

## **God Remembers: A Bridegroom of Blood**

**Exodus 4:18-31**

**By [David Strain](#)**

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Now let me invite you please to take your own copy of God's holy Word our turn in one of the church Bibles to the book of Exodus, chapter 4; Exodus chapter 4. We're going to be reading from the eighteenth verse which you will find on page 47 if you are using a church Bible. Once you have your Bibles open before you, would you join me as we ask for God to help us understand the Scriptures. Let's pray together.

*O Lord, we want to understand the Bible better, to know what You are saying to us that our lives may be more wholly surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ whom we so very much love and desire to honor and serve and glorify. And so we ask You now that You would pour out the Holy Spirit upon the reading and especially the preaching of Your Word that sinners may be called to trust Jesus, that backsliders may be brought to renewed repentance, that believers may be strengthened in paths of obedience, and that Gospel servants may give themselves with renewed diligence to extending the fame and renown of the name of Christ. For we ask it in His name, amen.*

Exodus chapter 4 at the eighteenth verse. This is the Word of Almighty God:

Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Please let me go back to my brothers in Egypt to see whether they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace." And the LORD said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead." So Moses took his wife and his sons and had them ride on a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the staff of God in his hand.

And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, 'Let my son go that he may serve me.' If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.'"

At a lodging place on the way the LORD met him and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it and said, "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!" So he let him alone. It was then that she said, "A bridegroom of blood," because of the circumcision.

The LORD said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. And Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which he had sent him to speak, and all the signs that he had commanded him to do. Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel. Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.

Amen, and we give thanks to God that He has spoken in His holy Word.

### **Surrender to the Mastery of King Jesus**

The father of the 18th century Presbyterian Bible commentator, Matthew Henry, was a Puritan preacher by the name of Philip Henry, someone who had suffered greatly for the sake of the Gospel. Philip Henry once declared, "He is no fool who parts with that which he cannot keep when he is sure to be recompensed with that which he cannot lose." Almost three centuries later, a young missionary by the name of Jim Elliot would paraphrase Henry's words in his journals as Elliot prayed about heading deep into the Ecuadorian jungles in search of a tribe then known to the world as the Auca Indians. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Elliot was renouncing his resolve to surrender himself wholly to the task to which the Lord had called him, no matter the cost, knowing that the cost, howsoever great it may be, will always be outweighed by the rewards. As you may well know, upon first contact with the Auca Indians Elliot was called upon to pay the ultimate price. His life was taken from him, along with his team - Roger Youderian, Pete Fleming, and Nate Saint. They were speared to death and martyred for the Gospel cause but he gladly and willingly gave what he could not keep that he might gain what he could not lose.

And Henry's sentiment and Elliot's sentiment, along with Elliot's sacrifice in service of the Gospel, propelled a new generation of young people onto the mission fields. It is a principle of course not simply for the missionary. It really is a principle, a principle of radical surrender to the call and commands and the Lordship of Jesus Christ that rests upon and should be the governing principle of every life that bows before Jesus as Savior and Lord. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose" - complete, whole-hearted,

absolute surrender to the mastery of King Jesus.

This morning we are back again after a break in Exodus chapter 4 and you'll remember the story thus far. Moses, remember, was raised a prince of Egypt but he chose to identify with his own people, the Jewish people, and when he intervened in defense of his people and slayed an Egyptian taskmaster he was forced to flee for his life and spent the next forty years in Midian in exile there. There he married Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, the high priest of Midian, and served now no longer as a prince of Egypt nor a Hebrew slave but now as a Midianite shepherd. One day, tending his father-in-law's flocks, he came close to Mount Sinai, he saw the burning bush, drew near, and there God met him, confronted him, humbled him, and called him into service. Moses was going to be sent back to Egypt to be the human instrument by which God would deliver His covenant people from slavery and bondage. And we pick up the story in verse 18 and all that remains now for Moses since his calling is clear is obedience. Now it's time to go back to Egypt to do what God has called him to do and say what God had called him to say.

