

How Deep the Father's Love for Us

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[0:00] Great. Please open your Bible with me then. We're looking at Exodus, the end of chapter 4 this morning. It's found on page 47 of the Blue Church Bible.

! So we're picking up at verse 18 and reading to the end of chapter 4. Exodus chapter 4 from verse 18.

Page 47. 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 put them on a donkey and went back to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the staff of God in his hand.

[1:04] And the Lord said to Moses, When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I 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 ye, 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.

[2:15] And Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which he had sent him to speak and all the signs that he 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 reflection, they bowed their heads and worshipped.

Amen. Amen. Let's do that briefly before we come to the word. Father, we thank you for your living word. And we thank you, Lord, that it is all breathed out by you and profitable for us.

And so we pray, Lord, that you would feed us, help us to learn from it, teach us, we pray. And above all, lead us to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of your every promise, the yes and amen.

[3:19] And so we pray in his name. Amen. I wonder, what do you do when there's something you need to do and you don't want to do it?

Maybe for some of us, it's a good old tantrum, crying, screaming, door slamming. However, I suspect for most of us, though we might feel like doing that sometimes, we express our desires in more grown-up-looking behavior.

So perhaps to me, it's bargaining. Last Sunday in our house, when the tantrum didn't work, the bargaining began. I'll only come on a walk if it's a short one.

Procrastination is another favorite, isn't it? Suddenly you discover a passion for housework. Or you remember that friend that you haven't called for five years, and you find yourself too busy to get onto that other thing.

Or maybe you go full on ostrich. Right? Head, sand, done. Out of sight, out of mind. If I ignore it, it doesn't exist.

[4 : 33] Last time in Exodus, we saw there's something that Moses needs to do, but he does not want to do it. God said to him, 3 verse 10, Come, I will send you to Pharaoh, that you might bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.

God's planned the greatest rescue the world has ever seen, to break his children out of slavery and bring them home to himself. And he's sending Moses to go and do it.

Moses then spent some time trying to bargain with God, but finds that doesn't work. And so we ended last time with a tantrum. Moses saying simply, Oh my Lord, please send someone else.

And it's then that we read, 4 verse 14, The anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses. God's Savior refuses to save, and God is angry.

And our passage this morning picks right up from that point. It's easy to imagine, as I did, that because Moses got home to get his family and hit the road, that he's now fully convinced.

[5 : 50] However, we're not actually told what Moses thought when he got home that day. And the closer we look at the rest of chapter 4, the more, I think, we see that having tried bargaining and tantruming, he is now on to procrastinating and ignoring.

One clue is that halfway through our passage, the Lord tries to kill him. We'll circle back to that. But the Lord is clearly still angry with Moses.

In fact, even angrier. Which suggests that despite getting on the road, not much has changed in Moses' heart. But in seeing what Moses does, we're going to see far more importantly what God does when he wants to save.

In short, out of Moses or God, who wants it more? Just how committed is God to the redeeming of his people? How far will God go to see his rescue plan carried out, his people saved and safely home?

Now, this is a rollercoaster of a passage. Perhaps, as you noticed, as it was read, not all of it is that clear. However, however, if you take nothing else away this morning, take this home with ye.

[7 : 17] that God is 100% committed to carrying out his rescue, even in the face of our stubbornness and sin.

He will never give us up or back down, and therefore we should trust in him and praise him for his sure and certain salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I think we see that in four main ways through our passage, beginning firstly with this. We can trust in and praise the Lord because of his patient persistence.

At first glance, it does seem as if Moses is getting on with God's plan, verse 18. 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're still alive.

That sounds really good, but hang on a minute. Why is Moses asking for Jethro's permission to do what God has commanded him to do?

[8 : 24] This is God. I am who I am. The Lord's purposes do not depend on Moses' in-laws and what they think.

God is entirely in control. He is in need of no one. What he says is what happens. Notice that Moses doesn't even drop into conversation that the Lord told him to go.

That's a fairly persuasive point, isn't it? And also, what is he asking for? Just kind of a visit, right? Just want to check in, see how they are.

All of this suggests a fairly casual request. You know, whatever you think, Jethro, there's nothing really riding on it. Apart from the eternal God's plan to rescue his people through me, look what I can do with a stick, by the way, none of that, is there?

It sounds very much like Moses is hoping his father-in-law will say, well, to be honest, Moses, we really need you here to keep looking after the sheep. Oh, Lord, sorry.

[9 : 32] Family comes first. I can't go and rescue your people after all. But God is God, and so, verse 18, Jethro said to Moses, go in peace. No problem, Moses.

Huh. Moses is running very low on excuses now, and God whips his last one away in the next verse. The Lord said to Moses in Midian, go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.

Moses had hoped that the Lord was tied down to that bush. He'd be pretty disappointed, because now he says to him again, in the comfort of his own home, go back to Egypt.

