

INTRODUCTION

Moses has made all his excuses and God has dealt with every one of them. We left Moses last week with a decision to make. It was a simple decision was he going to obey or disobey God. God has encouraged and equipped him now Moses has to respond to God's call. It was clear in Moses mind that it was God who spoke to him, now he must obey. In the rest of this chapter we will see Moses first steps towards obedience.

1. MOSES WENT BACK TO JETHRO (v 18).

After experiencing an encounter with God at Horeb he makes his way back to his Father in law. We need to try and imagine how Moses must have felt having just met the Lord. He must have been stunned one moment he is doing his ordinary and very mundane job as shepherd and the next moment he has this encounter with God. Now his whole life has been turned around and he is facing a colossal task to lead God's people out of Egypt. He must have wondered where to start in his obedience to God's call.

Presumably he started in his obedience by taking the sheep back to Jethro; he couldn't just leave them alone at Horeb. But he also had to go to Jethro to seek his permission to go to Egypt. Even though Moses is 80, in his society and culture it would have been impolite to abandon his job and family and go to Egypt. He had responsibilities to fulfil he was accountable to people and so he couldn't just go to Egypt without first dealing with mundane but important matters at home. When he finally gets back to Jethro's home he asks if he could go to Egypt to see how his own people are doing (the term 'still alive' means the general well being of the people).

It does not appear that he told Jethro the full story; he doesn't mention God's call or his encounter with God. Perhaps he feared that Jethro would refuse permission for his wife and children to accompany him on such a dangerous venture or perhaps he simply wanted to prevent word of his call preceding him to Egypt. In any case Jethro gave him his blessing and Moses is now free to return.

Now before we move on let me pause and apply this principle to us today. Moses recognised that in his society Jethro was very much the patriarchal head of his family. He could not just go and abandon everything because of God's call; he knew that God would clear the way for him to go. Now when God calls us to say 'full time' service it is very important that we don't take God's call as a reason to abandon all our responsibilities and go to where God has called us. It might well be that we will have to talk it over with our family whether that family is just husband or wife or whether there are children involved, it is important that they are considered. Most importantly we must consider our church family as well. I have heard of people who believe that they have been called by God to go to be missionaries in such and such a country and they go without the blessing of the church family.

If God calls you then God will clear the path for you to go and one of the things that you need to do is to talk to the elders about your call. God has placed the leaders of the church in authority over you and therefore it would be wrong to go without considering their views and opinions. There may be times when we have to obey God even without the church's blessing, but these are usually when the church is not as it ought to be.

William Carey had to go to India on his own, he couldn't get the blessing of Christian leaders yet he went and started what is known as the modern missionary movement. But generally speaking when God calls us we need to consult others and seek their blessing before we go.

2. MOSES STARTS OUT ON HIS JOURNEY TO EGYPT (vs. 19-23).

So Moses sets out but before he does so the Lord assures him that all the men who wanted to kill Moses are now dead. This must have made Moses feel better and encouraged him to continue to trust in his God. So Moses takes his wife and sons with him and sets out for the land of Egypt. He also takes the staff, which is now called the staff of God, because God was going to work powerfully through this staff. God once again encourages Moses by telling him what is going to happen when he reached Egypt.

Moses is told to perform all the wonders that he had given him the power to do. However in spite of the demonstration of God's power, God will harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will not let the people go. Now this often causes Christians problems. The bible uses side-by-side three different ways of describing the same situation. Three different Hebrew verbs are used to describe the same thing. Sometimes it is said that God hardens the heart of Pharaoh as here.

At other times Pharaoh is said to harden his own heart as in 8:15; and at other times the act is described as Pharaoh's heart was hardened as in 7:13. It is three different ways of looking at Pharaoh's state. The Hebrew mind does not see the problem that we see in these verses for in his mind God is the first cause of everything without in any way denying the reality and moral responsibility of the person involved. To the Hebrew mind these words explain what is happening in three different ways. Pharaoh is hardening his heart against God, God is hardening Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh's heart is hardened. What is being said is that Pharaoh is opposing God and God is opposing Pharaoh. Paul comments on this incident in Romans 9:16-18. The context is God's election and God's authority and right to act as he chooses. God raised Pharaoh up so that he might demonstrate his power in judgment and so that his name will be proclaimed in all the earth.

Then comes his conclusion God in his sovereign and elective purposes has mercy on those he has mercy and hardens those he wants to harden. In salvation God shows mercy to those he wants to show mercy to and the opposite is the case as well he hardens who he wants to harden. Now the hardening of someone's heart is not the cause of someone's unbelief but it is God's response to one's unbelief.

Those who by nature oppose God will have God opposing them unless He in his sovereign elective purposes intervenes in their life. God's hardening Pharaoh's heart is God's judgement upon Pharaoh for his sin and rebellion against God. These verses in Exodus are simply focusing upon God's action towards Pharaoh whereas other verses focus on Pharaoh's response towards God. No Hebrew person had any problem holding this tension in his mind.

The lesson that Moses is being taught here is twofold.

a) The task is not going to be easy. Just because you have been called Moses, does not mean that you are going to walk straight into Egypt give Pharaoh God's message and walk out with the people of Israel. No! there are going to be many difficulties and hardships and as we will see next time that things will get worse before they get better. So it is with us because God may have called us to salvation and service does not mean things will be easy.

