

Assuring Signs

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[0 : 00] Now I want us to continue for a little while this evening looking at Exodus. We're going to work through some of these chapters in the next few weeks in the summer and hopefully take these truths and apply them to our own hearts.

We saw this morning that Moses was a reluctant leader and that continues this evening, a reluctant leader.

He wasn't particularly keen on doing what God was asking him to do. It wasn't an easy thing God was asking him to do, but nonetheless he wasn't particularly keen. Now often in our lives we're reluctant Christians.

Well I am, I'm a reluctant Christian very often and I don't see what I should see and I don't believe what I should believe and I don't live the way I should live in the light of who God is and what he has done.

But God is hugely patient and for that we should be eternally grateful. We should all stop each day and praise God for his patience with us and for his understanding and no more so really than in this passage where we see him persuading Moses with great miracles.

[1 : 20] The people to whom he was going didn't have a Bible, they didn't have the cross, they didn't have anything tangible in the way that we have. They had the word of prophets, they had the word passed down through word of mouth and often in these times to authenticate the message of a prophet of God he was given signs and miracles to be able to give authority to what he was saying and that's what really is happening here.

We must all go through this quickly and then apply it in our own lives and in the way God deals with us and in his patience and his grace and yet his, his Godness with us.

We mustn't take his patience as an excuse to be disobedient or to be lukewarm or to be distant from him.

God doesn't matter, he's patient anyway. That's not why we recognize his patience but because we also see his purity and his divine anger in this passage but it's very challenging and I hope very provocative and encouraging for us.

He gives Moses various signs, real signs to authenticate who he is as he's going to go to people. He's in the first verse, what if they don't believe me?

[2 : 47] Or what if they don't listen to me and say well the Lord didn't appear to you and so the Lord gives him these miracles to authenticate his message and what he's coming to do to be the redeemer of the people to take them out of Egypt.

And the first thing he does is he takes his staff, he's a shepherd remember and he's a shepherd's staff and he says take this staff and he's thrown it on the ground, he throws it on the ground and he becomes a snake and Moses runs away, he doesn't like snakes, don't blame him.

And this snake on the plane here, on this desert plane and he then, God says to him, reach out and take it again and it turns into a staff again.

And simply it's not just magic, it's not just as if he was some conjurer but there's symbolism in what he's doing also, he's reminding Moses and he would be reminding his people, the people knew about Genesis, they knew about the story of the fall, they knew these things, they knew about Satan and the serpent and the serpent had that image of evil to them and there's a reminder here that though they'll be faced with evil and though evil will be in front of them, Moses and the people aren't to be afraid of it they're to overcome that opposition because of who God is, God is sovereign, God is more powerful, God can change this evil and make it not evil and not dangerous to them, God is more powerful.

And interestingly, and I'm not sure how much, Moses would have certainly known a lot about this, but the cobra was symbol, the symbol of the cobra was on Pharaoh's head on his, it wasn't a crown, what he wore on his head there was this cobra on the front of it as a symbol of the might of his position is diminishing his strength and also the magic of his gods were symbolized in this cobra's head and yet God is saying with just a shepherd's crook, Moses would be victorious and would be unharmed and so there's this first sign that helps Moses to understand how great God is both evil, spiritual evil, sin and the devil and also against this malevolent, powerful evil that they're facing in Egypt, remember Egypt was the powerhouse of the day, it was a Roman Empire, it was the communist east, it was whatever, it was the great empire of the time, it was the great empire of its day and then he gives a second sign of a leprous hand, absolutely shocking sign not to us, because we don't really deal with leprosy today, but to have his hand made leprous when he put it into his cloak, took it out, it was frightening and the Hebrew said, it was leprous, it was horrible, diseased and all that went with that disease of alienation and of being ostracised, being cast out and then when he took his hand back into his cloak, when God commands him and takes it out, it's restored, the rest of his flesh, a further reminder of the cleaning and healing and restoring power of God and Moses himself might have felt that need for that, having been already known as a murderer because of what happened, remember years and years before when he was hounded out of Egypt, because people didn't want him because he was a murderer, he murdered an Egyptian and the reality for Moses was that he too needed that cleansing and that healing and that God was the one who would do this for him and for his people and then the third sign affects the Great River Nile, again we see it later on in the plagues, but here we see him taking water from the Nile and pouring it into the dry ground and that water becomes blood on the ground, a symbol of death and destruction and for the Egyptians particularly, water was absolutely sacred, it was worshipped, it was the source of life and power and Egypt's economy and Egypt's wealth and Egypt's greatness was partly as a result of the Nile that flowed through their country and yet here is this evidence that God is sovereign even over this and that their self-reliance on this river would lead ultimately at one level or another to their destruction so God gives three very powerful miraculous signs that he will be with him and that the people will know that what he is saying is true because of that what is Moses' response to that?

