



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA

By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.
Exodus 4:18–31

October 25, 2015
English Standard Version

“The Lord Prepares Moses”

The 8th Sermon in a series on the Book of Exodus entitled
“The Glory of the Lord!”

Scripture Introduction:

The great emphasis in Exodus is that God delivers His people in order that they might worship. We are saved, in other words, in order to worship. And that term worship or service appears over and over throughout Exodus. Last week, in Exodus 4:10–17 we saw two final objections of Moses. He protests to the Lord that he’s not eloquent, he’s not a good speaker, and he says, “Lord, send the message by whomever you desire to send it.” Which, being translated, means “Lord, please send somebody else. I hear what you’re saying. Please send somebody else.” It’s the famous, “Here I am, Lord, send Aaron” response.

And in that passage, we see God using Moses who is a sinful, weak person to accomplish His purpose. We see that God’s message is powerful, even apart from the messenger, and that God Himself is always our only Savior. He may use Moses, He may use people like you and me, but God Himself is our Savior. And that brings us to **Exodus 4:18-31**. This is God’s word for you. Please give it your full attention.

Exodus 4:18-31

“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.”¹⁹ And the LORD said to Moses in Midian, “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, and went back to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the staff of God in his hand.

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, so that he will not let the people go.”²² Then 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 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.”

Heavenly Father, this is Your Word and we need it. We need it as much as the people of Exodus needed it. We need to be reminded of what makes God great! We need the Glory of the Lord. Oh Lord, this passage is rich with truth and significance, and it’s also mysterious. Open our eyes to understand it, reveal Yourself by it, teach us, instruct us, correct us, tame our hearts, and draw us to Yourself as Your word is proclaimed. And so we pray that by the power of the Holy Spirit, help us see Jesus, in His name we pray, amen.

INTRODUCTION: *I’m F.I.N.E*¹

One of my favorite movies is the 2003 version of *The Italian Job*. It’s a crime drama, not too fancy, sort of a low-budget *Bond* with a lot more laughs. One of my favorite scenes is right at the beginning of the movie when two of the main characters are in Venice, Italy. Their names are John and Charlie and they’re standing in front of one of the great palaces in Venice, with these huge columns in the front, when the following conversation takes place ...

[John Bridger](#): I feel so optimistic. How do you feel?

[Charlie Croker](#): [shrugging] I’m fine.

[John Bridger](#): **Fine**? You know what “**fine**” stands for, don’t you?

[Charlie Croker](#): Yeah, unfortunately.

[John Bridger](#): Freaked out...

[Charlie Croker](#): Insecure...

[John Bridger](#): Neurotic...

[Charlie Croker](#): And Emotional.

[John Bridger](#): You see those columns behind you?

¹ The Introduction is adapted from “*It’s Narcissist Friday*” by Rev. David Orrison, from the blog graceformyheart, 10/23/15. The information on the movie *The Italian Job* comes from www.imdb.com.

[Charlie Croker](#): [looks behind him and sees the columns] What about them?

[John Bridger](#): That's where they used to string up thieves who felt **fine**.

[Charlie Croker](#): After you.

Freaked Out, Insecure, Neurotic, and Emotional. So the next time your wife says “*I’m FINE*” you know now what she means. Well we’ve come to the end of Exodus 4 and we’re going to see that Moses’ wife has an “*I’m FINE*” moment. It’s a strange passage and we’ll see that, in this case, being Freaked Out, Insecure, Neurotic, and Emotional is completely understandable.

The other day I was reading a blog by another pastor and I thought what he wrote was very applicable to this issue. This is what he said ... “A friend of mine recently went around a room straightening curtains and pictures. Now, I’m tempted to label him OCD, but he is simply a person who has a keen eye for **incongruity**. He sees things that don’t fit and, when he can, he does something about it. Most of us live regularly with things that don’t fit. We may not even see them. **But we usually FEEL them.** There’s a whole movement of interior decorating and design that promises to minimize the feelings of incongruity we often feel in our homes or at work. The idea is that incongruity adds to our stress, even when we don’t know it.

