

Bow and Worship as God's Son (Exodus 4:22-31)

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Please open God's Word to Exodus 4 and as you do I want to share how blessed I was to be at the Puritan Conference the prior week

- learning what we can learn from the Puritan pastors of the late 1500s and 1600s
- The speakers John Piper, Kevin DeYoung, Sinclair Ferguson, Ligon Duncan and Michael Reeves and others were highlights and Joel Beeke's message really tied in with Exodus 4
- The original Reformers tried to reform the Catholic church
 - o to **scripture alone (sola scriptura) and the gospel on the banners behind me**
 - **(saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone)**
- The Puritans tried to reform the Protestant Church of England to be purified
 - o especially pure worship regulated by **scripture alone and SDG (glory to God alone)**
- It was the biblical truths of those banners that drove Puritan Pilgrims to the Americas
- Some of the early Ivy League schools were founded on Puritan reformed convictions (come a long way).

Today the evangelical church of America needs to be reformed and purified back to God's truth

Exodus gives the foundation of those truths. Ex 4 will point us to the gospel

- pure worship in the Exodus story will drive God's people from Egypt to a faraway land to worship God freely without an oppressive government.
- they'll give glory to God alone at the end of the chapter but first we'll see
 - o what it means to be God's son, disobeying God's word can mean death
 - o how blood and covenant saves from death, then how to respond in pure worship

The context is God speaking to Moses in Arabia at a burning bush telling him to return to Egypt

In Ex 4:22 God says to Moses 'you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn **son**,²³ and I say to you, "Let **my son** go that he may **serve [or worship] me**." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn **son**.'"²⁴ At a lodging place on the way the LORD met him and sought to put him to death.²⁵ 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!"²⁶ So he let him alone. It was then that she said, "A bridegroom of **blood**," **because of the circumcision**.²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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.²⁹ Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel.³⁰ Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people.³¹ 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**.

Let's bow our heads and worship in prayer. Father in heaven, I come as your son by grace asking you to mercifully visit your people again as we gather together. Help us to believe and be encouraged that you see our afflictions and you meet us in our time of need. Help me to speak all the words that you have spoken, and help us to worship and bow down in Jesus' name.

For the outline I'm using the language of the end of v. 31, the response of bowing and worship:

1. Bow to God's sovereignty and obey

2. Worship as God's Son by adoption

The end of v. 31 shows us the right response, where the passage is going, where we should go: bow in humble adoration and proclaim how great Thou art. 1st part: **Bow to God's sovereignty**

If you look at the end of v. 30 it says '*they did the signs in the sight of the people,*'

- then in v. 31 the people believed and bowed at the end of the verse. What were the signs?
- From v. 3-5 one sign was Moses' staff turning into a serpent
 - o then he picks it up by the tail, showing the sovereign power God had.
 - o In Egypt, a leader's staff symbolized power and authority, God uses a staff to show
 - He has real power, He has Egypt by the tail
 - and all must bow to God.
- In v. 6-7 the next sign showed God's sovereign ability to afflict the body or heal at will.
- Then in v. 9 the sign for Israel was God's power over **life and death**
 - o **Nile=source of life** **blood=death**

Moses and Aaron do these signs before Israel and the people believe and bow the head to God.

That was visual but there's also verbal statements of absolute sovereignty in this same chapter:

¹¹ *Then the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ...*

- There are no accidents or mistakes in what He makes, God is sovereign
- we're not to blame Him with any wrongdoing, we're to bow and trust His good purposes.

v.21 *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...***

- God is sovereign over the hearts of kings; He turns them whatever way He wishes
- He'll harden this king's heart so he won't let Israel go
 - o without an almighty intervention and the utter defeat of all of Egypt.
- A careful distinction: disabilities or special needs aren't judgment for personal sin
 - o (even in accidents God has merciful purposes)
- but what God does to Pharaoh is a judgment for his sin

- (don't forget Egypt killing all baby boys and enslaving an entire ethnic group)
- God is sovereign and just
 - but also gracious to save at least some Egyptians from their hard-hearted dictator
- God has mercy and elect in Egypt, but there's hardening and judgment on the reprobate
- **Bow to God's sovereignty AND OBEY – disobedience is dangerous**

²³ *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.* Israel is God's son called to serve God, not Pharaoh.

