

Text: Exod. 4:27-5:2

Title: True obedience encourages others to obey

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Introduction: In chemistry a *catalyst* is a substance that helps to speed up a certain chemical process. The healthy human body uses catalysts called *enzymes* to accomplish much of what a human body has to do. In fact, I have read that “most biochemical reactions are so slow that they would not occur under the mild conditions of temperature and pressure that are compatible with life. Enzymes accelerate the rates of such reactions by well over a million-fold, so reactions that would take years in the absence of catalysis can occur in fractions of seconds if catalyzed by the appropriate enzyme. Cells contain thousands of different enzymes, and their activities determine which of the many possible chemical reactions actually take place within the cell.” [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK9921/>].

We are truly fearfully and wonderfully made. Not only do our bodies conduct biochemistry, they do so with powerful catalysts. Without these catalysts, those processes would take way too long to sustain life. Getting Moses to the point of true obedience has been a process that has taken way too long.

With the end of chapter four, we have come to the end of the first part of the Book of Exodus, the part we have titled, “The need for deliverance and the provision of a deliverer.” The need for deliverance was Israel’s state of bondage in Egypt, emblematic of the sinner’s slavery to sin. It is a need that had persisted for hundreds of year.

Moses, of course, is God's choice to provide a deliverer, and at times it has felt like this has taken a long time too. I suggested that the fateful night of verse 24 was an evening in which Moses learned finally the importance of true obedience to God's call in his life. I think it may have been the night he wrote the words of Psalm 90, which ends:

"Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it." Finally, as we come to the end of this chapter, Moses is ready to do with his hands the work that requires true obedience.

Moses is beginning to truly obey, and as he does so, we see how his obedience begins to work as a catalyst that encourages the obedience of others. I want our lives to see that it is also true in our case: our true obedience can encourage others to obey. We will examine this truth under three headings this morning – one-another encouragement to obey; leader-follower encouragement to obey; and how we must face discouraging disobedience at times.

I. We need the one-another encouragement of true obedience (4:27-29).

Illustration: As I think back over the course of my life, I can remember a handful of "best friends." Perhaps you can do the same. I heard this past week from the new pastor of Beth Eden Baptist Church in Fitchburg, MA, and he mentioned that he knew one of those best friends I have had, Dave Reinhardt, under whom I trained for ministry at the Baptist Church of Danbury.

I can remember many times that Dave came through for me as a best friend. Those are precious memories for me of our relationship.

Application: Moses is writing here about his older brother long after the episode that he writes about. He is looking back as he writes and remembering one of his best friends and an intimate co-laborer. By then, Horeb had become “the mount of God,” for they had experienced the wonders of Sinai together. They had gone through tremendous times of serving the Lord together.

And one of the things Moses remembers here about their service together was that very early in their work in a common cause, God told Aaron to go meet Moses in the wilderness, and Aaron went. Aaron obeyed. He took that first step, and that step of obedience was a great encouragement to his younger brother to obey the Lord at a critical time.

If we remember that Aaron would have been one of the slaves of Egypt when God told him to go into the wilderness to meet Moses, we will appreciate that his obedience would have required some personal risk. Perhaps there was a family to be left behind in Egypt. We will read later in Exodus about Aaron’s four sons, but here it seems that for a time in order to obey God, he had to be willing to leave his family for a time. He obeys; he kisses Moses; he listens as Moses explains what further obedience was going to mean (v. 28); and he teams up with Moses to encourage obedience in the elders of Israel, none of whom would have known Moses the way they knew Aaron (v. 29).

And so, we see the importance of the way we encourage one another’s obedience by obeying ourselves. We not only obey the Lord, but also we make it easier for others to obey

the Lord when we obey the Lord. Aaron did that for Moses. Our obedience is an important catalyst for the obedience of God's church. Paul put it this way, "That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:25-27).

Unfortunately, we also learn from the examples of both Aaron and Moses that because we are a body and dependent on the obedience of one another for encouragement, disobedience to the Lord absolutely hurts more than just ourselves. It discourages the whole body. Our disobedience hurts one another.

We see the harm caused Moses by Aaron's disobedience in the golden calf incident especially (Exod. 32:35, "And the Lord plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made). Moses smashes the tablets and has to get new ones after interceding with the Lord for Israel's survival. That was not a fun day.

And we see the harm cause Aaron by Moses's disobedience in the rock-striking incident especially (Num. 20:24, "Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah."). Moses failed to treat the Lord as holy on that occasion, and he led Aaron tragically to do the same.

Who is your obedience helping to obey? Who is your disobedience harming? What side of this equation do we see ourselves on this morning? How might we go about answering that question? Well, our church covenant is a document that speaks of our commitment to encourage one an-

other through our obedience to the Lord as a local church. Pull it out, and give it another reading. Then answer the questions about whether we are encouraging or discouraging the obedience of one another.

Like Moses and Aaron, we have the capacity for good or evil in this regard. Let's choose obedience so that we can encourage the good. We need the one-another encouragement of true obedience.

II. We need the leader-follower encouragement of true obedience (4:30 - 5:1).

Illustrations: We are praying for our civic leaders and doing our best to follow their direction in an encouraging way as the threat of a coronavirus pandemic continues to concern them. Some leaders are performing better than others in this time of the fear of a crisis. Arguments rage over who is and who is not providing good leadership these days.

Much has been written about what constitutes a good leader. I read a couple of quotes in this regard: "A good leader is one who takes more than his fair share of the blame and less than his fair share of the credit" (John Maxwell). I am told that Albert Einstein said that "the leader is one who, out of clutter brings simplicity. . . out of discord, harmony . . . and out of difficulty, opportunity." These are wise words.

Application: Biblically, more than anything else, the good leader is the good follower of Jesus Christ. The good leader is the one who provides an example to others of obedience that should encourage them to obey as well. The apostle Paul put it this way: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). That's leadership for the churches of Christ. The most important part of being a local church leader is being an obedient follower of Jesus Christ.

In our passage, Moses, Aaron, and the elders gather the people they seek to lead together and they point them to what God has said in His word and miraculous signs (v. 30). They are telling the people, God has said for us to do this, we are here to do it, and therefore follow us as we follow what the Lord has said. The point was not that a great man should be followed, but that the Lord has visited us and seen our affliction (v. 31). He cares about our bondage and He has promised to set us free. He is worthy of our obedience.

And that is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Similar to Moses and Aaron, Jesus is our Leader, the Apostle and High Priest of our profession (Heb. 3:1). And what was this Leader of ours like? "He was faithful to him that appointed Him" (Heb. 3:2). Our Leader was the Great Obeyer. He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Think of how that obedience has catalyzed more obedience! Without the obedience of His work of atonement, none of us would have any hope of obeying the Lord. But with it, we can respond the way these people respond to Moses. We can be catalyzed by Christ's obedience.

Note this response - they believe, they bow their heads, and they worship. Because of the obedience of their apostle and priest, Israel found that the Lord truly did see their affliction and had come to change their lives and save them from bondage. The obedience of our Apostle and High Priest should remind us of the same as a local church.

What has been our response to our Apostle and High Priest? Have we believed on Him for salvation, bowed before Him in humility, and worshipped our God because of Him? Remember what the Great Obeyer said about what it will take for us to follow Him. Jesus said that we have to

deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and obey like He obeyed. We live for Him and His body, the church, not ourselves.

And so following Christ is the nature of leader-follower encouragement to obey. But leader-follower encouragement to obey is by no means a one-way street. Leaders must encourage obedience, but they need to be encouraged to obey by obedient followers as well. This wonderful response from the people of Israel was important preparation for Moses and Aaron's interview with Pharaoh, and so we read specifically, "And *afterward* Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh" (5:1).

Paul spoke of his follower Timothy's encouragement, "I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee." In this last dark hour of difficulty, Timothy's unfeigned faith encouraged the heart of his leader Paul. It was unfeigned faith because it was faithful, obedient faith.

III. We must at times face the discouragement that opposes true obedience (5:2).

Illustration: C. H. MacIntosh: "Pharaoh most truly expressed, in these words, his real condition. His condition was one of ignorance and consequent disobedience. Both go together. If God be not known, He cannot be obeyed; for obedience is ever founded upon knowledge."

Application: Obedience is ever founded upon the right answer to Pharaoh's question, and disobedience is ever

founded upon the wrong answer to Pharaoh's question. Do you know the Lord? It is not your claims that answer that question; it is your commitment to obeying Him that gives the true answer. Pharaoh's opinion of the Lord was that He is not someone who has to be taken seriously enough to be obeyed. When we disobey the Lord, we are coming to the very same conclusion. We are telling ourselves that whoever the Lord is, He is not someone we have to take seriously enough to obey.

Conclusion: What did Pharaoh think the answer to his question was? He thought that the Lord was the weak God of the Hebrews who was unable to give them any freedom or even a land of their own. Pharaoh is about to find out how sadly mistaken he is. Perhaps some believe the God of New Boston Baptist Church is not to be taken seriously enough to be obeyed. Look how small and oppressed they are, after all. But our God is the God of Exodus, and we must become a church that knows He must be obeyed.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*