

Exodus 4

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[0 : 00] Well, it was the graffiti artist Banksy who was quoted just this summer as saying that art should disturb the comfortable and it should comfort the disturbed.

! I think you probably heard that phrase used elsewhere. So he's saying, isn't he, if you're feeling troubled in life, art should bring you comfort. But if you're resting on your laurels, if you're getting a bit overconfident and cocky in life, it should disturb you. It should wake you up from your sleep. It should stir you up from a false sense of security or overconfidence in life. I'm pretty sure that Banksy did not coin that phrase. But actually, I think it's a pretty good summary of this chapter in Exodus, Exodus chapter 4.

That the God of the Bible, the God who we read of here, is a God who gives visual signs to comfort those who are disturbed and disturb those who are comfortable, who are overconfident in themselves.

Moses, as Steve said, he's in his training period, isn't he, before he goes back to Egypt. And he finally returns to Egypt at the end of chapter 4.

[1 : 24] But before that, he needs to understand this lesson. And not just as a nice soundbite, but he needs to understand in a vivid way that God is the God who comforts the disturbed and disturbs the comfortable.

So you see, what we have in chapter 4 is a series of visual aids, of visceral illustrations for Moses to experience as lessons.

On first reading, I don't know whether you thought this as we went through it then, it's a bit like Moses is being taken on a kind of mind-bending trip of strange things happening, isn't it, in Exodus chapter 4.

His hand becomes diseased and instantaneously heals again. His rod turns to a staff and then back to a rod. There are images of rivers turning into blood.

There's this strange coincidental meeting with Aaron in verse 14, who just happens to be there at the right time in the conversation. It's eerie.

[2 : 33] And then there is this really odd thing, isn't there, in verse 24 to 26, where Moses has this near-death experience with God, who seeks to kill him.

Really odd. It's as if, though, this chapter is God taking him through an art gallery of performance art, if you like, to show what he is like, to show his character.

So what I'd like us to do for the next 15 minutes or so is just look at the two big lessons that Moses learns on this training lesson, on this training scheme.

First of all, the lesson number one is that the God of the Bible comforts the disturbed. He comforts the disturbed.

Now, I don't know what your perception of Moses is. I think before I looked at Exodus more, I thought of him as a sort of spiritual Hulk Hogan, this great colossus of a guy.

[3 : 39] It's a bit like the famous painting by Rembrandt, where Moses holds the Ten Commandments on stone with these huge rippling arm muscles, surrounded in clouds and silk billowing around the place.

It's quite an impressive image. Or if you look at his statue on the US House of Representatives, you can see him looking like a Greek god.

Zeus-like. He sits on his throne, giving out the law of God to the people. They're great images, actually, of Moses. But I just wonder whether those images forget that the man we now read about in chapter 4 is at least 80 years old, probably older.

And by his own admission, he's a pretty weak character. So five times, we listed them quickly last week, in chapters 3 and 4, Moses comes up with excuse after excuse not to go back to Egypt and

obey God.

He feels far from comfortable, doesn't he, in his own skin. He feels disturbed about the situation and about himself. He feels totally inadequate to be God's servant.

[4 : 59] So verse 1, there's another one of these excuses or problems that he comes back to God with. He says, behold, they'll not believe me or listen to me. How will they know that the Lord appeared to me?

He's worried, isn't he, that he'll be ineffective. They won't listen to him. Moses' motto, if he's got one for the mission, is, I can't do it, so I won't.

Now you can understand that, can't you? In Moses' position here. How many times have we said that to God? They won't believe me God.

They'll think I'm a nutter. Talking about Christianity. And about Jesus. I can't do it. So I won't Lord. Moses here, he's totally out of his comfort zone, isn't he?

So you see, the God of the Bible comes to him and comforts the disturbed Moses, the servant of God. He takes his excuse seriously, first of all, doesn't he?

[6 : 05] You know, if I was God here, if I was Yahweh, I'd want to say, look, Moses, just get on with it. If you're crying out loud, I'm God Almighty. You're my creature.

You should do what I tell you to do. Get on with it. But that's not the God of the Bible, is it? No, he stoops down and addresses our worries. He addresses our reasons.

And even our excuses. For not obeying him. He doesn't just railroad over Moses. Pharaoh is the slave driver in Exodus, not God.

So the Lord will comfort Moses. He wants to draw out faith from Moses. To comfort him, to encourage him. How will they know that you appeared to me?

That's the question. Well, in verses 2 to 9, Moses gets the start of this great show. This art show, if you like. Three visual signs from God. To show the people and to show him what he is really like.