- Pharaoh took the place of God in making Israel his slaves
 - absolute submission, bowing to Pharaoh.
- God is the one Pharaoh must bow to in absolute submission
 - or God will sovereignly kill their firstborn.

So God is sovereign over bodies in v. 11, hearts in v. 21, and death in v. 23 (*I will kill*, He says).

But if you believe like v. 31, it's good news if a sovereign God sees our affliction. Bow to Him.

God's sovereignty isn't a tough pill to swallow, it's a soft pillow to sleep on

Don't make His sovereignty bow to your thinking, bow your head to this like v. 31, rest in Him.

There's hard questions and hard things to wrap our mind around, for me v. 24-26 is harder and raised even more questions than answers. ²⁴ *At a lodging place on the way the LORD met him and sought to put him to death.* ²⁵ *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!"* ²⁶ *So he let him alone. It was then that she said, "A bridegroom of blood," because of the circumcision.*

- **And all God's people said 'huh!' Kids ask your dads, he may say ask your mom!**
- This isn't in the movies or flannelgraph sets or children's Bibles!
- But we preach verse by verse and can't skip over what God intends even if offends some

At least one of Moses' sons isn't circumcised till v. 25, and v. 24 says on the way back to Israel God sought to kill him. This is really confusing if you don't have some context.

- Our scripture reading today was the first mention of circumcision in the Bible
- the same Moses in the same scroll expects you read *'Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant'* (Gen 17:14)
- The penalty for covenant-breaking was to be cut off even to death
- that's the background of Ex 4:24, obeying this is deadly serious to God
- **It's not just Pharaoh and his son in danger for disobedience, it's Moses and his son, too**

How can Moses go back to God's covenant people and lead them if he broke the covenant with his own family?

- The NT principle is leaders need to lead those in their own home.
- How will he write the law if he's a lawbreaker not even trying to make right his wrong?
- Sometimes a wife helps where her husband fails.
- Zipporah does the deed in v. 25 but it's not clear if
 - o Moses didn't because he was near death in v. 24?
 - o Or some think it was his firstborn son about to die based on v. 23?
 - o There may have been some Midianite cultural things that are lost to us today.
 - o I read a lot on this and am still not sure what 'bridegroom of blood' means
 - o or how she put it on his feet.
 - o **Some translations say she cast it on him**
 - o **some think she's using positive covenant language**

But what's clear in v. 26 is:

- after the son is circumcised, the Lord doesn't bring threatened death.
- It's also clear that a woman again saves the day
 - o (ch 1 midwives, ch 2 Moses' birth-mom, sister, adopted mom). Now his wife.
- Moses isn't the hero, he's a covenant-breaking excuse-making sinner saying 'send-someone-else.'
- He hasn't been faithful in the most basic Jewish duty on the 8th day
 - o but to me this just shows this isn't a book written by mere man
 - o it's inspired by God to give the unflattering unvarnished truth.
 - o This is unlike any other ancient book that makes man the hero.
 - o The Bible celebrates sisters in the faith and sinners who God can change and use

And this reminds us only God is the perfect Father, and He works through imperfect parents

This is bloody, messy and likely even gross to Zipporah, but so is sin to God.

- Bloody skin in v. 25 is *touched* to him (key word) and then he didn't die.
- Same root word in a similar context in ch 12 '***touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood...And the people bowed their heads and worshiped***' (v. 22, 27)
- That's when God put to death the firstborn sons of Egypt like He promised
 - o but that death would've fallen on Israel, too, unless they were *touched* by the blood (same verb Moses chose for what touched him in ch 4).
 - o In some sense, Moses experiences what Israel will later experience, how death can pass over if touched by the blood shed from another.

In ch 4 life is saved by the blood of a son, in ch 12 it's the blood of a sacrificial lamb

Heb 9 says in the Law of Moses '*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin.*'ⁱ

Physical touch often identifies someone with the covenant that was cut and confirmed in blood.

Ex 4:23 promises death to the disobedient then v. 24-26 pictures saving life by covenant grace

- and blood of another touching/identifying.

