

Title: **HOW IMPORTANT IS OBEDIENCE?**
Text: Exodus 4:24-31
Subject: *The Lord Seeks to Kill Moses*
Date: Tuesday Evening — January 23, 2007
Tape # Exodus #36

Introduction:

How important is obedience? Is it really necessary for you and me to obey God in the details of our lives? Since we are saved by grace alone, justified freely through the blood of Christ, and assured that God will not impute sin to those who trust his Son, is it really necessary for us to obey God?

Turn to Exodus 4, and you will find the answer to that question. Having been called of God to go down to Egypt to deliver his people from the oppressive bondage of Pharaoh, Moses took his wife and his two sons and started for Egypt. Along the way they stopped at an inn to rest for the night. Look what happened (vv. 24-26).

(Exodus 4:24-26) “And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him. (25) Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast *it* at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband *art* thou to me. (26) So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband *thou art*, because of the circumcision.”

PROPOSITION: God requires obedience in his children!

DIVISIONS: I want to show you seven things in this message.

1. Moses was a saved man, a true believer, a child of God.
2. Moses was called, equipped, and sent of God to do a great work.
3. Moses was guilty of a very great sin against God.
4. The Lord sought to kill Moses because of his sin.
5. Moses' obedience to the Lord was very costly, but absolutely necessary.
6. Once Moses bowed to the will of God, God let him go and greatly used him.
7. “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.”

How important is obedience? That is the question I want to answer in this message.

SAVED MAN

Let me begin my message by showing you that **Moses was a saved man, a true believer, a child of God.** The Holy Spirit tells us in Hebrews 11 that he was already a believer before he slew the Egyptian and fled from Egypt. Indeed, his slaying the Egyptian and his deliberate rejection of the throne of Egypt were acts of faith (Hebrews 11:24-26).

(Hebrews 11:24-26) “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; (25) Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; (26) Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.”

The Lord God revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush in his great redemptive name — Jehovah (Exodus 3:2-14), and revealed his purpose of grace and redemption toward his afflicted people.

Without question, Moses was already a saved man. He believed God. He was righteous and justified in Christ, pardoned, forgiven, and sanctified by faith in the blood of the Lamb, the Seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus Christ, who spoke to him out of the bush.

I stress this fact because I do not want there to be any mistake about Moses. He was a child of God. My point is this: — **God’s people in this world, though complete in Christ, are sinners still!** I do not need to prove that to you!

In the bent and direction of his life, Moses walked by faith and was obedient to God. The same is true of all who are born of God. Believers walk with God! — Yet, this man Moses, was not without sin.

The Word of God speaks plainly about the sins of even the most eminent saints. It never seeks to conceal the faults of God’s people. Why?

- To teach us that salvation is by grace alone.
- To teach us that the whole of our acceptance with God is in Christ, our Substitute.
- To keep us looking to Christ.

- To keep us from being proud, self-righteous, and severe in dealing with our fallen brethren.

CALLED OF GOD

Not only was he a saved man, **Moses had been called, equipped, and sent of God to do a great work** (Exodus 4:18-23). **God called him.** — “I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people.” (3:10). Moses knew his inability for the work of a prophet, much less a deliverer, so the Lord God assured him of his presence and his success. (3:11-12). Then, he gave Moses special powers from heaven to authenticate him as one sent of God. (4:1-9).

- Moses’ Rod.
- Moses’ Hand.
- Water and Blood.

When God sends a man to do a work for him, he will equip him and demonstrate his power in him (Numbers 16).

And every man sent of God is sent with a message. So **God gave Moses a message** (4:22-23).

(Exodus 4:22-23) “And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, *Israel is my son, even my firstborn:* (23) 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 firstborn.*”

- A Message of Grace — “Israel is my son!”
- A Message of Judgment — “I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn.”
- A Message of Redemption — “I will bring them out of Egypt.” (4:12).

Moses had taken Zipporah, his wife, and Gershem and Eliezer, his sons, and started out for Egypt in obedience to God’s command. But...