If you'll look at the passage, verses 18 to 31, you'll see that it falls into three simple sections, each of which really do reinforce the principle of complete submission to the call and commands of God; that principle articulated by Henry and by Elliot, the principle that should mark every one of us if we are Christians. Surrender to the claims and mastery of King Jesus. First in verses 18 to 23 there are the claims of radical commitment; the claims of radical commitment. Then in 24 to 26, secondly, the danger of delayed obedience; the danger of delayed obedience. And then 27 to 31, finally, the fruit of faithful service; the fruit of faithful service. So the claims of radical commitment, the danger of delayed obedience, the fruit of faithful service. Moses has to learn, and we are being reminded in our passage this morning, when God makes us His children and deploys us in His service, He claims us completely as His own.

## **I. The Claims of Radical Commitment**

Look with me, first of all then, at verses 18 to 23 - the claims of radical commitment. Ever since God first called Moses to go back to Egypt in chapter 3 verse 10, from that point onwards all the way through to 4:17, Moses has been arguing with God, resisting the call of God in his life. "I don't know what to say. No one will believe me when I tell them. I'm not a good public speaker anyway. I'm not equipped for the job. Please just send someone else." That had been his arguments. To every one of his objections, however, remember, God responds with the abundant provisions of His grace and the perfect promises of His presence until Moses is left without any excuse. God has him cornered. The path of duty is clear; his calling absolutely crystal clear. He must go back to Egypt and God will go with him. But now, in verse 18 and following, the time has come to match words with actions.

## **A Reluctant Deliverer**

And do notice the sequence of events as they unfold - 18 to 23. First, Moses has to take leave of his father-in-law, Jethro. Verse 18, "Please let me go back to my brothers in Egypt to see whether they are still alive." And Jethro gives him permission. Now the commentators at this point give poor Moses a terribly bad rap because Moses doesn't divulge all of his motives and reasoning for returning. I think we're being unkind to Moses. He gives a sufficient reason, true as far as it goes, even though it may not be the comprehensive reason. The point here really is not to assess Moses' honesty but rather to recognize the poignancy of the moment forced upon Moses as the call of God can no longer be sidestepped or resisted. He's taking his leave of his father-in-law. There's a certain pathos and poignancy here - family bonds brought under pressure because Moses seeks to be obedient to God's call.

And having now secured Jethro's permission, notice in verse 19 God has to come and prod Moses further. It looks as though Moses remain, lingers, loiters almost in Midian. Perhaps he's found lots of excuses to delay obedience a little longer. "You know there's that family gathering next month. Really it would be wrong to go before then. There's some loose ends; I need to get my affairs in order." There's excuse after excuse. Whatever the reason, Moses is still in Midian and so God comes to him and says, "Now Moses, go back to Egypt. The men who sought your life are now dead." God has to push Moses. Moses' obedience comes in fits and starts. No doubt he's aware that this is going to be a challenging, demanding, costly mission. His obedience is slow; it's on-again, off-again. How like us he is. Isn't that how we obey so often? In fits and starts? But Moses here is to be the redeemer of God's people, the savior of Israel. How unlike the true and final Savior to whom Moses is intended to point us Moses is at this point. Our Savior, the Lord Jesus, who accomplishes the final Exodus and Redemption of all who believe from the slavery and bondage of sin, never delayed in His obedience to God. John 17 and verse 4 - "I have glorified you on earth. I have accomplished the work you gave me to do," He said to His Father. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane when the pressure to sidestep and take a detour and a diversion away from the call of God on his life was at its most acute even there. He bent His will to the will of His Father. "Not my will but yours be done," He said. And then He went the way of the cross. Moses is a reluctant savior but our Redeemer bore the greatest of costs with gladness that He might win you for His own.