[7 : 08] They're signs or wonders. They're designed to do two things. The first thing is to stop the people in their tracks and get them to pay attention. So they're unusual things, aren't they?

And they're particularly impressive things. But they're also signs to point to a greater meaning. Sign language. They're symbolic things. Sign number one, if you look at verse 2.

It's a great dialogue, isn't it? What's that in your hand? A staff, Moses replies. Throw it on the ground. So he throws it on the ground. And it becomes a serpent. Now, snakes are one of those animals, aren't they?

That a lot of people have very big problems with. I'm very, very glad that I've never seen a snake in the wild in Britain. I would probably turn into jelly at that point.

They're just not particularly cuddly animals, are they, snakes? But you see, for the ancient Egyptian, they were loaded with meaning and symbolism and significance.

[8 : 12] The snake was the symbol of the sun god, Ra. And when the pharaoh wore his snake-like crown, maybe you've seen pictures of Tutankhamun wearing that cobra crown.

It was said that he was joined with the divine. He was God incarnate. The snake was a symbol of Egyptian power. It was a symbol of Egyptian might.

And Moses runs from the snake as it appears on the ground. But he picks it up, as God tells him to, and it turns back into his staff.

It's a sign, a visceral sign, an experience for Moses, that God tells him that he will one day subdue the power of Egypt.

He will pacify that which he once ran from. The power of Egypt. And he's done it before, hasn't he? He's run from Egypt before.

[9 : 16] But God says to him, with my power you will master the great serpent Egypt. It's a dramatic sign, isn't it? It's a sign of comfort to Moses.

I will equip you to subdue your greatest enemy. That's sign one. Look at sign two as well, though. In verse six, the Lord said to him, Put your hand inside your cloak.

When he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. Then God said, put it back inside your cloak. So he did that. And when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh.

Now leprousy, again, was highly symbolic, not just in the Bible, but in Egypt. Socially and religiously, it was very significant.

And here Moses sees that it's God who has the power either to inflict or to heal. It is God who has the power to regenerate Moses in his own body.

[10 : 23] To be the source of his power. It must have been such an experience for Moses. Such a lesson. What about sign three? Look at verse nine.

If they don't listen to the first two signs, then take some water from the Nile and pour it out. And it will become blood on the dry ground. Now the river Nile was named by the Egyptians as the father of life.

Out of all of the gods that the Egyptians worshipped, I guess, the Nile was probably the greatest. It was the source of all life for Egypt. It was the source of fertility for the land.

It was the source of Egypt's great wealth. The economic artery that ran through the country. Similar to the Thames, I guess, in London, but just on a bigger scale. So you see, to destroy the river, to destroy the Nile, was to destroy Egypt itself.

And God says to Moses, you may be inadequate for this job. You may not be comfortable with what I'm asking you to do, but my power is made perfect in your weakness.

[11 : 39] Moses, you will, with my power, be able to overcome this great enemy. You will overmaster the Nile. Effectively, you'll be able to restrain a superpower.

You know, when you think about the kind of people that God chooses in the Bible, more often than not, they're pretty incapable, aren't they, as people.

They're probably the most inappropriate people to choose as his servants. Shepherd boys, prostitutes, illegitimate children, eunuchs, the list could go on, couldn't it?

The most inadequate people God uses to bring revival to entire cities in the Bible. To heal pagan kings.

To establish and grow his church. Even to write parts of his Bible. For consider your calling, brothers, Paul says in 1 Corinthians.

[12 : 41] Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

He chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. He chose what is low and despised. Even the things that are not. To bring to nothing the things that are.

That your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Carpenters.

Carpenters. Carpenters. Reluctant evangelists. Foul-mouthed fishermen. Tax collectors.

People like you and I. So that our faith might not rest in the power of men. Or our comfort in our own skill. Our comfort in our own skill. But in the power of God.

My strength is made perfect in weakness. He's the God who comforts Moses. He comforts him. As his disturbed servants with signs of power.

[13 : 41] And doesn't he still do that today. For you and I. Signs like the bread and the wine. Of the Lord's supper.

That he tells us to use. Today. They're a visual sign aren't they. That you may feel uncomfortable. You may feel inadequate and weak. But just as surely as this bread.

And this wine. And this wine. Nourish your body. So surely will my power in Christ. Nourish you.

And sustain you to the end. So surely have weak things.

Like the cross of Jesus. Been immensely powerful. Immensely powerful. In his service. He comforts disturbed servants.