Remember, last time Moses was in Egypt, something bad happened, and Pharaoh put a price on his head. But now the Lord tells him, the wanted posters have come down.

You can go back. Get back. And so, finally, Moses took his wife and his sons, put them on a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt.

[10 : 41] Four times in these three verses, and again in verse 21, we get the phrase, go back or went back. These verses are about God peeling a reluctant Moses away from home and getting him going.

Moses is procrastinating. God is patiently pursuing. That phrase, go back, is also in Hebrew the word for repent, to turn around and go in the other direction.

Moses needed to do that both physically, do a U-turn where possible, and spiritually, to repent of his unwillingness to be the savior God sent him to be.

Given how much that angered God, just how patient is he with Moses here? Notice that even in his anger, the Lord is not quick to give up or condemn, but he gently, tenderly nudges Moses back towards his will.

God, I am who I am, does not have to reason with anyone. He's God. But like the very best of fathers, he brings himself down to Moses' level to persuade him to be obedient, even though he's testing his patience.

[12 : 06] brothers and sisters, I wonder, have you ever experienced the Lord's loving correction in that way? None of us like to be told that we're wrong, but the Bible says that the Lord disciplines those who he loves and corrects every child that he receives.

I wonder, can you thank him today that this is a God that pursues you in your toddler-like rebellion and patiently, gently turns you back to himself and into his will?

Do you praise him from the bottom of your heart for never giving up on you, though we give him reason to every single day? How wonderful that he loves us too much to leave us where we are.

And zooming out, how much more wonderful that he wouldn't let his deliverer drag his feet but was so committed to his people's salvation that he got him going on his way to their rescue.

Friends, the Lord Jesus was not slow to come down to save us. He did not procrastinate on his way to the cross. He did not come up with reasons not to go through with the Father's plan.

- [13:25] but willingly obeyed his Father even to the point of death and death on the cross. He cannot be restrained from coming to our rescue.

Therefore, trust in him. Praise him. Brothers and sisters, here is a God who patiently persists with us in our stubbornness and he patiently persists with his great salvation plan.

Secondly, we can trust in and praise God for his powerful compulsion. So, on the way, the Lord tells Moses a bit more of the plan and this is where it begins to get a bit more complicated and a lot more serious.

Verse 21, the Lord said to Moses, when you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles I've 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.

- [14:43] God had given Moses an overview of the plan before. Tell Pharaoh, let my people go but he will not let them go unless compelled by a mighty hand.

But now Moses is told two key details that he wasn't before. Firstly, that part of the reason why God will not let the people go is because God will harden his heart so that he doesn't.

this is the first time we're going to come across this. We'll come across it again in Exodus and it's worth saying up front that this is profoundly mysterious.

God's will is often a glorious mystery to us. Paul picks up on God hardening Pharaoh's heart in Romans in a section which ends with a famous exclamation, O the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable are his judgments how inscrutable his ways for who has known the mind of the Lord and who has been his counselor.

We can't begin to get our heads around everything that God is doing. We can often only stand in awe of what he's doing. We'll have more opportunities as we go on to unpack that but for now just notice what this means.

- [16:09] The Lord is not interested in a quick and easy rescue. It won't be a simple grab and go. It'll be ten grueling rounds in the ring.

In one corner the unstoppable force of God himself. In the other corner an immovable object Pharaoh's heart. Why would God make it such a tough battle?

If his objective is simply to free his people from slavery it doesn't make sense to string it out for so long. This hardening should prompt us to ask what is God's ultimate goal?

What is he working towards? He does tell us but not yet. So tuck that question in your back pocket read on this week and keep tuning in to Exodus.

The other key thing God reveals newly here is that to him this is really a battle between fathers over their firstborn sons.

- [17:16] Israel is my firstborn son. Let my son go. The consequence for Pharaoh of not freeing God's son is unthinkable but the point is it is proportional.

if you refuse to let my firstborn son go I will kill your firstborn son. It's a chilling threat but if we think it's going too far we haven't yet understood what the Exodus is about to God.

We often fall back on a vision of the Exodus which is only about freeing slaves which is great and it's true. But now imagine that you have a child who's been kidnapped and held hostage.

They have been trafficked to another country where they are forced into slavery for decades of their life. When they have children of their own they are taken away and killed by the slave masters.

From far away you see your child suffering and hear their cries for help. what would you not do to bring your child home?

[18 : 29] That's a bit of a different thing isn't it from freeing a nation from slavery. Both are true here but God says this is not about political liberation it's about his fearsome fatherly love for his son.

He will stop at nothing to bring him home even if Pharaoh's son has to die for him to do it. Now those two things slightly scare you.

You wouldn't be alone. The scale of the battle the fearsome jealousy of God over his people hearing that makes Moses quite literally stop in his tracks.