[8 : 25] I think Moses is genuinely humble, he doesn't feel able to carry out this task you know after all these great signs, we got these great signs, we got these signs that God would be with us and just through a staff on the ground and a snake is picked out, you think that's wonderful, it's fantastic and after all these great signs, three really powerful signs that spoke into the situation and spoke about the situation that we are facing, he says, Lord please send someone else to do it it's an amazing response isn't it?

Well thanks very much God, these are amazing declarations of your power but I'm going to send someone else, I'm not really the guy to do it he genuinely doesn't feel, he has the abilities and the persuasive powers to take up this role that God has given him he's genuinely full of doubt, you know right from the beginning, what if?

what if they don't? what if they don't believe? what if I can't, what if? and he's full of doubts about what will happen but that humility and that doubt leads on to stubborn resistance doesn't it?

it's more than just doubt, I'm going to say there's nothing wrong with doubt and there's nothing wrong with fear but there's a stage that it moves beyond and it does become in Moses' situation stubborn resistance you know, send someone else please I'm a shepherd here, I've been here for 40 years, I'm 80 years old send someone else, I'm not your man I'm content here, go away God I'm not doing anyone any harm here I was in the free church in Ellipool last Sunday and the preacher was a visiting preacher from Feren a retired minister, Donald McKeever and I can't remember the passage he was preaching on but he said something really that's really stuck in my mind, I'm going to use it tonight he talks about God disturbing people you know, if we're going to be moved by God, if we're going to follow God, if we're going to be disciplined by God through Christ

He'll disturb us, it involves being disturbed it does involve being kicked out of our comfort zone sometimes church is the last place where we feel disturbed it's that wonderful, so-perfect experience where all is at peace and we meet gentle Jesus, meek and mild but church should be disturbing for us I think the Scottish Presbyterians had an idea when they had uncomfortable seats in church there was something about that, you know, it was something about just don't get too comfortable here this isn't where the action is, just be fed here to move out and serve it was like the

Passover meal that was to be eaten in haste with your loaves guarded it was a fast food, it wasn't a luxurious wedding feast that's still to come it was to be, you were to be ready, your staff was to be there and you were to be ready to move and there's that sense of which God disturbs us and sometimes we can have that stubborn resistance like Moses had here send someone else, is there work to be done? I'm sure someone else can do it is there service to be engaged in? I don't need to be doing that, someone else can do these things stubborn resistance, he was a reluctant disciple and I wonder if there's even a hint of that in the very last verse that we read in verse 17 what it's almost as he's wandering away from God and as if God says, look, take your staff with you you can perform miraculous signs with it, don't forget your staff, Moses, don't forget that you'll need that because it's an evidence that I am with you he truly is a reluctant disciple, isn't he? and God is so gracious to him so many different ways in giving him and answering his fears

[13:05] I can't speak him, no use, well I'll give you Aaron, isn't it great that he says that he's going to give him Aaron to speak for him so that you can speak together? Okay Aaron seems to be his mouthpiece but they still have this communicative role together God understands Moses' weakness in this area and he provides for him and gives him what he needs even though the Lord was angry with him, I'll say a little bit more about that just now because we have Moses' response and it's similar very often to ours I'm going to come round to that at the end but we see God's character, don't we, in this passage he's the one again and I'm not going to say anything about this but he takes in this the deliverance from Egypt in its Old Testament setting is all about God taking the initiative to redeem his people and to provide a redeemer, a deliverer it's a sign, it's a type of Jesus, we'll go on to say a little bit about that but God's taken the initiative and in love God provides for Moses he condescends to provide for him, doesn't he?

he gives him Aaron, he gives him the resources he needs, he gives him the signs, he gives him his presence he assures his fears, he overcomes his stubborn reluctance, he provides for Moses this is the great sovereign God and Moses is stumbling in front of him and God gives him all he needs to move forward but God also reveals his wrath God reveals his wrath in this passage to Moses the Lord's anger verse 14 burned against Moses you can see, it's not really, you can't really talk about divine frustration but you can sense frustration, can't you?

