

grow trip

exodus 4.18-31

Find your way to Exodus chapter 4, verse 18. We're going to wrap up this chapter as Moses begins his road trip to Egypt.

He starts off a little shaky, but by the end of the passage we see some significant growth in his walk with the Lord.

So let's look at our text and see what we see.

Exodus 4.18 - So Moses went and returned to Jethro his father-in-law, and said to him, "Please let me go and return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see whether they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."

So, Moses had just had his encounter with God at the burning bush, which we looked at over the last couple of weeks. He's definitely been called and sent and empowered to do God's work in Egypt. And, remember, the Lord has given him specific signs and specific messages and a very specific layout of how all of this was going to go.

Now, he comes down the mountain and goes to his father-in-law and gives him this sort of half-truth. He doesn't really tell Jethro what's going on. Which indicates a couple of things to us.

The first is that Moses still wasn't walking in confidence with the Lord. And that's a bad position to be in. The Lord is faithful, but if we don't buy into His plan and if we don't walk trustingly and confidently with Him, then we'll find that we're continually afraid of what other people think. And when we're afraid about what other people think, we're bound to compromise in order to please them.

The other indicator we get here is that Jethro possibly wouldn't have been accepting of the mission that Moses was going on. Jethro is an interesting guy. He's a little bit hard to get a read on. From what we've seen so far in Exodus, I'm not all that impressed with his spirituality at this point. The fact that Moses didn't directly share with Jethro what the Lord had said makes me think that Jethro was a Laban-style father-in-law.

Here's the encouragement for us: You probably have some intimidating people in your life. Maybe they're in your family or your field. But we don't need their permission to honor God and follow His path for our lives. We don't need to be afraid of what people like Jethro might think about us if we do what God has asked us to do. And, in fact, we should be direct and open about our obedience to God so that they are confronted with Him themselves.

Now, on the God side of this, we see that He had been working to soften Jethro's heart to this request. And the Lord is working in the hearts of the people around you and me too, so all the more reason to not be timid about our faith, but to be bold about it.

Exodus 4.19 - Now the Lord said to Moses in Midian, “Go, return to Egypt; for all the men who sought your life are dead.”

This passage shows a lot of the Lord’s heart. How He speaks to us and works for us and how He is serious about His relationship with us. Here we see that God had been paving the way for Moses to get where he needed to go and the Lord had dealt with the obstacles to the task that Moses was being asked to do. And, remember, Moses murdering that Egyptian was never part of God’s plan, yet, in His mercy and His grace God adapts the situation to work out His plan for good in Moses’ life and the life of His people.

Exodus 4.20 - Then Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God in his hand.

The stand out story from this text is coming up in verse 24 and 25, where the Lord seeks to kill Moses for his disobedience. There’s a lot more here, but something like that certainly gets our attention.

Since that’s where we’re going, notice here how this road trip starts. Moses packs up the wife and kids and sets them on a donkey and heads out to where the Lord called him to go.

But he wasn’t really walking in obedience. We’ll see that in a few verses. He was concerned that his family would be comfortable, but he wasn’t that concerned that they were being raised in the Lord in the small areas of their lives.

In our time, comfort and luxury and enjoyment are more readily available than maybe ever before. But what’s more essential in our family lives is that we’re circumcising our hearts and the hearts of our children.

End of the day, public ministry cannot cancel out private mutiny. This road trip in Moses’ life is forever preserved as a proof for that.

Exodus 4.21 - And the Lord said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.

Let’s deal with the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. Did God force Pharaoh to not repent?

Without spending the rest of our time talking about this one issue, though it’s an important one, let’s talk about what we know.

In the discussion of Pharaoh’s heart, there are about 10 references to it being hardened. Four times it says that he hardened it himself and six times it says that God hardened it.

When the Bible presents to ideas like this you don’t just count and then look at which has *more* references and then say, “Well, 60% of the time it says God did it, so God did it.” What the Bible teaches about Pharaoh is that he hardened his heart against God and God hardened Pharaoh’s heart against Moses. Those two truths can exist simultaneously.

What we also know from the rest of Scripture is that anyone can repent. Individuals, cities, nations. Those who call on the name of the Lord will be saved, no matter what wicked things they had previously done.

The thief on the cross blasphemed Jesus Christ as He died for our sins, yet as he took his final breaths he believed and asked God for mercy and he received it.

Pharaoh had the same shot at and potential for repentance as that man or Rahab or Nineveh or any other sinner in history.

But looking at what the Lord said to Moses, we see God directing him in ministry and saying, "Do what I ask you to do and don't worry about the response of the people."

Moses' big hangup at the burning bush was, "They're not going to believe." But that doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if the audience receives your service if you're doing what God has asked you to do. You and I aren't responsible to save people, we're responsible to preach salvation. So, the Lord says to us what He said to Ezekiel - "Whether they listen or refuse to listen," that's not on us. The obedience is on us. And the Lord was encouraging Moses to do his service, despite the reception he would receive in the palace.