When something is wrong in your world, what should you do? You can’t see it, but you know it’s there. Something isn’t right. Maybe you feel it in your body. Not exactly pain, but discomfort. A sense that things aren’t what they should be. Maybe it’s something with your child. Nothing you can point to, but something worries you. Maybe it’s something in your marriage. You don’t even want to admit the feeling to yourself. You shrug it off ... over and over. You tell yourself that everything’s okay. You reinterpret the words that were said, the discovery you made, and blame the suspicions on yourself. You convince yourself that **you’re fine**. And he didn’t say what you thought you heard. And she couldn’t have meant that. **We want things** to be okay. **We’re invested** in things being okay. We don’t want to have to deal with things not being okay.

Yet, at those moments, a part of us knows that **something’s not okay**. And, when we experience this within ourselves, we discover something called “*cognitive dissonance*.” *Cognitive dissonance* is the technical term for Freaked Out, Insecure, Neurotic, and Emotional. “*Cognitive dissonance*,” just as the words indicate, is made up of two competing harmonies. It would be like listening to two songs at the same time. The attempt is both uncomfortable and futile, so we find ways to adjust. We sense the **incongruity**, but we convince ourselves that everything’s okay. After all, we were taught to doubt ourselves. “It’s just me,” we say. It isn’t hard to dismiss the feeling that something is off.

The brain does this often with sounds and smells, even sights. For example, you can work all day in a certain room without noticing the hum of the fluorescent lights until someone turns them off. We all know the relief that comes when the hum is gone, but we didn’t hear it or notice it before. Your brain does this because you have to focus. It rightly categorizes the sounds of ticking clocks, whirring fans, and humming lights as understandable and not important. The stress is there, but not particularly uncomfortable. At least not as uncomfortable as it would be if you had to focus on all those sounds.

Most of us have learned to do with our relationships. We hear things that are said and we let them go. It isn’t just forgiveness. It’s self-preservation. With some people, we have to let go of a lot. They give orders rather than requests. They tear down rather than build up. They speak

with a mean spirit, rather than a kind heart. And we let them. We excuse them. We feel the **incongruity** and we let it go. We adjust the reality **we see** so that it fits the reality **we want**.

But what do you do when **one person** doesn't notice it and has adjusted their perception so it doesn't bother them anymore. They just let it go, and makes it fit the reality they want? However, the **other person**, your spouse, your boss, your kid, your parent ... **does notice** something's wrong, there's an **incongruity**, and it's creating a lot of stress? **Something Has To Be Done**. When something is wrong, eventually we have to acknowledge it as wrong. Then make a conscious choice. Confronting the **incongruity** has a cost, but so does covering it up. And you're forced to choose what you'll do.

And that's the situation here in Exodus 4. A lot of **good** things are happening. Things are getting **better**. Moses has talked with God and things are moving **forward**. All of his excuses have been **answered**. His objections have been **resolved**. But there's a problem. **And it's a big problem**. It doesn't fit with the rest of the story. And Moses is letting it go; besides, he's told himself ... it doesn't really matter. But it does to his wife. She knows this problem is **serious**. She knows it has to be dealt with. She's **Freaked Out, Insecure, Neurotic, and Emotional** and **Something Has To Be Done**. So let's turn to Exodus 4 and see what's going on. Good things are happening and so it starts off well with a ...

v. 18–20a: BLESSING ²

“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.”¹⁹ And the LORD said to Moses in Midian, “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, and went back to the land of Egypt.”

Here, we're told of Moses' preparations to return to Egypt. God has to command Moses to go. He goes with the assurance of God, yet he's clearly fearful of what lies ahead. He goes dependent upon the power of God. In other words, it's very clear that **God** is the One who's redeeming **His** people, Moses is **His** spokesman, **His** messenger, **His** mediator, but it's **the power of God**, it's **the heart of God** for **His** people that's going to lead to their redemption.

