

Sermon Outline

“ABBA! FATHER!”: KNOWING GOD AS OUR BELOVED FATHER

LET MY SON GO
(EXODUS 4:21-23)

I. Introduction

II. The Gospel in Exodus

- A. In Exodus, we see God forming Israel into his kingdom on earth.
- B. Exodus is an important book in the Old Testament for two major reasons.
 - 1. It shows us how the Lord saved Israel from slavery to Egypt.
 - 2. It shows us how the Lord then moves to embrace Israel to himself by giving them various laws and commandments.
- C. The book of Exodus contains the great gospel event of the Old Testament—Israel’s liberation from Egypt *revealed* the nation of Israel as God’s beloved child.
- D. It was this salvation event that formed the context in which God gives Israel his laws.
—Before God gave Israel the Ten Commandments, he said: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex 20:2).
- E. Since Israel is also the seed of the future Church; the lessons that God teaches Israel in Exodus are also applicable to the Church.
 - 1. The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed.
 - 2. Many of the blessings in the New Testament, accomplished by the Lord Jesus, are found in embryonic form in the Old Testament.
 - 3. Take the temple for instance.
 - a. Christ is the *place* where we meet with God and the *way* by which we go to God.
 - b. This great truth about Christ is pictured in the form of the Old Testament temple and the Old Testament sacrifices.
 - c. In Exodus, we meet many of the same truths that we will encounter in the New Testament, albeit in a smaller expression or smaller realization.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does Exodus teach us? Why is Exodus important? (2) Why are many of the lessons given to Israel applicable also to the Church? (3) “The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed.” What does this mean? Discuss.

III. The Calling of Moses (Ex 4:1-17)

- A. In Exodus 4, Moses was standing before the glory of God in the burning bush.
—In chapter three, God told Moses about his plans to free Israel from Egypt.
- B. Chapter four begins with Moses saying to the Lord that no one will believe or listen to him (4:1).
—The Lord tells Moses that he would perform great signs through him to show that Moses was indeed sent by the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (4:5).
- C. But Moses still doesn't want to go—he claims to be a bad speaker (4:10).
—The Lord says he was the one who made man's mouth—and that "I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak" (4:12).
- D. Moses works up the courage to say what he was actually thinking: "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else" (4:14).
—While the Lord was displeased with Moses; the Lord allows Moses to take his brother Aaron along with him to see the Pharaoh.
- E. And so, the journey begins.
 - 1. Moses, with his wife and his sons and his brother Aaron, make their way to Egypt.
 - 2. While they were on the way, the Lord continues to tutor Moses in what he should say.
 - 3. This is what we find in verses 21-23 of our text.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What was Moses doing when Exodus 4 begins? (2) What did God tell Moses in Exodus 3? (3) What are some of the excuses Moses gives for not wanting to obey God's call? (4) How does the Lord accommodate to Moses' fears?

IV. Moses Is to Do Miracles before Pharaoh (Ex 4:21)

- A. "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'" (v 21)
 - 1. What were these miracles that the Lord has given Moses to do?
 - a. The turning of Moses' staff into a serpent (4:3)
 - b. Moses' hand turning "leprous like snow" (4:6)
 - c. The turning of the water of the Nile into blood (4:9).
 - 2. Of course, God would eventually perform greater miracles than these. But these were the introductory signs that God wanted Moses to perform in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.
- B. We need to read the miracle in the larger context of God's intentions, God's plan of salvation.
 - 1. Since mankind fell into sin, God has been fighting on behalf of his people to redeem them from sin and from the power of the serpent.

2. This confrontation between the prophet Moses and the Pharaoh of Egypt is once again a confrontation between God and Satan and between good and evil.
3. Moses is the leader of God's Church, while Pharaoh is the leader of Satan's nation.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What were the miracles that Moses would perform? (2) What is the larger context in which we are to read the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh? (3) "Moses is the leader of God's Church, while Pharaoh is the leader of Satan's nation." Discuss.