Well Moses now finally after much prodding and pushing from God begins the return journey. Notice in verse 22 that he brings his family along with him. He loads them on a donkey and off they set from Midian to Egypt. He doesn't really know what's waiting for him or his family when he gets there. He must have had some sense of the potential dangers and risks involved. His delay certain seems to imply as much. But they are a family, after all, and the call of God rests upon

the head of the household and so there is a secondary sense in which that call obligates the entire household. They're all involved. The cost of discipleship is not some ethereal, abstract, spiritual thing you know. It is often paid in those places in our lives where its demands are most painful. Very often it penetrates into our families and into our households.

### **A Word concerning Gospel Ministry**

And let me speak a word here, if I may, to anyone involved in Gospel ministry or training for Gospel ministry. Do not think you can serve your Master with faithfulness and diligence while at the same time completely insulating or isolating your family from the burdens and costs that ministry involves. If God is calling you that calling will have implications and consequences for them. There is a cost to your household. There are joys and glories and wonders they will be privileged to see as God works by the ministry of the Word through you. That's wonderfully true. But there will also be sacrifices they will have to make and burdens they will have to carry and costs they will have to pay. And if you are the head of such a household you must serve them well and seek to prepare them for the path ahead. That's really what our Savior meant when He said, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" - Matthew 10 and verses 37 and following. The claims of Jesus Christ, when He calls us to be His disciples and calls us into His service, the claim of Jesus Christ over us is total. There are no no-go areas in your life if you are a disciple. He claims Lordship over your future, over your family, over your finances, over your hopes and dreams. You are His. You are not your own. You have been bought at a price.

### **A Reminder of the Sufficiency of God**

I think that's actually part of the point of verse 20 - the curious little codicil at the end of verse 20. Moses takes the staff of God in his hand. Back in verse 2 and again in verse 4; it's just a staff - unremarkable, terribly ordinary, a rough-hewn stick of wood polished by Moses' hand over the years; a shepherd's crook. But now it has changed. It is now the staff of God not because it's anything other than an ordinary staff but because God has called Moses and promised to work by this ordinary staff mighty things. That's also true of Moses himself. Moses is still ordinary old Moses and you're still ordinary old you, believer in Jesus. But if you are His, your identity has changed. You are now the instrument of the power of God. You are now the servant of the mission and agenda of God. Like that old wooden staff whose identity has changed, now it is the staff of God, this grand thing, so you are the servant and instrument in the hand of God and by you, ordinary though you may be, by you, in His mighty power, He will do great things if you will but consecrate your life to His service.

And then look down at verses 21 to 23. God tells Moses to repeat before Pharaoh the miraculous signs he was to perform before the elders of Israel and he was to ask that Pharaoh allow God's people to go free. But Moses here is told ahead of time, before he makes the journey and arrives in Egypt that God is going to harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will reject the Word of God. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart, as you may know, is a major theme in this part of the book of Exodus so we'll have cause to come back to it and think about it more in the future. For now I just want you to grasp that God lets Moses see ahead of time that there will be a final confrontation between the lordship claims that Pharaoh was making and the absolute Lordship that belongs only to God. And it is a confrontation that God Himself is going to orchestrate. His sovereignty extends, Moses is being told, as far as the response of the human heart to the word and message of God. He will harden Pharaoh's heart and the battle will be joined. If Pharaoh will not let Israel go, God's firstborn, then God will kill Pharaoh's firstborn.

You can imagine Moses, with his family in tow on that donkey on their way through the wilderness, hearing these words and the weight of them bearing down upon him. "I will be the instrument both of the deliverance of the people of Israel and the means of a terrible judgment upon Pharaoh and the people of Egypt. No wonder when the apostle Paul surveys the same consequences, the same twin consequences arises from his preaching ministry he would cry out, "Who is sufficient for these things? To the one we are the aroma of life unto life and death unto death to the other." Eternal destinies are being worked out as the message of God is proclaimed. Who is sufficient for these things? Paul's answer is so helpful. He says, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as coming from ourselves. Our sufficiency is of God who has made us sufficient to be ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter that kills but of the Spirit that gives life." Our sufficiency is from God. And I think as Moses carried that old wooden staff in his hand, now called this staff of God, he had, as it were, a tangible reminder of those same truths. "Moses, you are not up to the task. You are inherently insufficient and all your arguments up till this point have rehearsed that reality and that fact but still you must go and your sufficiency for the task is not grounded or rooted in yourself but in My grace. I am sufficient and I can make you sufficient as a minister in My service." The staff of God by which God promised to do mighty things he carried with him as a reminder of God's faithfulness and promise. God does claim all of you, all of you, for His service. Nothing held back, nothing reserved - you are His. But as He sends you in His service He also promises to be sufficient for you, to make you sufficient as a servant of His Gospel and His cause. The claims of radical commitment.

