



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Exodus 4: 1-27

“Moses' Excuses and the Compulsion of Compliance”

TRANSCRIPT

Returning to Exodus, Chapter 4 in our study of our theme From Egypt to Canaan and the subject for tonight is, “Moses' Excuses and the Compulsion of Compliance.” The angel of the covenant, another term for the angel of Jehovah, and as we have often said, one of the pre-incarnate appearances of the Son of God himself has now appeared to Moses on the mountain side as he was shepherding his flock. He has revealed Himself to him in a very supernatural way through the burning bush and then in the resulting conversation, He has commissioned Moses for the task of the deliverance of the children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt. In the 10th verse of the third chapter, Moses has written,

“Come now, therefore, and I will send thee unto the Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”

This was the commission that the Lord gave to his servant Moses. What more does Moses need for the task of delivering the children of Israel than to have had an appearance of the Lord to have had a revelation of Himself as the one who was called "I AM," and now to have been commissioned by Him with the promise that He would

deliver the children of Israel from the bondage of the Egyptians? What more does Moses need for his task? Well, I suppose someone who had gone to theological school might say, “Well, what he really needs is a seminary education now, because after all, it is obvious in the things that Moses says as he replies to the Lord in this rather lengthy conversation around the burning bush that he is not straight on his anthropology.

Just think of what he says for example in Chapter 3 and verse 11, “But Moses said unto God, "Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" Well one might say that if he were thinking of himself apart from the Lord, but the Lord has just told Moses that He was going to be with him and He was going to deliver the children of Israel through Moses and so it would seem strange for Moses to make the comments that he does and then in chapter 4, verse 10 they are still talking, and Moses said unto the Lord, "Oh my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since Thou hast spoken unto Thy servant; but I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue." So, he is not sound in his anthropology and he is not really sound in the attributes of God because if God says He is going to be with him, does not a good sound theological education tell you that one of the attributes of God is His omnipotence and deity, so one would think Moses needs nothing else.

But someone might say he is not even straight in his eschatology because he was told by the angel of the covenant that he is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob and if he has read the Bible, he knows that the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob gave those promises to those fathers who is going to fulfill those promises and if Moses is an instrumentality in the fulfilling of them, then what does Moses have to expect? So one might say, he needs a theological education, he needs to go to an orthodox seminary so that he could learn all of these points and then he will be prepared to do his task.

Well, I get a little periodical called *Context*; it's some comments By Martin Marty, a well-known semi-liberal, semi-conservative. He is really conservative, but he's a semi-

orthodox, well-known professor of church history and in it there are a lot of comments made by various religious leaders and it's a handy little compendium of what's being said by some interesting people of various types of background. In the present issue that came either today or yesterday, John McKenzie, who is a well-known Roman Catholic scholar, he's just retired, he is probably the best-known Catholic biblical scholar in the United States. He has taught at Loyola, he has taught at Notre Dame, he has taught at DePaul, and he has taught at some other places too, and you will recognize all of the Catholic universities there, and Mr. McKenzie has a rather starchy tongue and he does not mind saying things that are opposed to his own Catholic faith at times and he does not mind making fun of the starchiness of religious people as well though he is one of them.

But in this particular issue of *Context*, he is quoted as answering the question regarding the seminaries he said, "Well, I do know that we spend a lot of time learning what is neither true, useful nor beautiful," which is really a very good reflection of what goes on in theological seminaries because it is true that when you go to a theological seminary, you may learn a few useful things, but you spend a lot of time by studying what is not true necessarily, not useful often, and certainly not beautiful. So if you say that Moses needed a seminary education, I think really if you read this account, you will see that is not what Moses needed at all.

What he needed is something more fundamental and something more difficult. He needed to learn to believe the word of God, and that is one thing you don't learn in theological seminaries. In fact, often men go to theological seminaries believing in the word of God and when they leave, they don't believe in the word of God. So, Moses didn't need a theological education in that sense. His problem is the same simple problem that Adam and Eve had in the garden and that you and I have in whatever garden we may be living in. It's the problem of believing the word of God. It's expressed in some places in the Bible that I think are rather significant. In Psalm 116 and verse 10, the psalmist says, "I believed therefore have I spoken. I was greatly afflicted."

