

Let my son go

Reading Hebrews 9:11-22

Exodus 4:18-31

IN this section of Chapter 4 we have come to the end of Moses encounter with God at the burning bush. All of Moses questions and objections were answered by the Lord. Moses would be God's mouthpiece and return to Egypt. The purpose was to liberate God's chosen people from slavery in Egypt.

This purpose is the good news for every age. This is what Moses was sent to Egypt for. This is also why God sent his son; that not just one chosen race of people but that people from every nation might be saved through the atoning sacrifice of his son.

So the theme for this sermon is that God reveals his great love for his people through the promise of atonement and deliverance for his people and retribution upon his enemies.

We'll look at this in three parts

1. The enemy without and sin within.

Moses was like us, he doubted himself, doubted the promises of God didn't think he could stand in front of Pharaoh and tell Pharaoh to let his people go, especially not as a former fugitive and a man who had slow heavy speech. Moses wanted God to send someone else. But the Lord was patient with Moses. The Lord knew he was the right man and so he helped Moses overcome his fears and difficulties with the result that Moses the man of faith was willing to go back to Egypt.

So God said to Moses "When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which you have in your power; but I will harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will not let the people go."

The result of Moses performing these signs and wonders in front of Pharaoh would =only cause Pharaoh to harden his heart against everything put to him by Moses. But the interesting if not disturbing thing here is the God would harden Pharaoh's heart for him and that this too was to be part of God's plan of salvation.

Pharaoh hardening his heart and it being hardened by God comes up several times in the next few chapters in Exodus. It goes to show that Pharaoh's heart was very hard. At times he hardened his own heart. At other times it says that God hardened it for him. It also goes to show that Pharaoh's will was God's will.

You see Pharaoh wanted to be master of the Israelites. Any thought of letting them go was out of the question. In his mind he was Pharaoh and therefore god to the citizens of Egypt as well as any other unfortunates who became his slaves. As supreme ruler he wouldn't tolerate insubordination nor acknowledge any higher authority such as the Hebrew's God. He certainly wasn't going to let them go and worship their God. So God hardened Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh hardened his own heart.

Well who can reconcile the two; God's sovereignty and man's responsibility? No one can; at least not this side of eternity. I like the way Philip Ryken explains it and that is that that is not a problem to be solved by a mystery to be adored. The reason for God hardening Pharaoh's heart is found in Romans 9:17 "that God's power and name might be known throughout the whole earth and that it might be very clear to all that God is sovereign in all matters including salvation.

That has to be the case because the fall into sin rendered all people incapable of seeking and finding God or worshipping Him; with the result that sin leaves people liable to the judgment of a holy and just God. The wages of sin is death (Romans 3:26) Pharaoh sinned. He rejected God. He enslaved and murdered Hebrew men women and children. Here in our text they are called God's firstborn son. Therefore God's retributive justice would come about through the death of Pharaoh's and all of Egypt's firstborn.

Another aspect of human sin is found in God's own chosen servant Moses who for reasons unknown to us here disobeyed God and failed to have his second son circumcised. We find later in Scripture that this was Eliezer) God already said in Genesis 17:14 that those who didn't respect the sign of covenant membership would be cut off. Moses sin in this regard angered the Lord and so we see in verse 24, the Lord sought to put Moses to death. How he would die the text doesn't say how but obviously death wouldn't come suddenly because some time must have passed for his wife Zipporah to see what was happening and take the decisive action she did.

By the grace of God Zipporah understood the problem. Their second son, Eliezer hadn't received the sign of the covenant. So, Zipporah did what Moses should have done much earlier. She then took the blood of circumcision and touched feet Moses with it. Moses revived, opened his eyes and looked at his wife. Judging my her cry, "you are a bridegroom of blood to me" Zipporah was glad to see him alive and well. Their marriage was threatened by the consequences of Moses disobedience but restored by Zipporah's faith and the blood of circumcision.