Look at 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 are still alive.”* Moses had flocks with him when he was meeting God at Sinai, so he couldn't just leave from Sinai and go straight to Egypt. He had to go back to his father-in-law, Jethro, and take the flocks back to him. And he at least shows the courtesy of seeking his father-in-law's **blessing** before going on his journey. This followed the traditional custom, and it speaks well of Moses. But it's interesting? If you look at verse 18, Moses doesn't tell Jethro the whole story, or at least he doesn't tell **us** that he told Jethro the whole story. If indeed, this is all he told Jethro, I wonder if Moses thought that Jethro thought that **he was crazy** for doing what he was about to do.

2 The Exposition of the text is adapted from the book, Exodus: An EP Study Commentary, Volume 1, by Dr. John Currid, pages 111–119. And the sermons, “Hardening Pharaoh's Heart” 12/31/00 and “The People Believed, Worshiped and are Afflicted” 1/7/01, both by Dr. J. Ligon Duncan, Chancellor, Reformed Theological Seminary, preached at First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS; and “A Bridegroom of Blood” by Rev. David Strain, Senior Minister of First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, 10/19/14, www.fpcjackson.org.

Whatever the reason, Moses says to Jethro, “*Please let me go back to my brothers in Egypt to see whether they are still alive.*” That phrase indicates that Moses is concerned for the general welfare of his people in Egypt. Moses wants to see how they’ve been fairing in Egypt since he left them some **forty years ago**. In verse 19, we have the Lord coming to Moses again, while he’s still in Midian, and assuring him of His purposes for him. God assures Moses that those who had sought to kill him before are now dead. He’s telling him that the coast is clear for him to enter back into Egypt. And God gives Moses a ...

v. 21–23: PROMISE

“*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, so that he will not let the people go.²² Then 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 Me.” If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.’”*”

In verse 21, God tells Moses to confront Pharaoh with the signs. God announces His intentions to Moses, but then He tells Moses that He plans to harden Pharaoh’s heart. In other words, the Exodus is about God’s **sovereignty**, it’s about His **worship**, it’s about His **kingdom**, and **Pharaoh is in the way**. God is telling Moses not only what He wants him to do, but also He’s telling him that He plans to harden Pharaoh’s heart. In verse 21, God is saying, “Moses, confront Pharaoh with these signs ... these miracles. But let me tell you something ahead of time.” Look at the end of verse 21. He tells Moses that Pharaoh’s **not going** to listen to his pleas, he’s **not going** to be impressed by the signs, and he’s **not going** to let Israel go. Now Moses, “Go and tell Pharaoh this, but he’s **not going** to listen to you.”

Now how would that have made you feel if you were the messenger? Go Moses. You’re going to be totally **ineffective** in your proclamation. Pharaoh’s **not going** to do anything that you ask him to. In fact, I have **decreed** that Pharaoh is **not going** to respond to what I have **decreed** for you to tell him.

God doesn’t simply tell Moses that Pharaoh **won’t** listen, and Pharaoh **won’t** let his people go. God goes a step further, and says that He Himself, God, is going to **harden Pharaoh’s heart**. And thus, we see a display of **God’s sovereignty**. In this story of Moses and Pharaoh, over the next several chapters, the idea of hardening Pharaoh’s heart will be used in **three different ways**. It will be said that God hardens Pharaoh’s heart. It will be said that Pharaoh hardens Pharaoh’s heart. And it will be said that Pharaoh’s heart was hardened. **The first one**, God hardening Pharaoh’s heart, is describing God’s sovereignty. **The second one**, Pharaoh hardening Pharaoh’s heart, is describing man’s responsibility. And **the third one**, that Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, is simply describing the fact of the matter. It’s describing what had indeed happened to the heart of Pharaoh.

What does it mean? Well, clearly we see here God’s **sovereignty** in hardening Pharaoh’s heart. God **deliberately** sends Moses to Egypt to make a spectacle of Pharaoh. God had told Moses He would do so in **Exodus 3:19–20**, [This is God speaking] “*But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand.²⁰ So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go.*” God tells Moses that He knows that Pharaoh will have to be **compelled** to let Israel go. But He goes even further. He tells Moses that He is going to harden Pharaoh’s heart so that He **won’t** let His

people go. This shows God's complete control over the situation. He will deliver in the way that He wants to deliver.

