through. And in the middle of the journey of obedience, God is often gracious to give us a taste of the end, just as this chapter concludes with a hint of what the goal is really all about.

What does this have to do with Christ?

v.22 – “Israel is my firstborn son”

Matthew 2.15 – Christ fulfills the prophecy “out of Egypt, I called my Son.”

Matthew 3.17 – “This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.”

This could not be said about Israel. Israel was called to worship. The son (Israel) failed. The people, called to be a redeeming community to the world, need a Redeemer. So, God sent His Son, re rescue Jews and now Gentiles and to make them the church – one people, one nation, one Kingdom under Christ.

What does this have to do with you?

You need a Savior.

You have a Savior who keeps saving.