In these matters then Pharaoh's hard heart and Moses failing to circumcise his second son, we see how sin has the potential to destroy the church. The schemes of Satan, the lure of the world and the lust of the flesh are damaging enough. So too is the sinful neglect of the church's members.

For example here are those within the wider church who don't have a Biblical understanding of baptism. They say that children along with adults must be believers before they can be baptised and so deny the sign of covenant membership to any who are not including their own children. The problem with that position is that it ignores God's will that the sign of the covenant of grace is for believers **and their children**. God commanded Abram that he and his male offspring on the 8th day following their birth should be circumcised as a sign of belonging to God. (Genesis 17) The apostle Peter said that baptism is for you and your children. (Acts 2) The connection between OT circumcision and NT baptism is found in Colossians 2:11& 12 where Paul wrote "In him (Christ) you were also circumcised, with a

circumcision made without hands by the circumcision of Christ having been buried with him in baptism.”

The example of Moses failing to circumcise his son helps us to see how seriously we should view this . God wants us to accept his sign of covenant membership for our children too.

That bring us to the second thing

2. Deliverance from our enemies

Our own sin. Unlike the enemies of God’s people God never intended to kill Moses. However he did show Moses how serious sin is and that the wages of sin is death. He also showed Moses that its better to fear the Lord than to be afraid of Pharaoh.

The good news is that for the man of faith the penalty for sin was set aside or propitiated by the blood of circumcision. This is because the covenant of grace is a bond in blood . Blood needs to be shed for the forgiveness of sin. Under the old covenant that included the blood of sacrificial animals and was also signified with the blood of circumcision. It was also prefigured in Abram’s day, recorded in Genesis 15 when God made a covenant with Abram and passed between the slain pieces of animals alone. That signified the fact the God alone would pay the penalty for Abraham’s sin and the sin of all his spiritual offspring. And so the blood shed under the Old covenant points to the blood shed by Jesus Christ on the cross

This experience once shows us that there is only one way to be saved . Every one of is a sinner deserving of God’s wrath just as Moses was because he failed to circumcise his son Eliezer. We have also failed to keep the law of God and are subject to God’s penalty under the law. The only way we can be saved is for God’s anger to be turned aside and the only way that can happen is if it is done through the shedding of blood because the covenant of grace is a bond in blood. This is exactly what Jesus Chris has provide for us on the cross. By dying in our place he turned aside the wrath of God from us. He is the one whom God put forward as a propitiation for our sin as Paul put it in Romans 3:25. He is the sacrifice, offered once for all to bear the sins of many (Hebrews 9)

So we are delivered from death through the sacrifice of Christ and then also though the ***punishment of the wicked.*** One reason given for God hardening Pharaoh’s was because Pharaoh tried to take God’s place over his people . This is offensive to God because Pharaoh subjected Israel, God’s son to slavery and refused to allow his people to worship the Lord. Pharaoh demanded their obedience instead.

We notice here that Israel is called God’s firstborn son. It is an indication of how dear the Israelites were to God’s own heart and how much he was angered by Pharaoh wanting to be Israel’s master instead of God. It helps us understand why God would inflict such a harsh judgment on the hardened Pharaoh through the plagues and the death of all the first born in Egypt.

Later after the Exodus during their desert wanderings Israel didn’t always live like God’s firstborn son but grumbled and complained. They failed to live up their privileges and

responsibilities as God's firstborn. This is why God sent his only begotten son to be their and our saviour.

This connection between Israel and the Exodus and Jesus Christ is found in Hosea 11:1 where it says "Out of Egypt I called my son." This prophetic verse was quoted by Matthew chapter 2:15 when Jesus went down to Egypt as a child with his earthly parents Mary and Joseph until the murderous Herod had died and it was safe to return. Jesus' return reminded Matthew of the promise in Hosea "out of Egypt I called my son"

It was Matthew's way of saying that **Jesus is the true son of God** the true Israel. This was confirmed at Jesus' baptism where God's voice was heard saying "This is my beloved son with whom I am **well pleased.**"

So the promise of sonship was fulfilled in Christ and subsequently everyone who comes to faith in Christ also becomes a true child of God. Christ came to earth for that very reason; to deliver many from slavery to sin into the freedom of sonship. As a result Romans 8:29 calls Jesus the first born among many brethren." And in Galatians 2:26 Jesus Christ you are all sons of God through faith in him./

On the other hand for those who reject God and his grace as Pharaoh did they remain in their sin and under the wrath of God.

