

Text: Exodus 4:18-26

Title: "True obedience must be done the right way"

Time: 4/5/20 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: I can remember the times my mom and dad had trouble getting me to obey. Those were often times when the garden needed weeding or the lawn needed mowing. As a child I could be lazy at times, and I could come up with excuses why I was not a good choice for the job. Often my parents had missed the fact that it was actually my brother or sister's turn to do the job. Sometimes it was too hot or too cold. Maybe I was still sore from the basketball game the night before.

But getting me started on the path of obedience was only the first challenge my parents had. Unfortunately, they also often needed to deal with the way I obeyed. While obeying I could have the wrong attitude or contemplate shortcuts that would make the job easier but incomplete. Maybe like Huckleberry Finn I would try to figure out a way to swindle a sibling into doing the work for me somehow.

Like my mom and dad, we all seek to teach our children that true obedience must be done the right way. In our context, the Lord is asking Moses to obey. It has taken much patience, much encouragement, and even some anger from the Lord to finally get Moses on the path of obedience. But still that obedience is not yet being done in the right way. We know that because we get to the point in this passage in which God meets Moses and seeks to kill him (v. 24).

We will say more about that, but at the outset here we can say with confidence that Moses's obedience needs some adjusting. We too are often tempted in our calling as human

instruments of God's deliverance to obey the Lord with something less than true obedience. The title of the message this morning is "True obedience must be done the right way," and I want us to see four things from Moses's example about how this must be done in our lives.

I. We must obey with the right assurance (vv. 18-19).

Illustration: Following the New Chronology of Egyptology, the Pharaoh who had sought Moses's life 40 years earlier was Sobekhotep IV according to the Greek historian Artapanus. According to the *Turin Canon*, which is a fragmented papyrus list of Egyptian kings dating from the time of Ramses II, another Pharaoh named Dudimose I now reigned some 70 years later. This Dudimose was the Pharaoh of the Exodus, whom the Egyptian poet of the Middle Kingdom, Manetheo, called Tutimaos, "in whose time God (in the singular) smote the Egyptians, just before a 'people of obscure race' - that is, the warrior hords of the Lesser Hyksos - invaded a helpless Egypt, no longer capable of defending itself" (Rohl, *Exodus: History or Myth?*, 347-348).

Application: Moses is on the path of obedience, but he seems to have a very dim view about how all this is going to turn out. He tells Jethro that the mission is to see if any of his brethren are still alive (v. 18). God had, of course, defined the mission in far more optimistic terms, but Moses was not feeling the optimism.

Jethro wishes Moses a safe journey in peace, something we who travel a lot pray for often and give thanks for as a gift from God. But God answers that prayer with not only assurance that the journey will be safe, but also with the assurance that Sobekhotep IV and those who worked for him were off the scene.

We too can often obey the Lord with a very dim view about whether this obedience will ever make a difference or even be worthwhile. Today, as a local church, God has called us to be a human instrument of His work of deliverance and salvation from bondage. Jesus has promised that He would build His church and that the gates of Hades would not prevail against her. We need to keep that assurance fresh in our hearts and minds in order to obey in the right way.

“Be not weary in well doing, for in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not” (Gal. 6:9). Moses is weary right at the start. We are called not only to keep from fainting, but also to keep from becoming weary in our attitude as we obey.

Illustration: I am often refreshed and encouraged in the work of the Lord by times spent with fellow pastors. Before one such recent meeting, a brother wrote in an email this: “Please pray for one another. I know I would appreciate prayers. The struggles of ministry are true for everyone, I know, but my own heart and spirit are struggling with things in our ministry (some complaining spirits, unrepentant husbands, etc). Let’s really pray for one another before we meet. I am looking forward to our time together.”

We all need those prayers, and we need the assurances of the promises those prayers can reference. Moses needed to hear assurances from the Lord. Let’s take time in the Word every day that we too might hear those assurances and be encouraged rather than weary on the path of obedience.

II. We must obey with the right expectations (vv. 20-21).

Illustration: We have met today for something I have called “curbside corporate worship.” We have also used the

phrase “drive-in-movie style” to describe what we are trying to do this morning in compliance with the social distancing emergency orders of our governor. Honestly, it feels like an unusual way to worship as a local church.

Application: But what is not unusual for the worship and work of a local church is that the church is often but a relatively small congregation gathered in the Lord’s name. Jesus told us that two or three is all it takes in Matt. 18:20 for us to experience by faith His presence in a special way among us.

What is God’s instrument in this passage for overthrowing the Egyptian army of Pharaoh? Well, the attack force He puts together is a shepherd from the backside of the desert, his wife with their two young sons on a donkey, and a shepherd’s rod. I think Moses had trouble with that picture the way you and I have trouble with there only being two or three of us gathered as this local church at times.