John Currid, an Old Testament professor at Reformed Theological Seminary, has shed important light on this phrase, "*the hardening of the heart.*" Dr. Currid tells us that that can literally be translated, "*I will make his heart heavy.*" The phrase is apparently an allusion to Egyptian beliefs about the after-life. The ancient Egyptians believe that those whose hearts were weighed and found **heavy** in the after-life were **condemned**. While those whose hearts were judged light in the after-life were considered blessed. Do you see what Moses is saying here? God is so **sovereign** that He has determined that the god of Egypt will be **condemned** in the after-life. The God of Israel has made that judgment over Pharaoh, over the embodiment of the Egyptian gods. God wants everyone to know that God, and God alone, is **sovereign**. Though the Egyptians considered Pharaoh to be a god, yet the God of Israel is so **sovereign** as to make heavy the heart of Egypt's god, leading to eternal **condemnation**.

Then look at verses 22 and 23, God tells Moses to let Pharaoh know about the special relationship that Israel has to God. Or rather, the special relationship that **God** has to Israel. Israel is His firstborn — three things about this. First, in verse 22 we see a phrase introduced that has **never before been used** in the Bible, but will be used hundreds of times from now on. It's the phrase, *Thus says the Lord*. Or even better, in the King James, "*Thus Sayeth The Lord.*" It's the classic formula whereby a prophet announces that he's delivering the words of God **verbatim**. Everyone in the Ancient Near East would have known that when a prophet entered the room and announced "*Thus Sayeth The Lord,*" he was claiming to speak not his own words, not his own ideas, but **the very words of the God who had sent him**. And in this passage Moses is to announce to Pharaoh that what is about to be spoken to him is **the very word of the God of Israel**.

Second, notice what that word is, "*Moses, tell Pharaoh this. Israel is My son, Israel is My firstborn.*" The status of being **firstborn** was one of tremendous importance in the ancient world. It's still pretty important in some parts of the world. But it was of tremendous importance in the Ancient Near East. It meant that you had the headship of the family upon your father's death. It meant that you received a double portion of the inheritance, and this is **the only place** in the Old Testament where Israel is identified as the **firstborn** of God.

That image of the **preeminence** of Israel amongst all the nations as the **firstborn** will be transferred in the New Testament to the Lord Jesus Christ who has **preeminence** above all things, **Colossians 1:15-18**, "*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.* ¹⁶ *For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things were created through Him and for Him.* ¹⁷ *And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.* ¹⁸ *And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent.*" And so, just as He would do years later with Jesus, so now God announces that Israel, His people, has a unique relationship with Him giving them **preeminence** amongst all the peoples in the earth.

And third, God says to Pharaoh, end of verse 23, "*I will kill your son, your firstborn, because you have not listened to Me.*" Now I shouldn't need to say that's not **the most politically correct thing** that Moses could have said to Pharaoh in their first meeting. I mean ... God has given Moses these words to speak to Pharaoh, but they constitute **a direct assault** on

the royal succession of Egypt. In other words, Moses is basically saying to Pharaoh that **my God** will determine who will sit on **your throne**. And He has determined that **your son** will not be the one who will sit on **your throne**. You cannot imagine a more shocking announcement to the most powerful monarch in the world than that. But of course that announcement is sort of a pre-announcement of the final plague, isn't it, the plague of death in Egypt. What Pharaoh didn't know, and perhaps couldn't have known at that time, was that this judgment would be far more severe than simply the judgment of his own son. It would mean the loss of **all the firstborn of Egypt**, as we'll see in Exodus 11 and 12.