And that text evidently the Apostle Paul had studied, because later on in 2 Corinthians, Chapter 4 he cites that text. In chapter 4 and verse 13 of 2 Corinthians, Paul wrote, “We, having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, “I believed, and therefore have I spoken,” we also believe, and therefore we speak.”

One of the things that made the Apostle the great man that he was, was the simple habit of believing the word of God which was given him by God and which with God's grace he practiced. One of the finest statements that Paul ever made was the statement he made in the journey from the East to the West recounted in Acts chapter 27 and while the storm was going on, remember in verse 25 of chapter 27, we read that Luke saying, “Fear not, Paul. Thou must be brought before Caesar and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.”

These were the angel's words to the Apostle. “Wherefore, sirs,” Paul is recounting the words that came to him, “Wherefore sirs, be of good cheer for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me.” What a magnificent statement that is! “I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me,” and I think if you could all learn that simple lesson, if we could by the grace of God carry it out, most of the difficulties and trials and problems of our Christian lives would be solved. He didn’t need a theological education. He simply needed to respond in faith to the word that was spoken to him by the sovereign, omnipotent God.

But what does he do? Well, he fills the air with excuses. God's promises are ringing in his ears, but he fills the air with his excuses because he did not believe God. Of course, it could be worse. Moses does respond with a sense of humility. It is unfortunate that he is too humble but nevertheless he does not respond like this, “Gotcha Lord, leave it all to me. It's as good as done.” Now, that would bring him into difficulty as well. So, maybe we should be thankful that he didn’t overdo his confidence in his humanity and rather manifested lack of confidence in his humanity and did not believe

God as he should have. Actually, where we should be is in the center of that, knowing what man is, but knowing what God is too.

Now, the Lord is going to answer Moses. In spite of his disobedience here, He is going to give to give him some signs and He recognizes no doubt that these are some of the frailties that His servant has and He will minister to Moses and build him up in order to carry out the work for which God has commissioned him. So now let's look at verses 1 through 9 where we have the deliverer, Moses is the deliverer, the deliverer's credentials.

“And Moses answered and said, ‘But behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice; for they will say, the Lord hath not appeared unto thee.’ And the Lord said unto him, ‘What is that in thine hand?’ And he said, ‘A rod.’ And he said, ‘Cast it on the ground.’ And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses fled from before it. (That's a good sense of humor in the word of God. I can see Moses throwing that rod down and then looking to see that serpent there, evidently a very poisonous serpent. You see him jumping rather sprightly away from it and standing off at the side.) And then the Lord said unto Moses, ‘Put forth your hand, and take it by the tail.’ (And Moses, I know he did this very gingerly. He went around and he finally got the tail of that snake and he took the snake and he caught it and he was startled. It was the rod again.) ‘That they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee.’ And the Lord said furthermore unto him, ‘Put now thine hand into thy bosom.’ And he put his hand into his bosom: and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous as snow. And he said, ‘Put thine hand into thy bosom again’ and he put his hand into his bosom again and plucked it out of his bosom, and behold, it was turned again as his other flesh. ‘And it shall come to pass if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe also these two signs, neither hearken unto thy voice, that thou shalt take

of the water of the river and pour it upon the dry land, and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry land."

Now I'd like for you to notice that the terms that are used here are the terms or term, "sign." So this was not simply a wonder. It was not simply a mighty miracle, but these things have very great spiritual significance and they were to look behind them and see with whom they are dealing. Egypt was the land of magic arts. In Egypt they practice necromancy, magic. All over the ancient world they were known for that and furthermore, in their worship, serpents played a big part. The Talmud, the Jewish volumes, say this about Egypt, "Ten measures of sorcery descended into the world. Egypt received nine and the rest of the world, one." In fact, we got the term gypsy and gypsies are often associated with that kind of thing from Egypt. So, Egypt was the land of the spiritualizing miracles and so when Moses goes there, he is given these signs in order to accredit him as the messenger of Yahweh to compel attention and they were to be proofs of the power of Yahweh. They are for Moses, they are for the people of Israel, and they are for the Egyptians.