- Ex 12 talks about the blood of the lamb *touching* and covering and it goes on to talk about circumcision before Passover as a grace for Gentiles
- This isn't just for OT Israel, God will provide a way in the Exodus story for believers of all nations.ⁱⁱ

In a small way this strange story points us to our story as 'strangers to the covenant'ⁱⁱⁱ

The NT is clear Christians aren't bound by circumcision law or ceremonies of the old covenant

- but our sinful disobedience deserves death without the shed blood of the Son. God's Son kept the law for us perfectly but He was cut off in death for us, for our law-breaking.
- So look beyond this weird story with the son of Moses to the wonderful Son of Man.
- He shed His blood for His bride
- The wages of sin is death, not just for bad guys like Pharaoh
 - o for us who are bad sinners by God's standard
 - o But Jesus' blood covers all who bow and confess He is Lord
 - and believe God raised Him from the dead.
 - o Have you bowed your knee and life to the Sovereign Savior?
 - o If not, today is the day of salvation
 - turn from your disobedience and trust His blood alone to save

If you're a believer here, is there an area of your life you haven't bowed to the Lord?

- Maybe it's been years like Moses you've put it off.
- Baptism is a first step of basic obedience as a Christian disciple
- Joining our church in covenant commitment is the way we seek to obey together
- The shepherds here would love to help you follow the Lord towards baptism or membership or even relationships to help you in your weakness
- Moses needed that with Aaron and Zipporah, and we all need others to help us obey.
- Parents, are you teaching God's Word to your kids in some way?
- Do you help others you see sin?
- Are you serving and sharing in children's ministry here but not doing that with your children or with others?
- Whatever needs to bow, give it to Christ.

#1. Bow to God's sovereignty and obey, then #2. Worship as God's Son by adoption

In the rest of ch 4 two sons come together

- they had been sons together when Moses was little in the process of being adopted
- but adult Moses had been gone 40 years.
- These 2 sons went back to the sons of Israel with signs showing God's sovereignty so they would obey the call to go worship God. ³¹ *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.***

They now know there's a Father who knows and sees and cares and is coming

God's people rightly respond in worship – not just to be seen by God in affliction – but as the son of God in adoption.

When v. 31 says they heard the Lord had visited that word 'visited' is later used in the NT

- of true religion that includes 'visiting orphans...in their affliction'^{iv}
- that's the Father's heart, but He visits Israel to adopt His son.

In v. 29 Israel's elders gather. ³⁰ *Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses*

... that would include what He spoke in v. 22: *Thus says the LORD, **Israel is my firstborn son**...*

Firstborn is the place of preeminence, special blessing, and it implies more sons to come
Hebrew word order is emphatic: '**My son, my firstborn, Israel is...**'

- It's the first time God talks about His son, out of Egypt He's calling 'my son'
 - o and committing now to be the father of Israel.

Moses had been adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, but Israel is now adopted by their Father God.

Rom 9:4 *They are Israelites...to them belong the adoption...the giving of the law, the worship...*

The afflicted slaves of the Pharaoh, are now adopted sons of the Father in heaven

Ex 4:23 *I say to you, "Let **my son** go..."* Moses later said to Israel looking back on the exodus '*God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way...he cared for [Israel], he kept him as the apple of his eye*' (Dt 1:31, 32:10). God said later in Hosea 11: "*When Israel was a child, I **loved him**, and I **called my son out of Egypt**...I myself taught Israel how to walk, leading him along by the hand...it was I who **took care of him**. I led Israel along with my **ropes of kindness** and love. I **lifted the yoke** from his neck, and I myself **stooped to feed him***' (v. 1-4 NLT). That's a prophetic affectionate picture of God the Father redeeming, delivering, and caring for His son.

We bow to a Father who stoops to care for us! We worship the Lord of love as His son!

Ex 4:31 says they worship as they hear God '*had visited the people of Israel,*'

- that's echoed in the gospel of Luke as visiting to redeem.
- Lk 1:68 "*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he **has visited and redeemed his people**...that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him...the sunrise shall visit us from on high...*" (v. 74, 78)
- Zechariah knew his OT, that visiting meant redeeming, delivering from the enemy so we might serve God like Ex 4:23, '*let my son go **that he may serve me**.*'
- Zechariah knew a Messiah would visit from on high like this.