MOSES’ SIN

Moses was guilty of a great evil, a terrible evil against his God and Savior. It may be that Moses thought that it really did not matter whether or not he circumcised his son. I say that because he appears to have circumcised one of his boys, but did not circumcise the other. He knew that it was the will of

God for him to circumcise his sons. He simply chose not to do so. But the evil began much earlier. After leaving Egypt, Moses had married a Midianite wife. Midianites were the descendants of Ishmael. Moses had taken a wife from those who were not the people of God. That was itself a shameful thing.

Though Moses was in a strange land, he should have restrained himself from taking a pagan woman to be his wife. No doubt he convinced himself that circumstances made his choice justifiable, if not necessary; but he knew better. The wrath of God had once been provoked against the earth for this great sin (Genesis 6:2). Such an unequal yoke of a believer to an unbeliever begins with compromise and can only be continued with compromise, unless God is pleased to save the unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14-15).

(2 Corinthians 6:14-15) “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? (15) And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?”

Those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are free to marry whom they will, but “only in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:39).

- **It is obvious in reading our text that the reason Moses had neglected his known duty was the fact that he was married to Zipporah.**

Their firstborn son, Gershom, had apparently been circumcised when he was eight days old, as God required; but Zipporah despised the ordinance of God as a needlessly painful and bloody rite. Our text shows us that she was a fiery, hot-tempered woman, who got what she wanted by tantrums and fits. And Moses caved in to her! But in trying to please Zipporah he greatly displeased the Lord!

Let this man, Moses, be a beacon of warning to us all. We must each carefully watch his own heart. We must not allow our fondness for anyone, or our relationship with anyone keep us from obedience to our Lord.

- Eli honored his sons more than he honored God (1 Samuel 2:29). So God killed his sons.
- Moses, in this area, showed more fear for Zipporah than for God. So the Lord sought to kill him.

If we would follow Christ, our earthly relations must be given no consideration when it comes to obedience (Matthew 10:36-38).

(Matthew 10:36-38) “And a man’s foes *shall be* they of his own household. (37) He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (38) And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.”

Moses had been obedient in so many things. He had always followed Christ, regardless of cost or consequence. He was on his way now to meet Pharaoh, king of Egypt, armed with nothing but the promise of God. But there was this one area where he was not in obedience to his Master, one matter which he had not yet surrendered to the rule of Christ. He had not circumcised his son, Eliezer, because he wanted to please Zipporah more than he wanted to please the Lord. **This issue had to be settled!** Our Lord demands absolute and universal surrender. He will not allow us to pick and choose what we will give him, what we will do for him, or what we will surrender to him.

SOUGHT TO KILL

This was such a serious matter that the Lord sought to kill Moses because of his sin (v. 24).

(Exodus 4:24) “And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him.”

We are not told how the Lord sought to kill him. And we are not told that Zipporah was even aware of what was going on between God and Moses. Maybe she was. Maybe she wasn’t. But Moses knew what was going on! **God met him at his point of rebellion** and said, “All right son, before you make another move we’re going to settle this issue. You will either bow to me and obey me, or I will kill you right here!”

God’s displeasure was revealed against Moses, not Zipporah, because the worship, discipline, and direction of his family was Moses’ responsibility. — He was the head of the house, not Zipporah.

It is not unusual for a man to be united to a woman who opposes him at every step, as he seeks to lead his family in the worship and service of Christ, and seeks to maintain discipline and rule over his children. But that does not absolve him of his responsibility. Zipporah's wickedness was no excuse for Moses' disobedience. Before Moses would be allowed to go on to be God's spokesman and representative to his people, he was required to set his own house in order.

No man can be allowed to undertake the rule and government of God's church who does not rule his own house (1 Timothy 3:1-4).

(1 Timothy 3:1-4) "This *is* a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. (2) A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; (3) Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; (4) One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity."