How can doing this rescue mission with this assault team ever work? God had put wonders in Moses’s hand. Today, we do not have sticks that we can turn into snakes or inflict plagues upon people. Wouldn’t it be great to go to the top of the Empire State building with the right rod, stretch it out, and heal everyone of coronavirus in New York City in an instant? That would be great, but no one has a stick like that today. What we do have, however, is the living and powerful Word of God. Moses did not have a Bible, only a stick. We have the Bible which not only tells us what his stick was like, but so much more. God always wants to show what His wonder-working power can do without the aid of the arm of flesh. This is why He always accomplishes His will through the faith of the minority with God’s Word in hand, never through the force of the majority without it.

But notice also that God is clear (actually emphatic) about the fact that Pharaoh would not listen because God would harden his heart (v. 21). God's mission for Moses and his wonder-working rod to Pharaoh would not cause Pharaoh to listen, it would cause Pharaoh not to listen.

The prophet Isaiah had a similar mission to Judah in days of pending judgment (Isa. 6:9-10, "And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."). It turns out that this is one of the most often quoted OT passages in the New Testament. It too is a part of our gospel ministry.

One commentator said of this passage: "It was not darkness and a famine of hearing the word of God that would destroy the nation; it was light, too much light. It was this very light which would blind the people. 10 It is to Isaiah himself that the Lord now utters His command. He is charged to work in such a manner that his labors will bring about a hardening of heart and sensibility upon the part of the nation, so that there will be no possibility of its being saved. The heart with which men understand is to be made fat so that it is gross and callous and hence cannot perceive nor understand the divine message. . . . Preaching is thus compared to the act of smearing something over the eyes" (Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 1:257; see Zech. 7:11-12).

We kind of operate with the assumption that this kind of preaching is just bad preaching. But true obedience recognizes that at times it is the Lord's will to harden in judgment rather than to save in mercy. The account of the Lord's dealings with Pharaoh will show that for the first six plagues or so, it is Pharaoh and Pharaoh's heart that hard-

ens Pharaoh's heart. But beginning in Exod. 9:12, God begins the judgment of hardening Pharaoh's heart. The light of truth keeps coming and the blindness of the one who shut his eyes to that truth just keeps getting deeper. We must understand that there is a great cost to hardening our heart. We need a tender, humble, fearful, broken heart before God's truth.

Prov. 28:14, "Happy is the man that feareth always: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief." That mischief is described in 29:1, "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

Illustration: Trauma surgeons and emergency room doctors and nurses are the kind of medical professionals that see a lot of deaths. But if they are going to save some lives, they must accept the fact that part of their job is dealing with the hard cases that ultimately cannot be saved.

We must obey with the right expectations, understanding that at times the response to our offer of God's deliverance will be that of a hard heart. God is at work even in this.

III. We must obey with the right trust in God's love (vv. 22-23).

Illustration: I was the firstborn to Jack and Carolyn Hobi. Some of us have had the joy of giving a name to our firstborn child. Something very special happens to a person's ability to love the day that person becomes a parent for the first time. Parental love is a special kind of love.

Application: Pharaoh knew what that love was like. He had a firstborn son. Moses's message to Pharaoh was to explain

to him that God too has a firstborn son. In the Old Testament, God's firstborn son is Israel. In the New Testament, we read about God's church of the firstborn (Heb. 12:23). We must obey God with the right trust in God's parental love for us.

Illustration: I just returned from a week with my dad, and things are very different from the days I had trouble obeying him as a kid. Why the difference? Is it because his spankings hurt more now than they did then? No. I obey my dad in the right way now because I understand his love for me in a way that I did not always understand it as a boy. Is our obedience to the Lord like that? Do we obey Him with the right understanding of His parental love?

IV. We must obey with the right reverence for God's rules (vv. 24-26).

Application: Passages like this one teach me that the God of the Bible is not the God of my creation or my imagination. We rarely think of this episode when we think of the life of Moses, but it is undoubtedly the most significant night of Moses's life of obedience, perhaps more so than even the burning bush experience. God is about to kill Moses because he had not yet circumcised his younger son, probably because Zipporah was not in favor of the idea. To save Moses's life, Zipporah does what needs to be done.

This God is someone we must obey with the right reverence for His rules. Our rules are different than Israel's rules, but we have them too. The ordinances of believers' baptism and the correct celebration of the Lord's Table are two that come immediately to mind. Paul testified that some were asleep for their disrespect of these things. I believe that Moses's song (Psalm 90) was about this night.

Conclusion: Zipporah calls Moses a “bridegroom of blood.” Deuteronomy and Hebrews tell us that Moses is like Jesus Christ in many ways, and this is certainly one similarity between Moses and our Savior. Jesus is the bridegroom of the church who purchased his bride through the shedding of His own blood. It is not always easy to be married to the bridegroom of blood, but in His obedience, Jesus shows us how to obey the right way. We must take up our cross daily and follow Him.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching