

Exodus 4:1-17

Let's recap where we are before we begin Exodus Chapter 4:1-17. During the first 40 years of Moses's life, he was a prince of Egypt, a Hebrew raised in the Pharaoh's house. The next 40 years he was a shepherd in Midian and on the run after killing an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew slave. He had a wife, Zipporah, two sons, Gershom and Eliezer and a quiet life until one day, at the age of 80, he saw a bush on fire on Mt. Horeb, also known as Mt. Sinai. He knows it is the Angel of God speaking "MOSES, MOSES" because the bush is not being consumed. And this is God's message.... After 400 years of bondage in slavery, I am commissioning you, Moses, to go back to speak to Pharaoh and convince him to let the Israelites go. And, I want you to be the one to lead them out of Egypt. As we continue in Exodus, Moses will embark on his remaining 40 years, his journey to the promised land. Joe Focht best summarizes it as 40 years learning to be something, 40 years learning to be nothing and 40 years learning to become something out of nothing.

Moses' response to God's calling was "You can't possibly be talking to me. You want me to go back to Egypt, and do what? You want me to face Pharaoh who is not happy with me for killing one of his people, and you want me to lead hundreds of thousands of people out of slavery, out of the Pharaoh's control. Not possible." His immediate response reflects profound disbelief, fear and apprehension. And out of these concerns, we begin the journey of excuses. Last week we heard at the end of chapter three the beginning of specifically five excuses. These excuses grew out of his insecurities and fear that was exposed due to his lack of trusting in God. But our loving God had an answer to every one of

his fears. Let's take a look at what caused Moses to be fearful and begin his excuses and then see how God addresses each one of them.

As we learned last week at the end of chapter 3, The **First excuse was**, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? I'm not a miracle worker, or a public speaker and more importantly, I am a murderer on the run." He fears he is not equipped for this responsibility. It is scary, dangerous, and out of his comfort zone. God's loving response to him was "I will be with you" assuring him of His presence and power.

His **second excuse was** "If I go to the people of Israel and tell them the God of your ancestors has sent me to you, they will ask me, what is His Name. Whom shall I say has sent me?" God lovingly responds with "I AM who I AM..." the Lord the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has sent me to you. His fear was he would not be able to answer their question. Moses had no confidence in himself; but more importantly, he had no confidence in God. Moses' excuses were like an indictment upon the character and power of God. As we conclude Chapter 3, we find The Great I AM is talking to the Great I am Not!!!

Before we begin Chapter 4, let me define what a calling is so we can better understand Moses' conflict. From the book Undaunted, by Christine Caine, she refers to a calling as that which was designed by God to fulfill a purpose that is outside of oneself, a purpose that brings glory to God and blesses others. This is where we see Moses missing the mark. He is making it all about himself rather than all about God. At the age of 80 we see someone who is the polar opposite

of what his younger self had been. Brashness has been replaced with insecurity. Confidence has been replaced by fear. Initiative has been replaced by anxiety.

We proceed to Moses' **third excuse in the first verse of chapter 4**: "What if they don't believe me and deny that you appeared to me." This is where we see how fear deafened the ears of Moses. He had already forgotten God's promise made in Exodus 3: 20-21. "I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that he will let you go." God is laying out the blueprint of how this will go. Motyer further substantiates this by saying the God of the Bible is a God of words before deeds, a God of verbal revelation, who speaks and then acts to confirm what he has said. But instead of building his trust and faith in God, Moses was letting a 'what if' take over. What Moses wasn't believing is if God calls you to something, it doesn't matter what you or others think. God will infuse you with his strength, wisdom and confidence in what you are about to do. Moses was right where God wanted, in total dependence on Him. In Romans 8:31-39 we are reminded of why we can depend on Him. He is all sufficient, he intercedes for us, He loves us and we will not be separated from the love of Jesus. We are more than Conquerors through Him who loved us. If God is for us, who can be against us. All of God's promises are on solid ground. If only Moses would believe this.

After Moses' **third objection** (What if they don't believe me) God provides a way to bolster his confidence and demonstrate his own divine power. He demonstrates his authority and power through three signs: Sign#1 is a staff is changed to a serpent, #2 God changes Moses' hand to a leprous one and then heals it and #3, water from the Nile River is changed to blood. These are the signs

that will be used to show the elders that Moses was in fact sent by God. They will also convince Pharaoh in later chapters to let the Israelites go.

To clarify, there is a distinction between a wonder and a sign. A wonder is something that catches our attention where a sign serves to instruct and engage the mind. Motyer points out that the Lord's signs are always meaningful illustrations and not just clever tricks. Although the original purpose of the signs was to authenticate Moses was indeed chosen by God, the signs also point to deeper truths.

Let's look at the first sign. The angel of God asked Moses what was in his hand. He replied, a staff. The Lord said, "Throw it on the ground." Moses obediently threw it on the ground and it became a serpent and Moses ran away from it. Then the Lord said to him, come back and reach out your hand and take it by the tail. Let me interject.... most people would say this was not a good idea, as the serpent could turn around and attack you while you're holding on to its tail. But obediently Moses reached out and took hold of the serpent's tail and it turned back into a staff in his hand, a much more dramatic display of God's power. This, said the Lord, is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has appeared to you.

Why a staff, you might ask. Moses once held a scepter of riches and power, but now he is holding a symbol of mediocrity. It speaks of the lowly position of being a shepherd, further substantiating his feeling of inadequacy. But God tells Moses to throw down his staff so that He can change it into a serpent. Moses interprets the staff in light of who he was, and God was using it as a symbol of his power. The staff became a symbol of God's might to Moses as we will see later see at the

Red Sea when God demonstrated his power by asking Moses to raise his staff up to part the waters of the Red Sea as the army of Egypt was in hot pursuit of them. It is a symbol of protection over the evil forces in this world. Ultimately, God used something ordinary and turned it into something extraordinary!!!

We see the serpent as a symbol in the Egyptian Culture. Known as the Uraeus, it is the stylized, upright form of an Egyptian cobra, used as a symbol of sovereignty, royalty, deity and divine authority. However, in the Bible, the serpent was a symbol of evil power and chaos from the underworld. After all, it was the serpent who deceived Adam and Eve in the garden, resulting in the fall of man. By using a serpent as a sign, God was essentially saying that the Israelites were at war with evil. God wanted them to recognize him as the true source of power, not the Pharaoh. They would only be able to flee from the Pharaoh's grip hold by the mighty hand of God.

God was choosing something ordinary, something that was right in Moses' hand, a staff. Here are a few other biblical examples that demonstrate that God can use anything regardless of its perceived value or significance: God used what was in Shamgar's hand, an ox goad to strike down 600 Philistines in Judges 3:31. God used what was in David's hand, a slingshot and 5 stones to kill Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:49; God used the jawbone of a donkey in Samson's hand to kill a thousand Philistines, in Judges 15:15 and God used five loaves and two fish in the hand of a little boy to feed 5000 in John 6:9

Let's pause a moment and ask what is in your hand that God has given you to use for His glory? It could be as simple as a cell phone to minister to a friend, a pen to write a note of encouragement, a hot meal for someone ill or

homebound. God put piano keys in my hands and I discovered joy when I was giving God the glory through my music. God can use the simplest things for something amazing. He uses our ordinary gifts, experiences and even our flaws for His extraordinary purposes.

The second miraculous sign for Moses was the healed Leprous Hand. vs. 6 says “Then the Lord said, ‘Put your hand inside your cloak.’” So, Moses put his hand into cloak and when he took it out, the skin was leprous – it had become as white as snow. “Now put it back into your cloak,” he said. So, Moses put his hand back into his cloak and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh.