The first sign, the sign of the rod, is very significant because Moses was a shepherd so probably the rod was a simple shepherd's rod. The rod was a symbol of Moses and the symbol also I think of the fact that God can do something with the simple, and the rod was certainly a very simple little instrument to have. The second sign is even more impressive. What it means? It's difficult to say. It may mean that the servant of the Lord is to be clean and the idea of leprosy, because it was identified with sin, may have been identified with that. The third sign is a sign that will later be performed by Moses and as you know the Nile River will be turned to blood.

Now, the deliverer's prophet follows and in verse 10 after this what would you expect Moses to say, after all of this. Well he doesn't not really say what you would expect him to say because we read in verse 10, "and Moses said to the Lord, 'Oh my Lord,

I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since Thou hast spoken unto Thy servant; but I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue." The angel has a long struggle with Moses who is going to be the deliverer. They are still standing around the bush so far as the account goes. It is unfortunate in one sense that we have the division of chapters here because the interview is still taking place and it will not finish until verse 17.

So, he has had this mighty miracle of the burning bush, which was not consumed and now he has had the signs, two of them played out before him and he still is talking about his own frailties. So, it's a long struggle with the angel and the unbroken dialogue interrupted by Moses' expostulations and remonstrances gives us a picture of human nature refusing really to respond to the greatness of the Lord and His word. Think of Isaiah who said when they said, the three persons, "Who will go for us? Here am I Lord, send me." What a difference between the two!

Now, Moses' remonstrance in verse 10 is expressed as "I am not eloquent, neither heretofore nor since Thou hast spoken unto Thy servant but I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue." In the Hebrew, the construction here and in one of the later verses is a construction that suggests that he said something like 'please' or in other words, he is beginning to sense that maybe his response to the Lord does not make real good intelligent sense. And so he says, "Please or pardon me, but I am not eloquent, neither heretofore nor since Thou hast spoken unto Thy servant. I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue." His self-will, which he had manifested in the killing of the Egyptian before he went out to spend his 40 years in the back parts of the desert, has been lost. And so, he has been out there. He has been content to have been forgotten.

He had been a great man in Egypt. Forty years later now, nobody in Egypt knows who Moses is and Moses is very happy with that because evidently the change that has come over him as he reflected on his past out dealing with those sheep changed his whole character. But now, it is the other way. He is too much of a person who does not really have confidence in himself when the Lord gives him these magnificent promises.

So God replies in verse 11 and 12, "Who hath made man's mouth? Or who maketh the dumb or deaf, or the seeing or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach you what thou shalt say." There is a marvelous passage over in the Psalms that bears on this point. In Psalm 94 and verse 9 and there we read, "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?" So, "Moses, how you can possibly say and make sense to the Lord God, I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue. Who made your mouth? Who makes the dumb or the deaf or the seeing or the blind? Am I not the Lord? Am I not the one who does all of this?"

Now, this is really an implicit criticism of God for someone to say what Moses said, of course. "I am not eloquent. I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue." When the Lord has said, "Moses, you are the deliverer," he's really complaining that the Lord has made a very bad choice, a very bad decision to choose him. We sometimes forget that and when the Lord speaks to us with regard to his guidance and direction and then we think like Moses, 'Well, I am not really the one to do that; that's for brother so and so or sister so and so to do it,' when the Lord has really given us a pretty strong indication that something we ought to do, it's really a criticism of the Lord, in the final analysis. That's what it was in this case. He was implicitly critical of God's choice. So I am not surprised that the Lord, in a moment, would get a little angry with Moses, but first of all, he answers, "Who made man's mouth? Who makes his ears? Who enables him to see? Am I the Lord, not the one?" So Moses replies in verse 13 and he said, "O' my Lord, send I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thy wilt send." Notice he doesn't say that, "Here am I, send me," but he says, "OK, Lord, send whom you want to send." Did he yield a bit? Some think that this is probably a little bit of a yielding on Moses' part. If so, it is still reluctant. It is something like, "Send me if there is no other alternative Lord" or, "May God have his way, but must it be me?"

In fact, one of the commentators, a very good commentator, says, "Really what he means is send someone but send someone else, anyone else; don't send me." "O my

Lord, send I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thy wilt send.” Send somebody but he doesn’t say he is going to do it. So, God now is a little angry with Moses and we read, “And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, "Is not Aaron, the Levite, thy brother?" I know that he can speak well and also behold he cometh forth to meet thee and when he seeth thee he will be glad in his heart."