Exodus 4.22-23 - Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord: "Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn." ' "

Again, looking at Pharaoh for a moment, we see that the Lord always gives those who are about to be judged a fair chance. We've seen this too in our studies in Jeremiah on Sunday mornings. God gives fair warning of what will happen if we reject Him. But, Pharaoh and the Jews in Jeremiah's time and people here and now cast aside those warnings and move forward in their rejection of God anyway.

But what this means for us is that we had better take God's warnings seriously. When the Bible warns us about temptation and sin, it's not just for theological reference.

Proverbs 20.1 - Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.

Matthew 5.28 - Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Hebrews 13.5 - Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have

Yeah, but, I'm not going to ruin *MY* life. That's the natural response to a warning. But God gives them for a reason. And we should take them seriously. Pharaoh did not and it cost him the life of his son.

For Moses' part there in verse 22, we see again like we did last week that the Lord was sending him with action *AND* with a message. Both are necessary in our Christian lives.

Exodus 4.24 - And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the Lord met him and sought to kill him.

This is as serious as it gets.

At first this seems a little over the top. I find myself thinking, “Man, Lord, isn’t this a little heavy-handed? I thought You *loved* Moses.”

But that’s the key. God loves. Real love isn’t casual. Intimacy isn’t casual. It’s serious and it’s demanding. God doesn’t want to have a ‘hey I know that guy’ relationship with you. He wants something real. So the Lord confronted Moses there at the camp and had a moment of chastening in his life, *because* He loved him.

Exodus 4.25-26 - Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses’ feet, and said, “Surely you are a husband of blood to me!” So He let him go. Then she said, “You are a husband of blood!”—because of the circumcision.

Interesting. She knew exactly what to do, but as parents and as a couple they hadn’t done it.

Before the Lord we as men are charged with the spiritual leadership of our families. That doesn’t mean you don’t work with your wife and that she won’t have to answer to the Lord for her decisions, but we as men are in the position of spiritual leadership.

Zipporah called Moses a husband of blood, or it can be translated as a ‘bridegroom of death’. We’re supposed to be bridegrooms of life in our families because that’s who Jesus is to us and He asks us to stand in that position for Him toward our wives and our kids. And living the carnal life, a life that values comfort and enjoyment over the spiritual ways of God, that seems good to a man, but it ends in death. Bring life to your family by obeying God all the way.

Exodus 4.27 - And the Lord said to Aaron, “Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.” So he went and met him on the mountain of God, and kissed him.

God seems to use the wilderness to do things in the lives of His people. He sent Aaron out into the wilderness. Same with Elijah. Same with Philip the Evangelist. Same with Jesus after His baptism. God often sends us out into a wilderness, but it’s a good thing. Because when we’re out there He does stuff. He brings us unusual opportunities to minister or gets us away from distraction to strengthen us or removes us into a situation where we’re forced to depend on Him and those are all good things.

In the Pixar movie *UP!* the boy, Russell, is a Wilderness Explorer, which is a boy scout-style group that he’s a part of.

As a Wilderness Explorer, Russell goes around doing a couple of things - first, seeking people who need assistance (that’s how he meets Carl and goes on his adventure) and pursuing his merit badges that indicate growth and the mastery of skills.

That's a great mindset to have as a Christian, especially when the Lord leads us out into some wilderness. Because when God gets His people out there, it's for the purpose of doing rad stuff in their lives.

Exodus 4.28-30 - So Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord who had sent him, and all the signs which He had commanded him. Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel. And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people.

As the Lord sends us out into our calling, He inevitably connects us with other believers so that we can serve and support each other. He doesn't send disciples out into a vacuum. He connects us with the Church and with co-laborers. Which means that, Biblically, there are no freelance disciples. We're intended and commanded to be knit together in love and unity, serving in the fields shoulder to shoulder.

Exodus 4.31 - So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped.

Proper ministry highlights God's power, God's plan and God's word. Which means the result will be worship of God, rather than worship of man.

We live in a celebrity culture and that pattern makes it's way into the Church. We see in the letters to the Corinthians that this sort of think happened all the way back in the first century, so the admiration of men is always going to be something that causes distraction in the Church.

But proper ministry is never man-oriented. It magnifies God and God's ability. So, if you're doing ministry, amplify the Lord, not self and when you're receiving ministry, even from someone charismatic, focus on the Lord, rather than the man. It's ok to have favorite Bible teachers or living heroes in the faith, I do, but it isn't helpful when we ascribe worship to the man, rather than the Lord.

By the end of his road trip, Moses was in line with what God had asked him to do. He was boldly saying and doing all that the Lord had commanded him. And now he was ready to do some real damage for the Kingdom of God.