Now the next bit is confusing so ride the waves with me. nobody knows quite what bridegroom of blood means or what it has to do with circumcision or what the circumcision has to do with Moses near-death experience.

So if you ask me later how's your week been that's the answer. But enough is clear that we can get the gist that it will take God's powerful compulsion not only for Pharaoh to free his people but for Moses to free them.

[19 : 51] The first hint of that I think is it happens at a lodging place on the way. That word lodge can mean an overnight stay which would be reasonable it's a long trip it can also mean a longer stay.

So perhaps Moses has stalled on his return his repentance is incomplete his turning has not gone all the way back yet. However the key bit of information is that in Hebrew this is the same word that can also mean grumble and we are going to hear an awful lot of grumbling later on in this book and we are going to hear it in the wilderness.

In fact almost every time that we get the word grumble in the Old Testament it's in Exodus or Numbers as the people wonder about where Moses is now. So it's a very significant word to find here it's a symptom of spiritual hardness and it angers God.

In fact it's why the entire Exodus generation is later sentenced to death in the wilderness because they grumbled about God's rescue plan. Now perhaps you've heard the reason that's usually given for the reason why God is angry with Moses that he hadn't circumcised his sons.

Now to be fair that's quite an intuitive thing to see because once his son is circumcised the Lord leaves him alone. However just to speak to that for a minute nowhere else in Exodus is circumcision a big deal.

[21 : 27] Actually the children of the Exodus generation are not circumcised in the wilderness until they get into the promised land and that's not an issue. It's actually their fathers the Exodus generation that don't make it into promised land who were circumcised because they grumbled about God's rescue plan.

But you know we don't even have to go that far to find a reason why God might have been angry with Moses because we're told only a few verses earlier the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses. Why? Because he grumbled about God's rescue plan.

And the Lord thinks that is very serious indeed. A sin deserving death. Remember what the Lord has just said before this in verse 23.

If Pharaoh refuses to set his son free his son will be forfeit. But what about if Moses refuses to set God's son free? It's the blood of his son which is spilled.

which suggests that God is dealing with Moses as he said he would deal with Pharaoh. There is a price to pay for standing in the way of God's rescue and it is death.

- [22 : 45] He is the unstoppable force that cuts through immovable objects be they Pharaoh or Moses. It's also quite common to hear well God wasn't really going to kill Moses it was just a test.

But remember who it is so far in Exodus who stepped in time and time again to save the deliverer from death Shifra and Pua Jochebed Miriam the princess now Zipporah women saving the savior seed.

It wasn't Zipporah's place to circumcise their son. She does it to spare! Moses life. I think we're meant to see that but for the blood of the covenant this bridegroom blood Moses would be dead.

And what does she touch with the blood of her son Moses feet the part of him that represents what God is angry with and needs atoned for his refusal to go.

Now that doesn't nearly clear up everything about this passage but the point I think is clear enough friends Moses is stubborn but God is much more stubborn when it comes to our salvation he will not be held up he will not be talked down he will not be forced into stopping short even by Moses if his chosen savior is going to act like Pharaoh he will suffer like Pharaoh because nothing in heaven or earth in Egypt or in Israel in stubborn prophets or hard hearted kings in my life or your life your heart or my heart can separate us from the love of God through Christ Jesus our Lord what dad would give up trying to bring his hostage son home God is showing us here that he is infinitely more committed to the salvation of his family than even the most devoted father on earth to rescuing his first born son

- [25 : 03] I wonder as you sit here this morning do you believe that do you really believe that in your heart of hearts maybe right now maybe at point in the past you have been stuck on the way you have hit a road bump in your faith and you have stalled or you are limping on in doubt what is God doing in my life what is he doing in the world his plan his promises!

I'm not panning out in the way that I thought where is the promise of his coming has he given up on me on us does he remember his covenant friends if God would kill Moses for getting in the way of his rescue what wouldn't he do to bring you out of darkness and all the way home God would give up his own son to die in his place and ours what is it that stops all God's people suffering the same fate as Pharaoh covenant blood the blood of the lamb in their place smeared on the doorposts of the house we've seen already that Moses kind of lives the exodus in miniature before he draws all

God's people back through the experience of his own life to the Lord so this is part of the pattern being set in Moses for the threads that are about to be woven in the exodus for the tapestry that is in Christ the covenant blood of the circumcision points forward to the covenant blood of the Passover lamb points forward to the covenant blood smeared on the frame of the cross so that God's anger with us and with our stubbornness our saying no to him our doubt and unbelief that he really will and wants to save us that he's committed to us might fall not on us but on the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world his son our savior Jesus Moses near death experience and blood soaked rescue remind us how committed