So what's the point of this section? The Lord of Israel is **sovereign**. It is God who determines who'll sit on the throne of Egypt, and Moses needs to be very, very aware of that. His people need to be very, very aware of that. And the announcement of that to Egypt constitutes one of the central themes of Moses' encounters with Pharaoh. Egypt must know that God is the Lord, because the nations must know that God is the Lord. For He is the creator, and He is sovereign. But now we've come to the *Cognitive Dissonance* part. Now we see what "*I'm FINE*" looks like. Because now there's a big problem. And it's Moses' lack of ...

v. 24–26: **OBEDIENCE**³

"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."

Surely this is the most mysterious part of the passage. You have to ask yourself the question, **What's going on here?** Moses is almost killed by God. It seems to me that what we're being told that God is holy and will not be trifled with. Why does God seek to kill Moses? Because Moses had been **disobedient** to the commandment of God. This strange event *at the lodging place on the way*, in which God seeks to kill Moses, illustrates both the significance of **God's covenant signs** and the importance of **obedience**.

Moses was the divinely appointed spokesman for God. And yet **he had not obeyed the commands of God** from **Genesis 17:9–14** to circumcise his son. And so God would not suffer such a **blatant lawbreaker** to deliver the law to His people at Sinai. Nor would He allow **the covenant sign** of circumcision to be taken lightly. Integrity and **obedience** must characterize His prophets. Holiness is the clothing in which God's people serve Him, especially those whom He calls to represent Him before His people in the world. So here in Exodus 4 we see God seeking **judgment** against Moses because of His **disobedience**.

Second, in verses 25 and 26 we see God, **not for the first time in the book of Exodus**, showing His **sovereignty** by bringing deliverance through a woman. God's **sovereignty** is clearly displayed this way throughout the first few chapters of Exodus. Remember, we saw God's frustration of Pharaoh's power through using godly women over and over again in the early chapters of Exodus.

Here, however, something even more striking occurs. Moses' wife has an "*I'm FINE*" moment. She realizes that God sought to put Moses **to death** and immediately she became **Freaked Out, Insecure, Neurotic, and Emotional**. She grabs a flint knife, circumcises her son, and throws the bloody tissue at Moses' feet. **Hello!** Rule #1: **Don't Upset Zipporah**. Or in the

³ Part of this section is adapted from The Road to Redemption by Rabbi Burton Visotzky, pages 83–84.

modern American translation, “If Momma ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy. I’m pretty sure Gershom, Moses’ son, he ain’t happy. I can pretty much flat guarantee that. There’s a reason this ritual is done at an age when you can’t remember anything. But not Gershom, we’re talking nightmares for life. Just sayin’

In his commentary, Rabbi Burton Visotzky writes, “Zipporah sees the danger that lies ahead. It may well be that she and her children are endangered by Moses’ mission. When she takes the flint in hand, Zipporah acknowledges the power of the covenant. ... We should pause for a moment to marvel at Zipporah. She’s not an Israelite, she’s a Midianite. And so far, she’s been fairly meek and mild. Unable to withstand the shepherds, she looked to Moses for support. Relating the events to her father, he scolded her for not inviting Moses home. Given to Moses in marriage, it appears that she passively acquiesces, and just as passively, bears him children. **Yet the moment** that her husband and her child are threatened, Zipporah jumps into the breach **And Takes On God**. In the midst of this very male narrative, filled with blood and death threats, Zipporah acts decisively to save Moses, and with him, the future of Israel.”

There’s a quick reminder here that the sign of the covenant, circumcision in the Old Testament and baptism in the New Testament, is not to be neglected – not then, not now. **The Westminster Confession of Faith**, chapter 28, tells us that neglect of this sacrament is a very great sin. It’s a **sign** of membership in the people of God, the outward **seal** of God’s very great and precious promises. So if you haven’t been baptized, or your children haven’t been baptized, please come talk to me. God takes this way more seriously than we do.