He is already working in the heart of Aaron who, by the way, is in Egypt so far as we know. Moses has been gone for a long time. Aaron is back at home at Egypt, but God is already moving his heart and later on in this chapter and at the end of it they will meet after a long time. So, he says: "Aaron is your brother. I know he can speak well. He comes forth to meet you and when he seeth thee he will be glad in his heart and I shall speak unto him and put words in his mouth and I will be with thy mouth and with his mouth and will teach you what you shall do. And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people and even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth and thou shall be to him instead of God. And thou shall take this rod in thine hand wherewith thou shalt do signs." So, “Moses if you refuse to speak for me, Aaron's on his way and Aaron can speak and we will have Aaron be your mouth but you will be Aaron's God.”

Later on in chapter 7, verse 1, we learn the nature of a true prophet by these comments because in the seventh chapter, in the first verse, we read, “And the Lord said unto Moses, See I have made thee a God to Pharaoh and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. So, a prophet is a person who takes the things of God and brings them to men. And Moses stands as God to Aaron and Aaron is as the mouth of God to the people. Now, what has happened really?

Well, God is going to do his work and evidently Moses was given the option of being the one who would speak the words of deliverance that God would speak. And now because he has refused, because he has complained, because he has made all of these excuses, finally Moses loses the honor and the joy of the sole leadership of the

children of Israel. Aaron is going to be his mouthpiece now and as a result of it, Moses loses some of the reward that we might think would normally have been his.

It is a beautiful illustration of the fact that when we refuse to do what the Lord God seems to suggest we should do, God's hand is not shortened to do what he intends to do. He will do what he intends to do, but he may bypass you and use someone else. And in Moses' case that was true. Dean Stanley commented upon this, comments that the Egyptians who didn't not know the facts of all of this, the Egyptians must have thought since Aaron was the one who spoke to them that he was really the true leader of the Israelites. They may never have realized that it was Moses who was the deliverer of the children of Israel because Aaron was the mouthpiece who spoke. So, in that sense Moses lost by refusing, and if we refuse our powers, they atrophy. If we lose our opportunities, they depart.

We can be too humble minded and in this case, Moses' words suggest that. “I am not eloquent. I am slow of speech.” “All right, Moses if you won't allow me to work a miracle with your mouth and do with you what you cannot do naturally then someone else will do it and you will lose the reward that might have been yours.” I think of those words that are spoken in 2 Corinthians chapter 2 and chapter 3, where the apostle unfolding the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ and speaking of the fact that the word of God divides people into two categories, and then the apostle speaking of the ministry of the apostles and the solemn responsibility of preaching the word that divides people into two categories says, "And who is sufficient for these things?"

And then in the very next chapter, in chapter 3, verse 5 of 2 Corinthians the apostle, as the context moves on, answers his own question by saying, "Our sufficiency is of God." We are never sufficient for doing the work of God. We are never sufficient for obedience. We are never sufficient for any task. All the tasks are on a local church, all the tasks that involve your Christian life, all of the part that you play in the magnificent program of God, you are not sufficient for. You are never sufficient for the things of the

Lord. Our sufficiency is of the Lord. And it is through Him that all of the things that please Him are done. Let us never forget that.

Now then, in verse 18 through verse 27, Moses continues the account and we read, “And Moses went and returned to Jethro, his father-in-law and said unto him, “Let me go out pray thee and return unto my brethren which are in Egypt and see whether they be yet alive.” And Jethro said to Moses, “Go in peace.”

Now this last section of the account that we are looking at tonight might be entitled “From the Mountain through Midian to Pharaoh,” because Moses is still out on the mountain now and the conversation has ended and he is going back to Midian where his father-in-law Jethro is because he has to hand over the flocks to Jethro. He is the shepherd of his father-in-law and he does not leave the flocks out on the hills. He may be miles from Midian, but he has to take them back to Jethro, his father. That's what is meant by Moses went and returned to Jethro, his father-in-law. I wonder as Moses was going back because it must have taken him hours and hours, perhaps days and days. How far away he was from Midian we don't know. I am not sure what time of the year. I have not really looked into this to try to figure what time of the year it was.