from a human point of view, the Lord's anger burned against Moses look, what about your brother Aaron? and he provides for him in this way but love, the character of God as it's revealed reminds us that love gets angry it is a pure and a just love and God's saying there's nothing wrong with having doubt and struggling with fears but to be stubborn in refusal is something different to refuse everything that's been put your way is something that incurs God's wrath giving in to fear, to paralysis, to Satan, to sin to inactivity, to not following God Moses gets a message, thankfully Moses gets a message but I want just before we close to look at two things the calling of Jesus and then our calling to follow because you see Moses, you ask the question, what's the Old Testament about?

why do we have the Old? why do we need the Old? can we just go, give me a skip straight to the Gospels you're choosing a book to read in the Bible, which, let's skip the Old Testament let's go straight to the New Testament, so much easier to understand but why do we need the Old Testament? because the Old Testament points forward to Jesus and Moses is a type of Jesus, it points forward to the need for Jesus it's about God's timing, about God's preparation and one of the messages of course is the redemption from Egypt is speaking about a spiritual redemption that we have and the future of a land flowing with milk and other, the promised land which is the kingdom of God, points forward to that so many analogies, so many pictures, so much, so little time to talk about all these wonderful links between the Old and the New Testament but we remember as we go through that these sacrifices, these animal sacrifices were never good enough to take away sin, they were only pointing forward to Jesus who was the Redeemer but Moses, great Old Testament saint though he was reminds us that no man can be a Messiah even a great man like Moses was full of fear and full of mistakes and full of sin and full of error and couldn't be a Messiah for his people ultimately and there's a need for a greater Messiah than Moses no man can redeem man we need the God man to come and redeem and so we have Jesus Christ who in the mystery of God's divine purposes and plans and in the mystery of these deliberations about God sending his son when God the Father says, will you go?

[18:09] Jesus says, I will go and the son becomes flesh and as he becomes flesh he too is accompanied with many miraculous signs which are to point towards the authenticity of who he is

like Moses, he too wrestles with this way is this the only way?

must I drink of this cup? he too doubts or wrestles with fear in his humanity but never to the point of stubborn resistance because he always says, you know Moses never says here yet not my will be yours be done but Jesus does so and the Father throughout his life is well pleased with him and he goes alone to the cross and he becomes the only answer to appeasing God's wrath and overcoming the power of death on their behalf so the Old Testament Moses in some of his negativity points towards the New Testament deliverer of his people New Testament deliverer of you and I the New Testament savior who defeats sin who defeats the power of the world and all its attractions and who does so in order to give us life so he obeys the call of his Father to be the Redeemer and he obeys perfectly and what about our own calling?

our own calling to live for Jesus Christ now I would presume as I look around here at least 95% of the people here are Christians maybe more if you're not a Christian I call you to follow Jesus Christ but if you are a Christian here this evening then we have an ongoing call and I think sometimes we lose sight of that we lose sight of this God who is both infinite and personal there's much we can't understand or contain or explain about God in many ways but we recognise that he's given us all we need for our lives and as he calls Moses to be a Redeemer for his people in this unique way he's also calling us to follow him that is an authoritative call that's not for you and for I this evening an option it's not follow Jesus when I've done everything else that I want to do it's not follow Jesus Christ when it suits me it's an authoritative call because God has taken the initiative he has sent his son and he says repent and believe and follow me this great God that we were praying about earlier who is, I have no words

I can't describe how big he is I wish it was possible how glorious and how amazing and yet how loving and gracious he is he calls us to follow him he commands us to do the impossible and you know what, I don't have the gifts it's so difficult to be a believer where I am you don't understand as a preacher I'm so dry spiritually God seems so far away I have so few abilities here he's a shepherd's staff and he's using the simplicity of a shepherd's staff to reveal his power over the powers of Egypt in the same way that he puts this great treasure of grace and the gospel in jars of clay that's what you are and that's what I am we're shepherd's staffs, we're jars of clay we're ordinary people and he's asking us to do the impossible but with his authority he commands us to do it because he resources us so to do because he's a loving God, loving and he's asking you, commanding you to do the impossible he's commanding you to be moral he's commanding you to be sexually pure he's commanding you not to be drunken he's commanding us not to be proud and selfish and independent and ambitious before serving God and materialistic and hedonistic he's commanding these things he's commanding us to say no to ungodliness he's commanding us to put him first and this day, what I was saying this morning the Lord's day is such an important day to remind us of eternity it breaks the cycle of a world that has no thought for God and has no thought for eternity and breaks into that seven day cycle with eternity and saying there's more to life than this there's more just to getting up and having our read-a-bix and having our lunch and doing our work and going to sleep and waiting for the weekend and having a great time because we grow old and he asks us to serve him in this kingdom and says I've placed you where I've placed you nobody else's placed there and I want you to shine in where you are for Jesus Christ