Moses own wife, Zipporah, is **God’s chosen instrument** to spare Moses not from Pharaoh, but from God Himself. Zipporah performs immediate, emergency, life-saving surgery and circumcises her son and touches Moses’ feet with the bloody results — which seems to have been a way to identify Moses with her action. “I want this to be considered as though Moses had done it, this to be the fulfillment of Moses’ **obligation** that Moses might live.” By means of blood, she rescues her bridegroom and receives him back. “*A bridegroom of blood you are now to me.*” It’s really not clear what she means; **what is clear** is that her action **saves Moses’ life**. She saves his life. Their son receives the sign of the covenant and the blood that is placed upon Moses **delivers Moses from death**.

Thus, Zipporah becomes the intercessor for Moses ... whom God has appointed to be the intercessor for Israel. Can you imagine a more striking way for God to simultaneously display His holiness? He’s sending this sinful man into Egypt who himself needed forgiveness, and his wife mediated for him by carrying out the obedience that he should have done himself. God is holy, God is sovereign, God is redeemer, God governs and sustains by His ...

v. 27–28: PROVIDENCE

“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.”

Now we see the brothers, Aaron and Moses, meet in the wilderness and prepare for the mission that God had given them. But I want you to see that even in this incident God **encourages** Moses by **His providence**. By divine revelation, the Lord comes to Aaron in verse 27 and tells him to meet Moses in the wilderness. Moses had asked for a spokesman. God gave him a spokesman in his brother Aaron, but Moses doesn’t have to seek out Aaron. God does that

for him. What an **encouragement** that must have been. Moses doesn't have to go find his brother. God has already spoken to his brother and his brother's found him.

He's not only found him, he finds him at the mountain of **God**. The same place where **God** met with Moses, where **God had revealed** himself to Moses, where **God had revealed** his plan to Moses, where **God had revealed** Moses' role in that plan, where **God had revealed** the words that Moses was to say, where **God had revealed** the signs that Moses was to show. And at the meeting we're told, verse 28, that Moses taught Aaron everything **God** had told him to say. And he shows him the **revealed** signs that **God** had given him. Facing the huge challenge before him, Moses was surely **encouraged** by God's **providence** indicating **that God** was with him. **That God** was looking out for him. **That God** was going to provide for him every step of the way.

And we, too, ought to look for **God's providence** in our own lives and be **encouraged** by it and be **thankful** for it. Do you look for **God's providence** in your life? Do you see the **encouragement** that **God** has unfolded in your own life? Whether He has called you to a specific mission or whether He has called you to simple faithfulness. Are you looking for the signs of **God's encouragement** in that? As you do, I think you'll find ample opportunity for giving thanks to God. And if you don't, you will miss opportunities for thanking God ... which will actually **weaken** your faith, because in the very process of thanking God for His **encouragements** and **providence**, we're reminded how actively He's involved in our everyday lives. That's how God **encourages** Moses. And that's how God continues to **encourage** us today. God **encourages** us through His **providence**, His ongoing activity in our everyday lives.

And when we **recognize** that, when we're **encouraged** by that, when we're **thankful** for that, it builds our ...

v. 29–31: FAITH

"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."

Now, at the end of our passage, we see that Aaron speaks to the elders, and Moses performs the signs before the people. But it becomes clear, even in these three little verses, that the people's **biggest challenge** in the Exodus is still ahead of them. The people's **biggest challenge**, in all the trials that are still ahead of them, is going to be one of **FAITH**. Those trials are going to start in the very next passage. They've already been enduring much — 400 years of slavery. And now the temperature's going to be turned up. God's redemptive work has begun, and **things don't get better, they get worse**. But the biggest challenge **is not going** to be Pharaoh, **it's not going** to be the taskmasters, the biggest challenge that the children of Israel face **is to believe God's word**. That's the biggest challenge that they have before them.

Let me explain. In verse 29 Moses and Aaron gather, and they speak to the elders of Israel, the representatives of the people. And God had told Moses that he was to speak to them, and he was to reveal to them God's plan; and to show them the signs that they might recognize God's appointment of Moses as deliverer of His people. So in verse 30 we're told that Aaron and Moses did exactly what God told them to do. They spoke the words of the Lord to them, and performed the signs. Notice the four things that Moses and Aaron have done in verses 29 and 30.

They set off for Egypt, **in obedience to God's command**.