Certain times of the year would mean that he would be miles away from his father-in-law with the flock seeking a kind of pasturage that the flock would need. I wonder as he went back, was he thinking about the things that God was going to do with him. I think he must have been. I think he must have reflected over this great experience that he had had at the burning bush and then of the conversation with the Lord God, think of the marvelous privilege of that, and then I am sure he must have been thinking about the way he had so foolishly replied to the Lord.

In fact, Stephen makes something over this when in his sermon in the Book of Acts, he says, “This Moses whom they refused saying, who made thee a ruler and a judge, the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.” And so, Stephen, reflecting upon it, thinks of the angel

who appeared to him as being the power behind Moses. So, I would imagine that Moses reflected a great deal on what he had heard and that this was a time in which the words of God began to really to take force in Moses' life.

You know the Scriptures tell us that faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God. I believe that Moses must have reflected a great deal on his experience and thought about those magnificent promises that were given to him and thought also about his failures. And he thought also particularly about how God's hand was going to be with him in the deliverance of the children of Israel. I imagine he must have worried, “can you really resurrect a nation? Can you really restore a nation?” Think of what that must have meant to him. Think of what it might mean to you if you should have an experience like this and the Lord should say to you, "You will be my instrumentality for bringing America back to the truth of the word of God." That would be tremendous commission. Would it not? An overpowering kind of commission.

I am afraid I might reply like Moses, “I don’t think I am qualified for a task like that. Give it to somebody else who can do the thing in a proper way.” Moses must have thought a lot about that, and I am sure that it came home him ultimately how, as we shall see Moses as a person who has to learn the things of the Lord like anyone else but he was a man who was strengthened through the word of God and, through his experiences, grew in the knowledge of the word of God.

You know, there is a beautiful statue in Trinity Churchyard in Boston, which reflects the relationship of the servant of the Lord in the presence of the Lord or as a minister of the Lord. Maybe you have seen it. Maybe you have been to Boston and you have seen this. I have seen it, many years ago. It is a statue of Phillips Brooks who, in the last two years of his life, was appointed a bishop in the Episcopal Church but for about 22 years he preached in Boston and preached the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The statue is a statue of Mr. Brooks. He has his hand raised like this and then the pulpit is here and he has his left hand upon the Bible, the word of God. And then in the

background is the cross. So, it is the picture of a man who is proclaiming the cross and proclaiming it in the light of the word of God. And then standing to the left of Mr. Brooks is the figure of our Lord Jesus Christ, and obviously, the artist, the sculptor has sought to present him as the ascended and glorified Lord, and he has his right hand upon the left shoulder of Mr. Brooks. And so, he is proclaiming the word of God and the cross and the Lord Jesus standing behind him with His hand upon the shoulder empowering him and enabling him in the effective ministry of the Word of God. So, Moses is told by the Lord God, by the angel of the covenant that he was going to be with him, "I will be with you," and he will minister through Moses, this man who has demonstrated that he is only a man.

So anyway Moses goes back to Midian. He turns over the flock to Jethro, his father-in-law. You know that's very interesting, isn't it? It's very interesting that Moses now is a man of about 80 years of age and he still acts as if he is under the authority of his father-in-law. It is not wrong to be under authority. That is one of the great lessons we have to learn. In this same book, later on, we read that, "His master had given him a wife" and he was given Zipporah as his wife, "and she had borne him sons or daughters. The wife and her children shall be her masters and he shall go out by himself." So there is a sense in which Moses recognizes the authority of his father-in-law; he is living and working under him. I like that sense of recognition of the authority of the older man.

In verse 19, the Lord again appears to Moses and gives him further revelation. And the Lord said unto Moses in Midian, "Go and return unto Egypt for all the men are dead which sought thy life." And Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on an ass and he returned to the land of Egypt. Then Moses took the rod of God in his hand. Think of this now, from Midian to the motel because he is going to stop in a moment, at a caravansary. Think of the person whom God is going to use to deliver the children of Israel out of the hands of one of the greatest powers on the face of the earth at this time, the Pharaoh of Egypt.

One ass, that is not Moses, that's the animal, a wife, two sons, we have not read of the second son yet in the book of Exodus. Gershom was the first and Eleazar is the second son. He will be mentioned later on. So one ass, a wife, two children, and a lone man with a .22, [Johnson laughs] No, not a .45, but with a rod in his hand, that's all. Now would you think that this is the kind of person who is going to deliver the children of Israel who now have grown to be a large number of people, some have suggested that there were as many as two million people, or going to take them out of the hands of Pharaoh, the King of Egypt? He is going to go down to Egypt. He is going to duel with one of the world's most powerful men.