Like you and I. With signs. So he is the God who. Comforts the disturbed. But secondly. He's the God who disturbs.

[14 : 42] The comfortable. Now as time is running away with us. I want to skip ahead if we can a bit. In this chapter. To what I think we all know. Is the big sticking point.

Of the chapter. It's. Look at verses 24. To 26. There are lots of questions about this. Aren't there. So at a lodging place. On the way. The Lord met him.

And sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a flint. And cut off her son's foreskin. And touched Moses feet with it. So verse 26. God let him alone.

What is going on here. We ask. Don't we. The big questions. That we have. About this section here.

Are. I think. Why on earth. In the middle of a chapter. All about God. Comforting Moses. Is.

Providing Aaron. For him. For him. Later on. And then telling him.

[15 : 36] About what's going to happen. In the future. It's all about comforting Moses. Isn't it. Why in that chapter. Does he suddenly. Ambush him. On the road. And seek to kill him.

Verse 24. It's clear about that. Isn't it. I don't think it's. Exaggerating. Or joking. There. So what is going on. Well lots of people have.

I'm sure you can imagine. Debated this. And we don't know. All the details. About what exactly. Happened here. Do we. Perhaps Moses. Became ill. In the travel lodge. On the way to Egypt. Perhaps he became. Seriously ill. And Zipporah. His wife. Somehow had the presence of mind.

To circumcise their son. And that seems to have. Sorted the situation out. Doesn't it. It seems to save Moses. So there are lots of details.

[16:33] We don't know. It's probably best to go. With what we do know. About this passage. And the most obvious thing. Is. That Moses son.

Has not been circumcised. He can't have been. Can he. That's clear. Now as I say that. Alarm bells. Should. Maybe start to ring.

In your mind. Because if you remember. Back in Genesis. Chapter 17. Verse 14. God says to Abraham. Any uncircumcised male.

Who's not circumcised. In the flesh. Of his foreskin. Shall be cut off. From his people. And when God says that. It's serious. He has broken. My covenant. So it's the parents.

Responsibility. God talks to Abraham. It's their responsibility. If they take God's word. Seriously. To circumcise.

[17:29] Their children. So the question is. Why. Hasn't this happened. For Moses son. That's the big question. Might it be.

That in some way. Moses himself. Has not really. Taken God's covenant. Seriously. Might it be. That he is preparing.

To speak the word of God. In Egypt. But he hasn't really. Taken it to heart. Himself. Might it be. That Moses. Has neglected.

To hold on. To God's promises. For himself. And for his family. Might it be. That Moses. Is so disturbed.

About this job. Because he has become. All too comfortable. And complacent. And self-sufficient. So much so. That he doesn't feel.

[18:25] The need to trust. God's word. In this particular way. Might that be the case. And you see. God meets him. And asks him. A very important question.

In a powerful way. How can you do. All of this. Without taking. This sign. Of the covenant. On yourself. And on your family.

See God. Requires. Obedience. From his servants. He disturbs. The comfortable. And complacent. Servant.

Now as I close. I think. I just want to finish. By reflecting. On what our reaction is. To these verses. I think. The natural thing.

For us all. To think. When we read. Verses 24 to 26. Is that. God. Is overreacting. Somewhat. And as you read that.

[19:24] We think. I'm just a little bit. Put off by God here. If I can say that. It just seems a bit. Overblown. Doesn't it. God seeks to kill Moses.

Just feels out of proportion. We're tempted to say. Aren't we. My God. Would never do a thing like that. My God.

Would never do something like that. But you see. Passages like this. Come. And they make us think. Well. Perhaps. My God. Isn't the God of the Bible. After all.

The God I worship. Could be the God. That I've just conceived. For my own convenience. And my own comfort.

He could be a God. Who exists. Purely. To cuddle me. And comfort me. But he dares not. Demand my obedience.

[20:22] I have become the Potter. The Potter. And the Potter. Has become the clay. In that case. Perhaps. Like Moses. We have become.

Too comfortable. And we need passages like this. To disturb us. Don't we. He is the God. After all. Who loves us. Enough. Not to be indifferent.

About our disobedience. But a question. That Moses had to hear. And we must learn. To answer ourselves. Is how can you do all of this.

Without taking the sign. Of my promises. Yourself. You can never serve me. Really. Without really trusting. Jesus with your life.

Without really giving up. The effort. Of trusting in your own righteousness. And obeying him. He is the God. Who comforts the disturbed.

[21 : 19] But he is the God. Who disturbs. The comfortable. Let's pray.