The neglect of any known duty is as great an evil in God's sight as the commission of any transgression. — "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:16-22). — There are sins of omission as well as sins of commission. If I fail to do that which I know is the will of God, I have sinned against my God just as surely as if I had committed adultery, murder, or even an act of base idolatry. **Any time I fail to do something I know God would have me do, the cause is pride, covetousness, and unbelief.** It would cost me something I am not willing to give. If that is the case, there is an idol somewhere in my heart that must be torn out, a rebel lurking in my soul that must be destroyed, some realm of my life that is not yet brought in subjection to Christ! Whatever it is, that is my point of rebellion; and that is the place where God will cross my path. — **Surrender to Christ is not a once-for-all act. It goes on as long as we live in this world. Whatever comes up between me and my God must be slain.**

The Lord God takes notice of and is displeased with the sins of his people. — Thank God, he has forgiven our sins and removed them from us, as far as the east is from the west, through the blood of Christ. We rejoice to know that we are so fully forgiven in Christ that our God will never impute sin to one who trusts his Son. In a judicial sense, we shall never be charged

with or punished for sin. But God, as our heavenly Father, is grieved by the sins of his people. As a grieved Father, full of love, he takes out his rod to correct his erring sons and daughters (Hebrews 12:5-11). If we behave as rebels, we will hear about it. Our heavenly Father will not allow his children to live in rebellion to him.

- He will sharply reprove our consciences by his Word and his Spirit.
- If we persist in disobedience, he will chasten us in providence.

(Hebrews 12:5-11) “And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: (6) For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. (7) If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? (8) But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. (9) Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected *us*, and we gave *them* reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? (10) For they verily for a few days chastened *us* after their own pleasure; but he for *our* profit, that *we* might be partakers of his holiness. (11) Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

In this place we are plainly told that “the Lord sought to kill” Moses. I will leave it to others to argue about how we are to relate this to God’s absolute purpose in predestination to deliver Israel out of Egypt by the hand of Moses. Moses knew more about that than any of us. He was there when God revealed himself and revealed his purpose. But Moses (who wrote these words, and his wife Zipporah, were both convinced “that the LORD met him (in the inn), and sought to kill him!” **Bro. Rolfe Barnard** used to say, “The only way God will ever kill a Christian is when he is done with him, or when he gets in his way.” And he was right!

Illustration: Jim S. — F.G.

Disobedience to Christ is a serious matter!

COSTLY, BUT NECESSARY

After God met him and sought to kill him, Moses repented. That means, he now did what he had refused to do before. **Moses' obedience to the Lord was very costly, but absolutely necessary.** Moses knew that God meant business. He knew that he had been wrong. Therefore, he quickly circumcised his son. He surrendered to his Master. Actually, Zipporah did the act. Either Moses was physically incapable of doing it, because the Lord sought to kill him, or he assumed the reins of his house and commanded his wife to do it. Either way, Zipporah did the act and the Lord God spared Moses' life because he was now obedient.

His obedience was immediate. — Eliezer must be circumcised, circumcised right now, circumcised right here, even if it must be done with a rock (a piece of flint)! Moses' life depended on it, because God's honor depended on it. Someone once said, "Understanding can wait; obedience cannot."

I repeat, it was Zipporah, not Moses, who performed the act of circumcising their son. But she did it because Moses now demanded that she do it. She was as much opposed to it now as she had been before. When she had finished, she took the boy's foreskin, threw it down at Moses' feet, and said, "Surely a bloody husband art thou to me!"

Moses' obedience was costly, very costly. — When this thing was over, the rift between Moses and Zipporah was so strong, that he was compelled to send her, with her two sons back to Midian to stay with her father Jethro, until he had done what God sent him to do. We know that because we read in Exodus 18:1-6 that Jethro brought her and Moses' two sons back to Moses in the wilderness, where he was camped at the Mount of God, after he heard "that the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt."