How would you like to face Mr. Chernenko and Gromyko with this kind of artillery? Well, if the Lord God was behind it that would be sufficient. And the Lord God is behind Moses. Now listen to what follows. We read in verse 21, “And the Lord said unto Moses, "When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I put in thy hand, but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.”

Now, later on, we will talk a little more about what this means, but as you know Paul the Apostle, was a student of this section because this is one of the things that he cites in Romans chapter 9 and makes a great deal over; that God has the power to be merciful upon whom he will be merciful and he has the power to harden whom he will harden. And you will notice that it is God who says, “I will harden his heart.”

Now we have a relevant parallel in chapter 3 and verse 19 in which the Lord speaking to Moses said, “Now I am sure that the King of Egypt will not let you go, no not by a mighty hand,” but now he explains why he will not let them go. “I will harden his heart.” So this is just simply a proof of God's absolute omnipotence and his authority to do what he wills to do. If you find it difficult, it's not surprising. Moses found it difficult to think that he would be the instrumentality of the deliverance of the Nation Israel. I am

not eloquent. I can't do that. They won't pay any attention to me. They won't believe me when I say that the Lord has appeared to me. All those excuses.

Actually, about seven of them Moses gives through this section if we go on and take a couple that he offers in chapters 5 and 6. "So, I will harden his heart" in verse 22 and thou shall say unto Pharaoh "Thus sayeth the Lord Israel is my son, even my first born." In chapter 3 in verse 7, we read: And the Lord said "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters for I know their sorrows." Israel is a people of God. They are the elected people of God. Moses will later give full exposition of what that means, in Deuteronomy 7 and passages like that. They are his elective people and so they are his son. They are his first-born. This is the basis of the text in Hosea chapter 11 in verse 1 where the prophet says "Out of Egypt have I called my son," and that is the text that is cited by Matthew in Matthew chapter 2, so it is an important beginning of a line of teaching that Israel is as a nation the son of God. They are his elect people.

And further he continues in verse 23, "And I say unto Thee, let and ask." You see Moses is giving what God is telling him to say to Pharaoh. So this is what you say to Pharaoh and say it, "And I say unto thee, let my son go that he may serve me and if thou refuse to let him go, behold I will slay thy son even thy first born." So Moses is going to stand before Pharaoh and he is going to say, Israel, the Lord God says Israel is his son, his first born and if you do not let them go, he will slay your son, your firstborn.

As it turns out, this is representative language. And just as Israel is collectively the Lord's son and his first born so on the night of the Passover, the first born in all the families of Egypt will be slain because he is again speaking representatively. Pharaoh has a son too and a first-born. It is the nation of Egypt. Ancient students of law would know this. This is the *lex talionis*. That is, it is the law that demands that the very same thing that a person does is done to them. *Talis* is the Latin word that means "like." So the *lex talionis* is the law of like judgment or like punishment, that is, whatever you do shall be

done to you. So if you do not let my son go, I will slay your son. The Lord is certainly not a namby pamby Santa Claus kind of God, is He?

And now from the motel to the meeting with Aaron and here one of the strange things happens. In fact, it is a thing I cannot fully explain to you. Since Moses is too humble, I will at least be a little humble. In verse 24 to verse 27, we read, “And it came to pass by the way of the inn (that is the motel) that the Lord met him and sought to kill him.” It’s a curious a story: Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son. Evidently Eleazar is the youngest son, that is a speculation, and cast it at his feet and said “Surely, a bloody husband art thou to me.” So, he, that is, God, let him go. Then, she said a bloody husband thou art because of the circumcision. Very curious, isn’t it?

Now remember this, that the Abrahamic Covenant was a covenant in which God made certain promises to Abraham, such as I will make your name great, I am going to give you a land, in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed and your seed shall inherit this land. Now these are magnificent promises and those promises are the promises that make up the Abrahamic Covenant. Later on, there are expansions, the Davidic covenant being an expansion. The New Covenant is an expansion of the Abrahamic covenant, all the redemptive promises ultimately related to those promises made to Abraham.