## **II. The Dangers of Delayed Obedience**

Then secondly look at the perplexing little story in verses 24 to 26. The commentators have written volumes. This is the kind of thing Bible commentators

just rub their hands with glee over; this is how they make their money! It's a tough text. Verses 24 to 26. But here we learn about the dangers of delayed obedience; the dangers of delayed obedience. Moses now is on his way. He's finally obeying the call of God. He's being faithful; he's doing the right thing. Somewhere along the way he stops at a lodging place, maybe an inn, a secure watering hole, and there he meets God a second time. And it's not this time a renewed call; it's not this time a word of encouragement or fresh instruction. This time, look at the text, when God meets him he seeks to kill him! He seeks to kill him! Moses is going in obedience to God's call in his life and suddenly, abruptly, without warning he finds himself standing under the divine anathema facing the unmitigated wrath of God. What is going on?

Well look at the text. Zipporah, his Midianite wife, certainly seems to know, doesn't she? As it turns out, one of Moses' two sons was uncircumcised - the sign of God's covenant in the Old Testament Scriptures. The sign of belonging to the people of God has been omitted. Perhaps Moses and Zipporah had always intended to get around to it during those long years in Midian but never quite did. And besides, one imagines them arguing, infant circumcision was really not a Midian practice. And so, you know, "when in Rome..." Whatever the reason, one of their sons does not bear the sign and emblem of the covenant promises of God. No big deal, right? Wrong. Wrong. Moses now is left in no doubt about just how intolerable in the sight of God his oversight has been, his delayed obedience has been. Now he realizes, no doubt with terror, just how unacceptable it was that God should remember His covenant and act in mercy to save His people while at the same time the servant by whom God acts treats that same covenant with indifference, delaying obedience to its stipulations until a time more convenient to himself. The sign of the covenant was not to be neglected; not then and not now. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* twenty-eight, five tells us the neglect of this ordinance is a very great sin, speaking about the New Covenant sign of belonging to the people of God - not circumcision now but baptism, the baptism of our infants. It's the sign of membership in the people of God, the outward emblem of God's promises.

### **Delivered from Death by the Shedding of Blood**

Moses here is being taught, and so are we, about the danger of delayed obedience - not to play fast and loose with the commands of God. He's being taught about the risk of presuming upon God's covenant faithfulness to us while we neglect His covenant promises and commandments ourselves. But that was the situation and so Zipporah performs immediate, emergency, life-saving surgery and circumcises her son and touches Moses' feet with the bloody results - seems to have been a way to identify Moses with her action; a vicarious act. "I want this to be considered as though Moses had done it, this to be the fulfillment of Moses' obligation that Moses might live." And then she makes this strange declaration that has perplexed commentators. "You are a bridegroom of blood to me." We're not really sure what she meant. Is she perhaps horrified that she has

been put in this position, that she must conduct the bloody rite upon her son in order to save her husband's life? By means of blood she rescues her bridegroom and receives him back. "A bridegroom of blood you are now to me." It's really not clear what she means; what is clear is that her action saves Moses' life. She saves his life. Their son receives the sign of the covenant and the blood that is placed upon Moses delivers Moses from death.