V. I Will Harden His Heart (Ex 4:21)

- A. But God and the devil are not two forces of equal power.
 1. God is God, and the devil is just the devil—a created being.
 2. In what we see next, it's clear that the Lord has absolute power even over the will of his enemy.
- B. "But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go."
 1. God will cause Pharaoh to be so stubborn in his ways that he would not change his mind and let the Israelites go.
 2. This simple Scripture shows us:
 - a. that God has power over human destiny
 - b. that God alone gives us the ability and the willingness to repent of our sins.
 3. If God does not cause our hearts to move toward himself, we would not be able to do so—as we see in the case of Pharaoh!

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does it mean that God would harden Pharaoh's heart? What does this tell us about God's power? (2) "God has power over human destiny." Discuss.

VI. A God-Centered Perspective on Pharaoh and Evil

- A. *God hardens Pharaoh's heart so that God would have a reason to punish the enemies of his people.*
 - Exodus 9:16: "But for this purpose I have raised you [Pharaoh] up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth."
 1. That is the place that Pharaoh has in the plans of God.
 2. Pharaoh serves as God's enemy, so that God would have an occasion to show his goodness and power to his people and his enemies.
- B. This may also be the role of the evil one and all evil in the world.
 - Why does God allow evil to exist?
 - Why does God allow the devil to continue tormenting his people?
 1. There are many possible answers to these questions.
 2. But one of them may well be this:

—*God allows evil to exist in order that he would have an occasion to show his goodness and his power to his children.*

3. Thus, when we experience pain and evil in our lives, we must keep God's larger designs in mind.
4. God is training us to rely on him; to look to him.
5. We must be good stewards of your own experience of evil.
—Use evil as a reminder to pray, to ask God for grace, to seek God's face. God wants to come through for us in the struggles of our life.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) According to Exodus 9:16, why does God harden Pharaoh's heart? (2) Based on Exodus 9:16, what is one possible reason why God allows evil to exist for now?

VII. The Father Fights for His Firstborn Son (Ex 4:22)

- A. Verse 22 and 23 are the focus of our lesson.
- B. God had...
 1. instructed Moses to perform the miracles he had set in his hand.
 2. informed Moses that he would harden Pharaoh's heart.
- C. But God also wants Moses to deliver the following words 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.”
- D. Initial comments
 1. The Lord is giving Pharaoh an ultimatum.
—He is threatening Pharaoh and his kingdom with punishment if Pharaoh continues to refuse to let Israel go.
 2. The Lord is assuring his children that relief is at hand.
—His words to Pharaoh are salvation to us!
- E. First, God says Israel is his “firstborn son.”
 1. The firstborn son is usually the most honored and cherished son in ancient culture.
 2. Out of all the nations, God adopted Israel for himself, bestowing sonship upon the nation and its people (Dt 7:7; 10:15: 14:1).
- F. Second, “Let my son go that he may serve me.”
 1. As a result of being adopted by God, Israel does not belong to the Pharaoh but to God.
 2. Israel must serve God.
 3. What does it mean for Israel to serve God?
 - a. To serve God involves holding a feast to God: “Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness’” (Ex 5:1).
 - b. But ultimately, the meaning of “service” must be determined according to the entire book of Exodus.

- c. Looking at Exodus as a whole, the service God wants from his people is a whole way of life and culture.
 - i. God wants Israel to serve him by believing his testimonies and keeping his law—building a whole civilization that is centered on God and devoted to his glory.
 - ii. Exodus 19:5-6: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”
- 4. Since Israel is God’s firstborn son, Israel’s first and most primary obligation is to God.

—No human ruler, however powerful, however high in authority, can obstruct the fulfillment of that obligation.
- G. Third: “If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.”
 - 1. If Pharaoh or the other rulers in the world prevent God’s people from worshipping him, there will be consequences.
 - 2. Peter Enns: “Since Israel is God’s firstborn son, the appropriate punishment against Egypt for harming Israel is for God to harm Egypt’s firstborn son” (*Exodus*, 132).

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What words does God want Pharaoh to hear? (2) How would God’s children have received those words? (3) Who is Israel to God? (4) What does it mean for Israel to serve God? (5) What are the consequences for Pharaoh if he prevents the Church of Israel from serving God?