Now in the seventeenth chapter in the Book of Genesis, the sign of circumcision was instituted and all the males in the nation were to be circumcised. That was a sign, an outward sign of an ideally inward righteousness. So Paul explains in Romans chapter 4 that they have responded to the word of God given to Abraham. In other words, they were a part of the covenantal family with the covenantal blessings.

Now that was an important thing. It was something God said to them that every one of their male children should be circumcised and furthermore, they were warned that if they were not circumcised they would be cut off from the people. It was not the way

they were justified but it was the sign of their partaking of the covenantal relationship. So this curious story shows that covenantal disobedience cannot be tolerated in a chosen servant. Evidently, Moses had not carried out the requirement that Eleazar be circumcised and so God was going to put to death His servant that he had commissioned to do his work because he was disobedient in carrying out the ordinance of circumcision.

In other words, God thinks very strongly about his ordinances. I am not going to stop and make the application to baptism, but I think it is a legitimate application. There are individuals who like to say that they have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and they are saved, and yes that can transpire, but they do not feel any necessity to be baptized in water even though the Scripture very plainly that we are to be baptized in water. The attitude of an individual who says: "I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and I know the Scriptures say that we should be baptized in water, but I do not think it is very important." That attitude is the kind of attitude of a person that one would think makes it very difficult for God to use that person in Christian service. This story is a curious story. I may not understand it all and you may come and point out some things in it that I do not understand, but this was a sharp attack by the Lord God on his own servant.

Now what it was I do not know. Some like to say that he got sick that night, some virus or something. Well, the text does not really say it. It sounds as if it's something worse than that and Zipporah was afraid she was going to lose her husband and she recognized what the problem was and so she took that flint and she circumcised her child and the blood flowed and evidently Zipporah was an individual who had possibly resisted the circumcision of her own child because after all she was not of the children of Israel. So, she may have thought that that is a bloody practice and why does it have to be done. Nevertheless, though she recognized somehow or other that God was attacking Moses and he was in danger of death, like Jacob when he wrestled with the angel, and she cut the foreskin off, she threw it at the feet, whether it was at the feet of the child or at Moses, the text does not make plain. And she said surely a bloody

husband art thou to me. So, he the Lord let Moses go, and she said a bloody husband art thou because of the circumcision. So, she may have been the stumbling block.

What makes me think there may be something to this and again I say, may and underline, is because Moses sent her home. And in fact, she went home with the children and lived with Jethro, her father. And in the eighteenth chapter of the Book of Exodus, she and the children rejoined Moses after they have come out of the land of Egypt. On the other hand, if you are nice and sweet, you might say, "Well he didn't want to bother Zipporah and the children with the problems he was going to face in Egypt, so he sent them home for the protection of their home." I cannot answer that. One cannot answer questions like that. They are not set out in the word of God. But evidently, this was a very serious thing in so far as the Lord God was concerned.

The writer of the Epistle of the Hebrews makes a comment in the twelfth chapter that may bear on this. He says in the twelfth chapter, the first verse, "Wherefore seeing also we are encompassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." God will do his work through servants that are clean, servants that comply with his word.

One of the commentators that I like has said this and I will close with this quotation. "The scientific man intent on unraveling the secrets of nature and utilizing her powers knows by experience the necessity of minute obedience and absolute devotions to her least demands, and it is equally imperative for all who would serve God, you must live up to the furthest limit of your light. There must be no conscious defalcation from the standard of your high calling. Any secret rift will make the music mute. We must not confer with flesh and blood and we must not be disobedient of the heavenly vision. The story of Moses shows that God would rather have us die than take up his work with unconsecrated hearts and unsundered wills. It is the person who complies with the word of God who is used by the Lord God."

May God help us to treasure obedience to the truth of Scripture. Really, our problems come down to a very simple little thing, response to the word of God. May God give us the responsiveness of obedience. Let us bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for these lessons that we learned from the preparation of Moses as God's deliverer of his people. Lord, give us obedience. We know how often the New Testament, how our Lord himself emphasized the point that the one who loves me is the one keeps my commandments.

Enable us O God to do that and give us courage to do Thy will in spite of what we perceive to be our own personal shortcomings. Help us to remember that Thou art the omnipotent sovereign God and in having Thee we have all power and all wisdom and all might. We pray that Thou would use us this week for thy glory.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.