Why did God use a Leprous Hand? The significance of using Leprosy is that it was not curable at the time of Moses. Motyer points out that Egypt was held to be notoriously unhealthy and the leprous hand would have been taken as a symbol of this. Because it was incurable, the healing of his hand, substantiated yet again that Moses had been empowered by the one true God. And, this sign also held a deeper truth. The spiritual significance of the leprous hand represented the dying of our flesh. Symbolically, we are crucified with Christ. And, the healing represented the beginning of a lifelong process which results in being resurrected with Christ, and in the end becoming completely whole, a true miracle.

God, in his mercy offered yet another sign, knowing how hard headed the elders and Pharaoh would be. **The third miraculous sign** was the turning of some water from the Nile River into blood. **“Why blood?” you might ask.** Well, it struck at the very heart of Egypt’s existence. The sign highlights the Egyptian’s reliance on the Nile for life and prosperity, which God could turn into a source of death and destruction. The blood would kill the fish and fowl, representing further suffering

for the Egyptians. On a spiritual note, it represents God's divine judgment and power over creation. It symbolizes a powerful demonstration of God's authority and a warning to Pharaoh and the Egyptians who oppressed the Israelites.

Moses' **fourth objection was** I am not eloquent, I'm slow of speech and tongue.

There are many speculations as to what this actually meant. A speech impediment has been what I have always heard, but through deeper research it could have been the anxiety of speaking in front of a large crowd, a very common fear. A third possibility is he had been away for 40 years in the desert, thus not speaking the Egyptian language fluently as he had in his first 40 years of life.

Defense for this argument is found in the book of Acts, chapter 7 verse 22, where we read Moses in his first 40 years was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. Forty years later, in verse 10 we read "And Moses said unto the lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue." The Lord's response was in verses 11 and 12. "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go: I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." But that answer apparently was not good enough for Moses. You may recall in Jeremiah 1:6, a similar story where God is calling Jeremiah to address the kings and rulers of the foreign nations. Jeremiah says "Ah Lord God, Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth: He feels unqualified due to his perceived lack of speaking ability and young age. These two examples clearly show that God calls whom he chooses. It doesn't matter if you think you are qualified, whether you are too young, too old, too this and too that. When we are weak, he is strong. God is looking for our total dependence on Him. In 1

Corinthians 1:27 it says God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He can use our difficulties, our disabilities or setbacks for His glory and purpose.

We must not only believe that God will put His words in Moses' mouth, but He will also put words in our mouth today. I found that to be true this summer.

During one of my return trips home from the beach, I made plans to have dinner with my Athiest/agnostic neighbors. After dinner, they invited me back to their apartment, and our discussion led to what makes me believe in God. I literally felt like I was on the hot seat with no warning. All I could do at first was pray inwardly that God would use me as his mouthpiece. I didn't want to blow this incredible opportunity to be a light for Jesus to my neighbors. I concluded after a lot of grilling that my heart's desire was that they would see Jesus in me by reflecting His righteousness in all that I say and do. The husband who totally doesn't believe in God said, well, you are doing a good job. Ladies, we have a message that others need to hear, a message of salvation to those who don't believe. But, are we copping out because we feel inadequate, or are we ambassadors of Christ who trust God will put the right words in our mouth? The good news is that we are not the ones who change people's hearts. And, likewise, for Moses, he was the instrument by which the Israelites would be freed from bondage, but it was GOD who would free them from the shackles of slavery. It took Moses time to learn that he would not be the one who delivered them. So, essentially, we do not have any excuses!!!! And, personally, I know I cannot change my neighbors' hearts, but, I can be the instrument God uses to reveal Himself to them.

He goes on to his **fifth and final objection**. Please send someone else. This kindled God's anger. Moses was not believing what God could do through him and his doubts turned into disobedience. This was the greatest insult to God when Moses didn't think he could count on him. Moses wasn't expressing faith that comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Moses wasn't not remembering all the promises God had given him.

The unfortunate twist in this story is Moses went from being unable to being unwilling. Moses' initial humility was rooted in a genuine awareness of his own limitations, but his later reluctance was an unwillingness to trust and obey. Ladies, the ultimate expression of humility is not dwelling on your inadequacies but rather submitting to God's will even when it feels overwhelming.

