

#4 “Fear God, the Righteous Judge”

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Most of us are familiar with the story of Moses, but we may have missed this short but major incident in his life. It happened just after God’s revelation to him by the burning bush and just before he went with his wife and son to to speak to Pharaoh for the first time.

Regarding Moses, in Exodus 4:24-26, we read: "Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the LORD met him and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin and threw it at Moses’ feet, and she said, ‘You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.’ So He let him alone. At that time she said, ‘You are a bridegroom of blood’--because of the circumcision." God, after having just chosen Moses as his appointed deliverer for His people, goes to put him to death. What could Moses have done that was so odious to God to make God quickly want to execute His chosen deliverer? Moses had murdered an Egyptian, and God didn’t discipline him for that, as far as we are told. Even when Moses refused to speak for God, though God burned with anger, He didn’t threaten to kill Moses. What did Moses do that was so heinous? Actually, it is what Moses did not do that was so upsetting to God. God had given the distinguishing mark of His presence and association through the rite of circumcision. Surely, Moses, a Hebrew by birth, knew of this. Yet his own son was not circumcised when he should have been. It would be super-hypocritical to be the deliverer of God’s people and to refuse to obey God in what defined the nation of Israel (i.e. circumcision) by not circumcising his own son. Thus, this act of disobedience was greatly offensive to God.

Somehow Zipporah, Moses’ wife, was made aware of God’s intention to kill Moses. How this happened we are not told, but clearly God let her in on what was about to happen. She immediately circumcised their son and placed the foreskin at Moses’ feet, symbolizing obedience and submission to his desires, customs, and God. This seems to imply that up to this point she had defied Moses’ desires to circumcise their son. Though Zipporah was clearly disobedient to God, God also held Moses responsible as both parents are together responsible for raising their children. Moses, as the head of the household, certainly bore at least some responsibility for failing to obey God in this most fundamental of Jewish ordinances. Thus, it was just for God to hold Moses responsible.

God was merciful to Moses by working to bring Zipporah in line with Israelite customs. If Moses’ own wife was not willing to follow Israelite customs, there would have been reason to disrespect his leadership. Why would Israel want to be delivered by a Hebrew who married a pagan foreigner? God needed to bring things into harmony and into the proper order so that Moses would be fit for God’s call upon His life.

We can learn several lessons from this incident. First, God takes sin seriously. God was

merciful, though He burned with anger, when Moses refused to speak for Him. But after the failure to circumcise his son, judgment was ready to be poured out. Thus, we ought not to put our Lord to the test by our lack of faith or disobedience (Deuteronomy 6:16). The second truth is that no one person is above correction. Moses, the most humble man on earth (Numbers 12:3) and the deliverer of Israel, was still accountable to God for doing the little things right. Never are there exceptions to God's rules as God shows no partiality. Thirdly, an important part of spiritual leadership and preparation by God for effective service is that a man would be able to lead his family properly. God was working to bring harmony into Moses' home, a respect for his leadership and desires, and a love and submission to the God of Israel.

Of those three applications, the one that comes through most potently in the reading of this passage is that God takes sin seriously. The thrust of this passage is on the fact that God moved to kill the person He had just appointed to deliver His people. In light of this truth, we ought to not leave this passage without being introspective and asking the Spirit of God to examine our hearts for any outstanding sin issues. If Moses wasn't beyond the righteous judgment of God, neither are we. God executed Ananias and Sapphira for what we might call a small sin of keeping back some of the proceeds from a sale of personal property that was supposed to go fully to the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 11:29-30, we learn that some are sick and dead because of the fact that they have not judged the body rightly before the Lord's Table. They have let sin go unconfessed, making a mockery of their remembrance of the sacrifice of Christ on their behalf. In light of these truths, we had better fear our God always (Proverbs 28:14, 1 Peter 1:17). We don't have to fear His wrath, for that was poured out upon Christ on our behalf, but we should fear His discipline, holiness, righteousness, and judgment. The fact of the matter is that we can invoke God's judgment and discipline if we harden our hearts toward Him in disobedience. 1 Corinthians 11:32 says, "But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world." God's judgment of believers is discipline for those whom He loves, and its purpose is to prove our sonship in Him. We may be judged, but we will not be condemned. Yet the thought of God's judgment ought to be enough to cause us to live righteously.

Do we have anything that we need to confess, resolve, or repent of? Are we hiding any secret sins? We need to deal with our sin before the mercy of God takes the form of discipline and judgment. If we have developed an attitude that mocks God, let us remember that He is not mocked, just as a loving father doesn't tolerate disrespect from his children. God will hold us accountable for how we serve Him while on the earth (1 Peter 1:17, 2 Corinthians 5:10). In light of the righteous judgment of God, let's commit our ways to the Lord today in purity, enjoying and soaking in the goodness, glory, majesty, and blessing of God. Let's stop testing the limits of God's patience and start tasting of His goodness (Psalm 34:8).