Life will be difficult we are in a spiritual battle and it may be that when we are obedient to God things will seem to get worse, problems might mount up but we have to realise that doing God's work is not easy but difficult. But I want to deal with this subject next time so let's move on.

b) God is sovereign. The second great lesson is that God is sovereign even over Pharaoh. Egyptians gave Pharaoh a god like status but God is showing Moses that He is God and his sovereign control extends even over someone like Pharaoh.

But the Lord then encourages Moses by giving him the message that he is to give to Pharaoh. He was to explain to him that the nation of Israel is God's first-born son. This is a way of saying that the people of Israel are very precious to God; they are like the first-born son of a king. At the same time Moses is to give Pharaoh a warning he is to tell him that if he refuses to let God's people go then God will kill his firstborn son who is heir to the throne and is the next god of Egypt, this of course happens in chapter 12.

With such a specific instruction in his mind Moses must have felt encouraged and better equipped for the task. However Moses was in for a shock. But before we look at that shock let us remember that as we serve our God that he is sovereign, he is the only true and we who are his people are precious to him so precious that he sent his Son to die for us. If we are tempted by the difficulties to give up then let us focus our minds upon God who is sovereign and upon Christ God's Son who loved us to the extent that he gave his life for us.

Let us remember that nothing can and will happen to us without God knowledge and permission for he alone is sovereign.

3. MOSES FAILS TO OBEY A PREVIOUS COMMAND (vs. 24-26).

Now we come to this confusing incident in the life of Moses and his family. It seems that suddenly Moses was stricken down with an illness, which was so severe that it looked as though he was going to die. Moses was at last ready to obey the Lord but now it seems as if he is going to die and God was the cause of it. Why did the Lord do this? The main reason was that he had not fully obeyed the Lord in regard to one of his sons. Moses had not circumcised his son in obedience to God's command (Genesis 17:10-11).

The Lord had made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants, he promised to be their God and they would be his people. But the sign of that covenant promise is circumcision. Those who were circumcised symbolised that they belonged to the Lord. Now we do not know why Moses had failed to obey the Lord's command in this area, perhaps his wife Zipporah regarded the ceremony as obnoxious. Certainly her expression (v 25) is a derogatory term to use about circumcision.

At this point Zipporah took a flint knife and circumcised her son. The outcome of all this was that Moses got better, described as "the Lord let him alone."

Now there are valuable lessons for us to learn through this incident. We too can be like Moses; we have presented our excuses before the Lord and had them all blown out of the water. Then we submit to God's will, feel encouraged by the Lord's kindness and grace to us and set out with new determination to serve the Lord. But it might be that we know that within our hearts there is still disobedience, there is something still in our hearts that God spoke to us about weeks, months even years ago, something that we must put right an action that we need to take.

But we have resisted the Lord put it to one side and we may even have forgotten about it but now as you are about to serve the Lord with renewed vigour He reminds you of your previous failure to obey. He says to you, I'm glad that you are obeying me now but what about that other matter I spoke to you about and you are still disobedient and in rebellion about it. The Lord is holy and therefore all his commands must be obeyed.

When God speaks through his word he expects us to listen and obey. He commanded that all Israelite boys are to be circumcised as a sign of belonging to the Lord and his people but Moses has disobeyed. We cannot pick and choose with God's word. God expects us to obey all his word not just the bits that are convenient for us or the bits that do not cost us too much. We cannot disobey one command and obey another one and think that somehow our obedience

compensates for our disobedience. We cannot continue forever to put out of our minds the commands that we have rebelled against sooner or later God will remind us again of his word sometimes he does so at a time when we seem to be making progress with Christ when we seem to be about to embark upon some service for him.

This incident clearly reminds us that we cannot trifle with the Lord and his word he expects total obedience and submission to him. If we have failed to obey in the past and today are still failing to obey his specific word to us then do not do anything else until you obey the Lord in that area of your life. Do not take on any new areas of service until you are willing to obey the Lord in the area were you have been disobedient so far.

4. MOSES IS ENCOURAGED WITH THE ARRIVAL OF AARON (vs. 27-31)

God sends Aaron to meet Moses and Moses tells Aaron all that God has told him to say and about the miraculous signs that he is to perform. Moses and Aaron went to the elders of Israel and Aaron as Moses mouthpiece told them everything the Lord had said to Moses and he preformed the signs before the people and they believed and worshipped God when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery.

Now I want you to notice a few more lessons and then we are finished for today

a) In God's work we need the support of others. Moses needed Aaron and Aaron needed Moses and together they presented God's word to the people. We all need the support of one another in God's work for the burden of proclaiming God's word to people is too great for one person. Jesus sent out his disciples two by two in order to encourage and support one another. We all need each other, we can all support the work in prayer, we need people to work alongside one another for the sake of the gospel we need each other to encourage us in the work and we need others to stand with us as we proclaim his word to others.

b) People weren't easily convinced. We read that Moses and Aaron had to perform the signs given to them by the Lord before they believed. Presumably Moses had to use all three signs before they believed. One was not sufficient for them to be convinced. The Lord had given Moses these signs in case the people did not believe him; the people were living by sight rather than faith but when they finally did believe they worshipped God.

Perhaps you are no better than these Israelites you have heard God's message of salvation many times but you are not yet convinced. You are living by sight rather than by faith and you take some convincing. I trust that today you will be finally convinced of gospel truth. Convinced about your sin, about Jesus Christ and his death and convinced about your need of his saving grace. If we are convinced then I trust that we will be like these Israelites who believed and as a consequence worshipped God.

You cannot and will not truly worship God until you believe and once you believe you will want to worship God for you will be amazed that the Lord was concerned for you and heard your cries for mercy.

So turn to him and then come and worship God.

Amen