God's loving response to Moses' final objection in verse 14-16 was "What about your brother, Aaron, the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see you. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you and will teach you what to do. Aaron will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouthpiece and as if you were God to him. But take this staff in your hand so you can perform the signs with it." God was not letting him off the hook, but He was showing his graciousness to Moses by offering his older brother Aaron to be the spokesman. God would speak to Moses and Moses would convey to Aaron what to say. Moses would continue to be the main leader and receive direct communication from God.

To help you understand Moses' doubt, think of Moses' doubts like a construction worker who is asked to build a skyscraper but only has a hammer. He feels

completely inadequate for the task. God, however, doesn't just give him a better hammer; He provides blueprints, all the necessary machinery, the full construction crew, and ensures the foundation is solid. Moses' doubt was in his own capacity with a hammer, but God's point was that the entire project would be built by His power and resources, with Moses simply acting as the foreman.

Moses possessed leadership qualities and experience, having grown up in the Egyptian royal court. God recognized these capabilities and intended to use Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and to the promised land. While Moses expressed concerns about his speech, God reassured him that He would be with his mouth and teach him what to say. This highlights God's sovereignty and ability to empower even those who feel inadequate. In 2nd Corinthians 12:10, we read, "For when I am weak, then I am strong." This is part of larger passage where Paul discusses God's grace and power being made perfect in weakness. When we are most vulnerable, God's strength is most evident. That may be the most remarkable lesson we can teach our children. God does not expect us to be perfect. But what he does require is that we call on His strength when we are faced with challenges, trials and insecurities.

While I was suffering for Jesus at the beach this summer, God made sure to fill my heart and mind with resources for this study. Earlier I referred to a book Undaunted by Christine Caine. I had the privilege of hearing this Australian born author speak at the OC Tabernacle. She is the founder of A21 which is an Anti-human-trafficking organization. Her work parallels the work of our very own Grounds for Restoration, supporting safe homes for recovered women from the grip hold of traffickers. She herself was a victim of abuse as well as a child who

was given up for adoption. She had every reason to be bitter and deny God's existence, but instead, she heeded the calling of God. Here is an excerpt from her book.

"Yet even when I was younger and consumed by fear, I didn't want to be daunted, to be afraid, intimidated, or discouraged by difficulty, danger, or disappointment. I didn't want to be unable to respond to God's call. And I doubt that's your desire either. I think that you, like me want to be able to say instead, "Here I am Lord, send me." We don't want to sound like Moses, stammering in search of excuses.

And the truth is, we don't need to, because just as God gave Moses exactly what he needed to accomplish great things, he wants to equip us just as profoundly. If he calls us to slay giants, then he will be sure to make us into giant slayers. God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called. He leads us how to live undaunted so we can fulfill our calling. To live undaunted is to show courage and resolution. It's to live unafraid, undismayed, unflinching, unshrinking, unabashed. It's to be bold brave, gritty, audacious, daring and confident—even when we face opportunities not to be."

Trust me, life won't disappoint when it comes to challenging us, to intimidating us. There is no shortage of ways the enemy will try to daunt us, to render us incapable of following the bold and valiant plan God has for. But God has called us to live undaunted. To live boldly and courageously in the face of difficulty and to amaze the world by beating the odds, all for his glory.

The moral of Moses' story is found in the scripture Ephesians 3:20 "God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us." If God is who he says he is, then our only response is to trust

him. God did not deny Moses' inadequacies but drew his attention to God's strengths. Do not refuse to do good because you are what you are, but go because he is what he is. Dare to do what God calls you to do. Fear God foremost and be obedient to the call.

Let us pray:

God, your promises are true. Help us to remember them when we are tempted to lean on our own strength instead of yours. Take away our fears and help us to be obedient to your calling. When the day is done, help us not to regret missed opportunities, but rather rest on having done what you have called us to do.

AMEN!