### **Pointing to a Greater Shedding of Blood To Come**

Whatever else is going on the scholars seem to agree that there is a preview here of another incident that is still to come later in this story in Exodus chapter 12 on the terrible night of the Passover when the angel of the Lord comes to confront once again and the threat of death looms large throughout Egypt. The same word is used in Exodus 12 describing Zipporah touching Moses' feet here as used in Exodus 12 for the daubing of blood on the doorposts and on the lintel. Blood is shed again and those upon whom that blood is applied are spared the wrath and curse of God. Exodus 3:24-26 points to Exodus 12 but Exodus 12 points beyond itself too, doesn't it, to other blood that was shed once and for all that all to whom that blood is applied might not perish but have everlasting life. This is the Gospel. Blood is shed and applied and the one to whom it is applied is rescued from the wrath of God. The only means of escape from judgment for disobedience to the commands of God is through the shedding of blood. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. You need a Savior and there is one for you in Jesus Christ. "If anyone sins we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. He Himself is the propitiation for our sins" - the blood sacrifice that satisfies divine wrath. There's forgiveness even for wayward, sinful, Gospel servants, called of God into ministry like Moses. There's cleansing and mercy for you in the wounds of Jesus.

### **III. The Fruit of Faithful Service**

The claims of radical commitment, the danger of delayed obedience, now finally and very briefly, notice the fruit of faithful service. Well what happens when we finally get right with God and bend our will and conform it to the will and commandment of the Lord? What happens when we embrace at last Henry and Elliot's famous principle, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose" and surrender all to the Lordship of King Jesus? What happens? Well what happened with Moses? God sends Aaron to Mount Sinai to wait for him. When Moses arrives he shares all that God has told him and together they head back to do the work to which they'd been called in the land of Egypt. They gather the elders of Israel together, verse 19. Aaron spoke all the words Moses gave him, the signs were performed for all to see, and look at verse [3]1 - "The people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped." There is, if we can put it this way, a spiritual awakening among them.



They believe and they worship because Moses and Aaron are faithful in the service and call to which they had been called.

### **Ordinary Faithfulness and Fruitfulness**

They really do read, these verses, verse [3]1, like the summary statements that punctuate the book of Acts, don't you think? Acts 2:47 - "The Lord added to the number daily those who were being saved." Acts 4:4 - "Many of those who heard the Word believed and the number of men came to about five thousand." Acts 5:12 - "Many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. They were all together in Solomon's portico. None of the rest there joined them but the people held them in high esteem and more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." What happens when God's servants obey God's call and submit to God's commands? When you're faithful ordinarily you will be fruitful. Ordinarily God brings faithfulness and fruitfulness together. When God's servants do what God calls them to do God blesses their labors. People believe and people worship. There is growth in the church and there is glory to God. Faithfulness and fruitfulness ordinarily go together. God is pleased to work by servants who are pleased to obey Him. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." The claims of radical commitment, you know, are total. They are total. Are you ready to submit to them? You must if you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. The dangers of delayed obedience are real. Delayed obedience really is disobedience. It is never safe to say, "Not yet" or "Not now" to a holy God. The dangers of delayed obedience are real yet there is mercy for the most wayward among us in the blood of Jesus Christ. And the fruit of faithful service is sweet. When you do what God asks you to do, He will bless you and use you and ordinarily your faithfulness will produce fruitfulness, in your life and in the lives of others. They will believe, they will bow their heads, and they will worship God.

May the Lord be gracious to us that for our part we might be faithful and obedient and thereby also fruitful in our own spheres of service to the praise and glory of His great name. Shall we pray together?

*Father, we're grateful to You that though our service so often is on-again, off-again, we blow hot and cold, we're so grateful to You that there is a wideness in Your mercy, there is atonement in the wounds of Jesus, there's bloodshed to reconcile us to God, there's mercy for us. As we receive that mercy, would You help us to be faithful Gospel servants, to go in obedience to Your call and commands in our different vocations and spheres of labor, and as we go would You grant to us not just faithfulness but fruitfulness that others seeing Christ change our lives and hearing the Gospel from our lips might like Israel of old bow their heads, believing the message, and worshiping God? In Jesus' name we pray, amen.*

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