I want you to be like Jesus Christ there I command you to do this and he does so lovingly he condescends to provide please take your doubts about that and your fears and your worries and your sense of impotence and faithlessness and feeling just like a jar of clay and take it to him and say Lord I can't do this I can't live this life I'm not a flash Harry spiritual Christian I haven't got lots of great gifts I am unlike someone else I'm like them, him or her all their gifts and their faith and their strength I'm not like that he says I know I know understand your doubts I know your weaknesses and fears but I look, I compensate for you I'll give you what you need to be a Christian in your own uniqueness in your own individual character you're not asked to be a great evangelist like someone else just a great evangelist like yourself just with your own gifts you might not be great with words like Moses felt he wasn't great with words don't you be great with words sometimes a gentle act and a loving smile with a few stumbling words will be better than a hundred sermons from Derek Lamont you know

[25 : 55] God will use as we believe and as we have faith and as we ask for faith and as we seek doubt to be taken away he will do so please remember that please remember his loving provision as it's given here and also can I just it seems, it seems to finish with wrath I don't mean to do that

it's just the way this sermon came together if we take that reluctance and that doubt and that fear and make it stubborn resistance if we say no no I'm just going to carry on living the way I want to live I know it's wrong but I'm just going to carry on doing that but we know that God is perfectly just and perfectly loving and hates injustice and wrongdoing and evil and it's just as well isn't it it's just as well it's just as well he hates that because we imperfectly hate it we hate it in other people we hate it when we hear on the news we hate it in our families but we're very very patient with it in our own hearts but we know it's good news and it's good news and it's good news but we know it's good that he cares we know it's good that he hates jealousy and injustice and bitterness and gossip we hate all these things they're ugly at least in others we don't find them so ugly in ourselves but please remember that he cares and he doesn't like stubborn unbelief and as believers he will kick us out of stubborn unbelief one way or another or stubborn resistance to obedience because he loves us and because he cares about our never dying souls please don't take the call to obedience to God and say I'm happy what I am here

I'm not doing anyone any harm I'm not doing a servant of the most high as Christians don't be willfully rebellious because we know the New Testament speaks about quenching, grieving the Holy Spirit that's a terrible thing a terrible thing to have a quenched or a grieved spirit corporately terrible individually terrible where we're hardened to sin couldn't care less and we don't listen to the voice of God if that's where we are fall and go home just fall on our knees and ask for forgiveness and softness and sensitivity to this God with whom we shouldn't really mess because who he is but he loves us so much and is committed to our sanctification and to our usefulness and he will make us holy sometimes in the old Psalms there's a verse that says by fearful works unto our prayers is answered at the express sometimes we can pray lightly for God and for holiness but sometimes that's a fearful prayer if we are continuing to rebel against him or to live a life of distance draw close he loves to hear us he loves our repentance he loves bestowing grace he's patient and kind you never think of God as patient when you see a day like today and you see throughout the world people just enjoying the day without a thought for God all of their lives maybe how patient is he not wanting anyone to perish but all to come to repentance

Amen Lord God we ask and pray that we would learn from Moses we thank you for him we thank you for his example we thank you for his humanness thank you that the Bible exposes what so often our own hearts are like when we say well Lord we not just send someone else well someone else not do the work of evangelism or sharing the gospel or living the life of faith it's too hard we're swimming against the tide too much Lord we thank you that that the Bible gives us examples of you dealing with people who think like that even great people like Moses and we thank you that you've given us the gospel glorious precious treasure of the gospel in jars of clay we feel fragile and empty but remind us what it is to be filled with a great gospel remind us of your miraculous power and increase our faith increase our understanding of grace we ask for more wisdom and we pray Lord God for hope and we ask that you would not forsake us that we would not grieve or quench your spirit in our lives but that we would serve you wholeheartedly body and soul for the short few years that we have left to live on this planet earth thank you for the privilege of so doing and thank you for every day we live and breathe and for the gift that each new day is for us in Jesus name
Amen