They gather the elders, verse 29, **in obedience to God's command**.

They speak the Lord's words, verse 30, **in obedience to God's command**.

And they do the signs, verse 30, **in obedience to God's commands**.

Now, that whole event seems to presuppose that Israel is going to have **a hard time believing** God's promises and plan. Why would the showing of the signs be needed if there wasn't going to be **a struggle to believe** on the part of Israel? Now, as we continue to read through this story, that's precisely what happens. It's interesting that God grants signs because of **the weakness of their faith**. And it shouldn't be surprising then that we meet troubles in the area of faith as well. God is already preparing to deal with His people in the area of faith.

Now the initial response in verse 31 is very encouraging. The people believe what Moses announces to them. They believe, we might call it, **the gospel of Exodus**. And they instinctively respond in worship to the message that the Lord was concerned about them and that He had seen their affliction. And it's interesting that the core of **the Exodus gospel** is also at the core of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. God has seen and is concerned for the affliction of His people. And so He's sent a redeemer. This moves the people of God to faith and to worship. In these verses, it has been announced by Moses and Aaron, to the elders and to the people of Israel, that the liberation of Israel has begun. How great is their emotion at the thought of God coming to rescue His people, and Moses and Aaron announcing the liberation of Israel has begun. But it's clear that in all of this, the biggest challenge for Israel is going **to believe that God's word is true**. Trials are going to get more difficult for them, not less. They're going to be tempted to discount what God's said. And so the great challenge for them is **to believe**, to trust in God, to have faith in God.

It's the same way with us today. You know, I've noticed something, if you put someone in a tight spot, even for Christians, we begin to think of ourselves as the **exception** to the rule; we're **the one person** that doesn't need to do it the way that God has said in His word. We need to do it differently because our situation is **entirely different**. And yet **we all know** what we really need to do. We really need to trust God's word. He didn't make a mistake when He put down His promises. He didn't make a mistake when He put down His law. He knew what He's talking about. And He requires us to trust in His word, even when, and **perhaps especially when, we can't see how it's going to turn out**. And I don't care what circumstance you're in. If you're in a difficult marital circumstance, the main thing you need to do is trust God's word. If you are in a difficult job circumstance, if things are falling down all around you, the main thing you have to do is trust God's word. That's always the biggest challenge for God's people.

And Pharaoh makes it seem like a huge challenge. Let me say that over the next few chapters, God is going to make a mockery of Pharaoh. Pharaoh is going to be shown to be a fool. Pharaoh **isn't** Israel's problem. **Israel** is Israel's problem. And God's going to manifest Himself in glory in Israel through teaching them that **He Is Worth Trusting**. And when He says it, He'll do it. And that's their great challenge, to trust the Lord. And that's our great challenge as well. The collapsing culture isn't our greatest challenge. The relational challenges we face at home, at work, and at school aren't our greatest challenge. Even experiencing *Cognitive dissonance* and those moments when "*I'm FINE*" don't constitute our greatest challenge. I think that it's clear that in all of this, the biggest challenge for us is **believing that God's word is true**. Trials are going to get more difficult for us, not less. We're going to be tempted to

discount what God's said. And so the greatest challenge for us is **to believe**, to trust in God, to have faith in God.

Think about that ... Pray for that ... start now.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Our Lord and our God, thank You that You have spoken to us by Your Son. Open our eyes that we might see our sin and then see our Savior. You are awesome in Your might and wondrous in Your plans. Help us as Your people to trust You in every circumstance of life, remembering what You have taught us about Yourself in Your Word, remembering how You revealed Yourself to us in Your promises and in Your providence. And for this, we give You thanks. Build our faith, in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

This message has been lightly edited and formatted for the web page. No attempt has been made to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template. There may be slight differences with the audio version. Should there be any questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any error to be with the original speaker and should contact him directly. For full copyright, reproduction and permissions information, please visit the PHPC Copyright statement at www.PotomacHills.org.

Romans 4:20-25

*“No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted **to us who believe in Him** who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”*