Not just for Israel, Acts 15 says God '*visited the Gentiles, to take a people for his name*'^v

Ex 4:19 has another gospel echo: "*Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.*" ²⁰ *So Moses took his wife and his sons and had them ride on a donkey...*

- Turn to Mt 2 and remember that other time where a man and his wife and son-on-the-way traveled like that.
- Herod was the NT version of Pharaoh and the 1st century version of Planned Parenthood
 - o killing babies that got in the way of kingdom and career plans

- But God protected the baby Moses and the baby Messiah. Moses later fled from Egypt
- Look at Mt 2:14: *And he rose and **took the child and his mother** by night and departed **to Egypt**¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was **to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”**...* [quoting from prophet Hosea, then in v. 20 the angel told him] *“Rise, **take the child and his mother** and go to the land of Israel, for **those who sought the child’s life are dead.**”*

So let’s apply this the way the NT applies this

- Ex 4 ends with Israel in worship as God’s son, we have greater ways to praise today
- By adoption God called out of Egypt His son Israel
 - o but like us they sinned, were unfaithful (ch 5 thru the NT).
 - o A new exodus would be needed, a heavenly Son would come as a new and true Israel to be faithful where Israel failed.
- Rev 1:5 *Jesus Christ the **faithful** witness, the **firstborn** of the dead, and the **ruler** of kings on earth. To him who **loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood** ... John bows in worship at the sovereign ruler who is the preeminent firstborn who loves and frees us!*
- Col 1 says *He is the **firstborn** of all creation...that in everything he might be preeminent^{vi}*
- Heb 1 God *brings the firstborn into the world, he says, Let all God’s angels worship him*
- Heb 12 says you come to worship joining ‘*angels in joyful assembly, to **the church of the firstborn...let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe***^{vii}
- Rom 8 talks about ‘*his Son, in order that he might be the **firstborn among many brothers** ...For you did not receive the spirit of **slavery** to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of **adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”**...we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...*^{viii} Jesus is the only begotten Son, but He calls us brothers and shares everything with us in the Son!
- Gal 4 says ‘*God sent forth his Son...to redeem...so that we might receive **adoption as sons**. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you **are no longer a slave, but a son**, and if a son, then an heir...*’ We join Israel going from slave to son by amazing adopting redeeming grace!
- Paul launches into worship in Eph 1, praising the Father ‘*who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing...In love he **predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ...to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished...***’ Not a little, lavish!
- Don’t let the word ‘son’ throw you if you’re a daughter of God, son emphasizes we’re in God’s beloved Son. Behold what manner of love! 1 Jn 3:1 See *what great love*

the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!^{ix}

Joel Beeke at the conference taught on adoption. He said studying to write a book on this was sweeter to his soul than anything else he ever studied or wrote, to know his Father more deeply.

- Why would God choose to predestine to adopt me? A child of wrath now a child of God?
- God chose to adopt before I know Him, loved me 1st then I grew to know and love Him
- Puritans considered adoption as the overarching doctrine of salvation or apex of them all
- More than justification, it's the Judge coming down after He acquits the guilt to put His arm around the one who deserved death to bring him into the family like Mephibosheth
- 'It's one thing to accept us as a judge, it's another to treat us as a father with all the care'
- We're really His children and Beeke said we need to reflect that family likeness and care.
- Before you speak ill a fellow believer, think 'that's my real brother, that's my real sister'
- He told the story of a woman who had been an orphan all her life and never knew of any family other than a drunk uncle in Australia. But after the sermon on adoption in Christ, she said with tears in her eyes "I finally now know this is my real family, a big family!"
- And another true story of a boat at sea in a storm about to go down, a boy was very calm, and they asked him why and he said 'my Father is the captain of this boat, I'm not afraid'
- STORY of Beeke's elder before amputation, 'don't be sorry for me, Father knows best'
- STORY of conversation I had right after that conference message, guy battling cancer

That brings sovereignty and adoption together. Let's worship and bow in prayer as God's son.

ⁱ Hebrews 9:22, adapted from Leviticus 17:11 that says atonement is by life blood.

ⁱⁱ Exodus 12:48-49, compare what Jesus said at His last Passover with His disciples (Matthew 26:2, 27-29).

ⁱⁱⁱ Ephesians 2:11-13, note the language of circumcision and blood of Christ.

^{iv} James 1:27.

^v Acts 15:14.

^{vi} Colossians 1:15, 18.

^{vii} Hebrews 12:22b-23, 28 NIV.

^{viii} Romans 8:29, 14-17.

^{ix} TNIV.