(Exodus 18:1-6) "When Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father in law, heard of all that God had done for Moses, and for Israel his people, *and* that the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt; (2) Then Jethro, Moses' father in law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back, (3) And her two sons; of which the name of the one *was* Gershom; for he said, I have been an alien in a strange land: (4) And the name of the other *was* Eliezer; for the God of my father, *said he, was* mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh: (5) And Jethro, Moses' father in law, came with his sons

and his wife unto Moses into the wilderness, where he encamped at the mount of God: (6) And he said unto Moses, I thy father in law Jethro am come unto thee, and thy wife, and her two sons with her.”

Moses faced the fact that Zipporah would be a constant hindrance to him. And he knew that he could not relinquish God’s commission. Therefore he sent her back home. Contending with Pharaoh and with Israel would be enough. Moses did not want to have to go home every night and contend with Zipporah.

He did not divorce her. He did not cease to provide for and care for her. He simply resolved that he could not allow her and the boys to keep him from obeying God. Once Israel was out of Egypt, Moses sent for his family again.

MOSES BOWED

Once Moses bowed to the will of God, God let him go and greatly used him for the good of his people and the glory of his own great name. When Moses bowed to the will of God, he escaped the rod and the sword, and found himself once again in sweet fellowship with his Father. When he was reconciled to God, God showed himself merciful. — It was the grace of God that subdued Moses’ heart; but God did not show himself gracious until Moses’ was subdued.

And, **once his rebellion was broken**, though his obedience cost him much heartache and pain, the Lord proved himself gracious. Moses was now alone in the wilderness, going back to Egypt just like he had gone out, with nothing but faith in God. The Lord sent his brother, Aaron, whom he had not seen in forty years, to meet him and cheer him. (vv. 27-28).

(Exodus 4:27-28) “And the LORD said to Aaron, Go into the wilderness to meet Moses. And he went, and met him in the mount of God, and kissed him. (28) And Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD who had sent him, and all the signs which he had commanded him.”

The cheek God burns with tears from one quarter, he soothes with kisses from another.

Moses and Aaron came to Israel to tell them what God was determined to do (vv. 29-31).

(Exodus 4:29-31) “And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel: (30) And Aaron spake all the words which the LORD had spoken unto 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 children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.”

What a story they had for the poor, oppressed people God had chosen. Their message to Israel was good news, the gospel of deliverance by the hand of God. Look at how Israel received God’s message (v. 31). — “When they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction...

- “They believed!”
- “Then they bowed!”— Surrender!
- “And worshipped!” — Praised, Adored and Gave Thanks!

DO IT

Let me wrap-up this message by saying to you what Mary said to those servants who stood before the Lord Jesus at the wedding feast in Cana. — “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it” (John 2:5). Consult not with flesh and blood, just do it. — “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might,” for the glory of God. Failure is an impossibility to obedience to God. All heaven waits to help anyone who knows God’s will and does it. No one ever lost anything by obeying Christ. — “Lacked ye anything?...Nothing, Lord.”

ILLUSTRATIONS

Walter Groover — “Happiness has nothing to do with it. This is where God wants me.”

Bob Coffey — “The Crucifix Painting.”

Obedience to Christ is essential! — True, saving faith is always accompanied by obedience. Our Lord Jesus both demands and deserves that that obedience be universal. **Salvation begins with surrender to Christ, bowing to him as Lord; and he constantly demands surrender.** He never relinquishes his rule.

- Let us never despise the ordinances of God. — Baptism — The Lord's Supper — Public Worship.
- Let us never be hardened to and refuse the direction of God's Spirit (Ephesians 4:30).

(Ephesians 4:30) "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

O God, my Savior, will you graciously hold my heart and soul in compliance with your will! Allow nothing and no one to keep you from following and obeying you.

If we obey God, we will often meet with much opposition, even from those who are dearest to us. We will be misunderstood. Our actions will be misrepresented. Our motives will be misjudged.

- Joseph and His Brothers
- Moses and Zipporah
- David and Michal

"Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." — When God calls you to do anything in the service of Christ and his kingdom, put away everything that might hinder you. "Let the dead bury their dead." And send Zipporah back to Midian!

Amen.