God is to our salvation because they remind us that while Moses and his son live God did not stop short of putting his own son to death for their and our failure to trust his rescue and he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also with him give us all things he will bring us home to himself however high the cost because he has already paid it in full on the cross friends trust in him praise him for his powerful compulsion to save us thirdly and more briefly trust in him and praise him for his perfect prophet in 3 verse 14 the Lord said Aaron was going to make up for Moses unwillingness to be sent to the rescue and indeed here he comes in verse 27 the

Lord said to Aaron go into the wilderness to meet Moses so he went and met him at the mountain of God see how Aaron acts as a counterpoint to Moses it took Moses two chapters just to get halfway it takes Aaron eight words to get where God wants him to go bearing in mind that isn't this an interesting contrast Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which he sent him to speak and all the signs he commanded him to do verse 28 and verse 30 Aaron spoke all the words the Lord had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people Aaron has never seen God Aaron has not heard God's voice but he obeys instantly when Moses tells him what God told him and shows him what God showed him just in passing it's a reminder isn't it that miraculous encounters are not what convinces us to turn and start walking in

[29 : 54] God's way you know I think people think that this is how people become Christians that they have a dream they hear a word they have an encounter It's miraculous it's special it's spectacular friends no one saw more than Moses but he's completely outshone by Aaron's faith and obedience we believe not on the basis of extraordinary experiences like Moses had but like Aaron on the basis of God's message through his messenger the good news announced by Moses God has come down to save by the Lord Jesus the kingdom of God is at hand repent and believe in the gospel but does this all come off a little bit not as good on Moses doesn't it remember it's Moses who he comes out of it really badly what is he saying as much as I'm the rescuer it was never about me just look at me how

I doubted how I sinned whatever I am the Lord has made me in so far as I was like Christ that's his work not mine Aaron is the prophet Moses should have been a prophet like Moses but better and of course the best was still to come in the Lord Jesus an infinitely greater Moses a perfect prophet who not only truly speaks God's word to us but is himself the perfect representation of God's being towards us the word of God himself the word made flesh I reckon the people were grateful that God had sent them Aaron and not just Moses how much more grateful are we that God has sent us his son Jesus and not just Aaron and Moses friends praise God that he sent Christ to speak to us whatever Moses was whatever we are is ultimately because of what

Christ is the one who perfectly brings God down to us and brings us to him trust him praise him our perfect prophet and savior and very finally praise and trust him for promised results Moses had doubted that the people would listen God said they would Aaron spoke God's word and did the signs and verse 31 the people believed and when they heard that the Lord had visited the people of Israel and had seen their affliction they bowed their heads and worshipped it has been a roller coaster this morning if you kept up you were doing better than most commentators that I read this week but let's not miss the big point God has come down to save us in the person of Jesus and absolutely nothing is going to get in the way of him bringing his people who trust in and praise him from the darkness of slavery all the way home to himself

I was at Christianity Explored on Thursday I think there were 14 people doing it I think there were maybe four or five who could have been there and weren't it's very exciting and you can still come along if you want to the very first question on the course is what's the best news you've ever heard friends if you're not yet a Christian let me say that there is no you free and bring you home all other religions and ideologies are just more slavery follow these rules and live keep this regime of meditation of exercise of healthy eating and you will be free only Jesus came to find us in our spiritual chains break them throw us over his shoulder and carry us into his kingdom from beginning to end he has done the work so that we can come to

God he doesn't say meet me halfway he is fully committed to seeing it through the hallway and on the basis of that message alone it's beauty it's power his love let me urge you to believe him that he has done it that he can save trust in him to save you ask him in his heart to come and rescue you from everything that you can't rescue yourself from and those of us who have done that who believe in him therefore worship him God serve me instead of their old slave master, instead of the things of this world.

[35 : 24] Brothers and sisters, if you're in Christ, therefore live for the Lord in light of his glorious rescue. Wholeheartedly give your life to him to serve him. And as his family here, let us worship him alone, this God who is more committed to our salvation than even we are, who would save us even if it killed him, and who has saved us through his death.

Let's worship him in prayer and in song. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Let's pray. Lord, we praise you for your steadfast love that does not let us go. We ask that you would forgive us the times where we think that you are less committed to us than we are to ye.

When we believe that you are less for us than we are for ye. Lord, how unbelieving we are. How hard of heart. How slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

That the Lord Jesus had to come and fulfill everything that was written of him in the law of Moses. And that through his death and resurrection and ascension, forgiveness of sins is ours.

Freedom from slavery to sin. Freedom to live with you as our God. Lord, we pray, Lord, that you would soften our hearts. That we would receive your love in full.

[37 : 08] And Lord, for those who as yet are still slaves of sin, set them free, we pray, through faith in your son, Jesus. We thank you, Lord, for speaking to us. And so we ask in his name. Amen.

Amen. Amen.