That brings me to the third thing.

The faithful response to God's deliverance.

We see that faithfulness first in Moses obeying the call of God going to his father-in-law Reuel and telling him he would leave Midian and return with his wife and children to Egypt. We notice that he doesn't tell Reuel that he is going to Pharaoh to tell him to let his people go but only to check on their welfare. We can only speculate as to why. Perhaps he didn't want to cause Reuel any anxiety in case Reuel objected and tried to prevent him from God. Perhaps that was a weakness on Moses' part but would we have done it any differently? The important thing is that Moses was committed to God. In faith he was prepared to leave his home and extended family and do the Lord's will. It was also his faith that saved Moses over his failure to circumcise Eliezer. We are all saved by grace through faith.

Nevertheless Moses' obedience and willingness to leave extended family, a home, flocks and herds reminds us of the words of Jesus. "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sister and yes even his own life cannot be my disciple." There are times when God calls us to serve in one way or another. Sometimes that does mean leaving homes and loved ones. It doesn't mean we are to act sinfully towards family members. We are to love and respect all people especially the household of faith. What that does mean is that the person of faith puts God first and is obedient to his calling. It's true that few are called to be missionaries and leaders of God's people. Most of us are called to serve the Lord where we are in our vocations in our home churches in our families. But the principle is always the same. Whatever God calls you to do the person of faith will strive to be obedient to that call.

A second implication is seen in the actions of Zipporah. Her quick thinking and right action over Eliezer's circumcision is a reminder of how godly wives can be a blessing to their husbands and families by calling them to account when necessary. There are times when a godly wife may need to step in and prevent her husband from doing something which may be unwise or to remind him of his responsibilities before the Lord and encourage him in his own Christian walk. Another examples of that in the Bible is Abigail who stepped in when her husband Nabal refused to accommodate and feed David and his men who were protecting the country from a Philistine invasion. Abigail saw the danger and prevented her family from destruction by helping David. We can also think Priscilla the wife of Aquilla who was a great help to her husband when instructing Apollos. Wives are to submit to their husbands in all things lawful, they are also called to to help their husbands do that which is lawful.

Finally the person of faith trusts in God and in his power. When Moses left Midian to return to Egypt with his family he had the staff of God in his hand. We notice that here its called the staff of God, not just a staff. It was from now on a symbol of God's authority and power. With that staff he would perform the signs and wonders which convince Israel that Moses was God's true prophet. With the staff in Moses hand God would bring about the plagues on the Egyptians, part the red sea and draw water from a rock.

As you think about that staff you might wish you had one of those yourselves like some kind of magic wand with which you could fix all your problems. Of course the big problem is that we still struggle with sin this side of eternity and might use it in the wrong way. So its just as well we don't have one of those. But actually what the staff represented then is available to us now . It represents the power of God for the salvation of his people.

Today that power is seen in the cross of Christ. The cross is God's sign and wonder for us today. It is the sign of God 's love that he that he loved us enough to go to the cross and take the punishment we deserve for our sin on himself. It is the sign of God's mercy that our sins are forgiven. Paul made the point in 1 Corinthians1: 22-23 that while some people demand signs, we preach Christ crucified; the power of God for your and my salvation. It is through the cross that God accomplished the greatest Exodus of all by liberating us from slavery to sin into a relationship with God; and into and understanding of true love and ultimately eternal life. That power which the staff of God represents is available to everyone who lays hold of Jesus Christ.

Amen.