VIII. Sonship Is for Worship

- A. The lesson our Father wants to give us can be summarized in this phrase: *Sonship is for worship. Adoption is for adoration. Liberation is for consecration.*
- B. God saves us from our sins the evil one so that we can worship him; that is, serve him, all the days of our lives.
- C. To quote Peter Enns again: “God’s demand for Israel’s release is not simply for Israel to be free *from* service to Egypt, but for Israel *to* serve the Lord” (*Exodus*, 132).

***Questions for reflection:** (1) “Sonship is for worship. Adoption is for adoration. Liberation is for consecration.” Discuss.

IX. We Serve God Not Because God Needs Our Service

- A. To better understand serving God, we must recognize that God does not actually *need* our service.
 - 1. There is nothing that we can offer God that can contribute to God’s glory.
 - 2. There is nothing that we can offer to God that God does not already own.

⁹ I will not accept a bull from your house
or goats from your folds.

¹⁰ For every beast of the forest is mine,
the cattle on a thousand hills.

¹¹ I know all the birds of the hills,
and all that moves in the field is mine.

¹² “If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
for the world and its fullness are mine. (Ps 50:9-12)

- B. If God is not dependent on us for anything, God can act toward us simply out of pure grace, pure generosity.
- C. God is free to delight in us even when we grieve him because God is already complete in himself.
- D. God calls us to serve him not because he *needs* our service to become a more fulfilled being.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does Psalm 50:9-12 teach us about God and our worship? (2) God does not need our service. Why is this good for us?

X. Why We Serve God

A. *We serve God simply because God calls us to do so.*

- 1. This is always where we begin—not with our own needs or desires, but with the pure will of God.
- 2. We serve because God wills and desires it.
- 3. Therefore, service to God is simply an obedience to God’s will; a compliance with God’s desires.

B. *We serve God because it fulfills and dignifies us.*

- 1. God calls us to serve him because it completes us.
- 2. Listen again to Exodus 19:5-6: “Now therefore, *if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant*, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation...” (Ex 19:5-6).
 - a. If Israel would serve God, God would dignify Israel.
 - b. God wants Israel to serve him for the reward that such service would bring.
 - c. Israel would become God’s holy and royal nation in the world.
- 3. How does serving God dignify and complete us?
 - a. Just think about what serving God would entail.
 - i. When we serve God, we are seeking to please him.
 - ii. Since God is perfect goodness, goodness pleases him.
 - iii. Serving God is about seeking to approximate God, to get closer and closer to God in what we think, say, and do.
 - iv. In the end, serving God makes us more and more like God himself!
 - Leviticus 19:2: “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”

- Matthew 5:48: “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
- Ephesians 5:1: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.”

b. It is an honor to be a servant of God.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why do we serve God? (2) How does service to God dignify us? (3) “In the end, serving God makes us more and more like God himself!” How does this inspire your service?

XI. We Serve God through Christ Jesus

- A. But God has given us more than good thoughts and inspiring theology to help us serve him.
- B. Sin in us is often too powerful to be reasoned with.
- C. The reason the devil’s lies work so easily on us is because sin in us loves those lies.
- D. If we are to serve God, we are going to need help.
- E. God helps us through Jesus, our Lord and Priest.
 - 1. Because Jesus is our Priest, the one who relates to God on our behalf, Jesus can fulfill the condition of Exodus 19:5-6 for us.
 - a. Jesus kept the commandments of God on our behalf.
 - Romans 5:19: “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”
 - b. Jesus has earned holiness and dignity for us—he has given us the right to be the holy nation of God.
 - John 1:12: “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”
 - 2. Because Jesus is our Lord and King, Jesus has the power to form us into the holy servants the Father is looking for.
 - Ephesians 2:22: “In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

Our heavenly Father has called us to serve him. But he has not left it all up to us. He calls us to serve him through our Lord Jesus Christ. This means relying on Christ to make our service acceptable to God. This means depending on Christ to free us from our sins and oppressors so that we can go freely to God, and stand complete and perfect before him. Christ is the eternal Son of God who has made us all into God’s firstborn sons. Let us run to embrace our Father’s intentions for us. Let us give our lives in the service of our God and Father.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why do we need help to serve God? (2) How does Jesus help us to serve God in his role as priest and king? (3) What can you do bring your life into greater service to God?