

Stop Making Excuses!

Text: Exodus 4:1-17

Introduction:

1. Exodus 4 continues the theme of Moses call to service and the first half of the chapter takes place at the burning bush.
2. Suggested outline for Exodus chapter 4:
 - Moses' Stubbornness towards the Call (Vs. 1-17)
 - Moses' Submission to the Call (Vs. 18-23)
 - Moses' Stumbling block in the Call (Vs. 24-26)
 - Moses' Supporter for the Call (Vs. 27-31)
3. In this lesson we will study the objections/excuses Moses makes to try and avoid yielding to the call of God. Moses makes three excuses in this back-and-forth dialogue with Jehovah God at the burning bush.
4. Even though Moses had seen the glorious vision of the burning bush and had heard God speak to him in an audible voice, yet he was still resistant to the call. Shows how stubborn we can be when God calls!

I. THE SCEPTICAL AUDIENCE EXCUSE – LORD, THEY WON'T LISTEN OR BELIEVE! (VS. 1-9)

A. The Argument of Moses' Excuse (Vs. 1)

1. The Essence of the Excuse
 - a. They will not believe the message – “behold, they will not believe me”.
 - b. They will not listen to the message – “nor hearken unto my voice”.
 - c. They will reject the messenger – “for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee”
 - d. Note: The fear of man is ingrained into all of us. We naturally recoil from the possibility of our message being rejected.
2. The Error of the Excuse

Moses was in error on at least on three levels. He was guilty of:

 - a. Doubting and denying God's Word. God had foretold Moses that the children of Israel would respond positively to his message (See Ex. 3:18). Moses' claim directly contradicted God's Divine promise.
 - b. Placing a condition on his obedience. How the people would respond to Moses' message was not really relevant. That was in God's hands. Moses needed to simply obey God's call.
 - i. Think of men like Noah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel who saw hardly any visible results in their ministries and yet they are famous in the Word of God for their faithfulness.
 - ii. Note: This is one of the reasons why many do not go soul winning in our day. There is often so little, visible response. Our job is not to do what “works” according to man but to do what is right and biblical according to God.
 - c. Assuming the audience's response. Not only was he going against what God had plainly said about the future response of

Come out for God – Exodus Series

the Israelites (Ex. 3:18), he was making foolish assumptions even to the level of what they would say – “for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee”.

B. The Answer to Moses’ Excuse (Vs. 2-9)

God graciously gives Moses the ability to perform three miracles in order to authenticate his message before the Israelites. Significantly, Moses is the first man in the Bible given power to do miracles. They are called ‘signs’. We are reminded that “the Jews require a sign” (1 Cor. 1:22).

1. The staff to serpent miracle (Vs. 2-5)
 - a. The instrument for the sign (Vs. 2)
 - i. God draws Moses’ attention to his shepherd’s staff in his hand with the question “What is that in thine hand?” The purpose of this question was not because God needed information as He is Omniscient and knows all things. It was to direct Moses’ attention to the rod in his hand.
 - ii. God would use this simple rod in Moses’ hand to perform great miracles. A shepherd’s crook would have been despised by the Egyptians (See Gen. 46:34). The Egyptian magicians also had rods (Ex. 7:12) but their rods would not have been shepherd’s rods. They would likely have been the gilded, decorated rods of the palace.
 - iii. It is a reminder of the principle that God so often takes the ordinary, simple things and uses them powerfully for His purposes. “The Lord uses **ordinary objects to do extraordinary things** (the rod) so that it can be plainly seen that the power is from God.” (Macdonald) Ehud used a single dagger in his hand, Shamgar an ox goad, Gideon and his men a pitcher, lamp and trumpet, David a sling, Samson the jaw bone of an ass etc... “The key is not how impressive an object is which we have in our hand, but what we do with it. Yielded to God, our talents and gifts, though small in the eyes of man, can accomplish great things for God.” (Butler)
 - iv. The rod of Moses would soon be called “the rod of God” (See Vs. 20) and therefore became a symbol of the authority and power of God. Moses’ rod would later be used to unleash plagues on Egypt, to open the Red Sea for the Israelites (Ex. 14:16), to bring water out of a rock (Ex. 17:5-6) and to give victory over Amalek (Ex. 17:8-13).
 - v. Today we hold the rod of truth in our hands. Are you fearful about accepting God’s call in your life to be a preacher? What is that Book in your hand? The Word of God will do the job. You take it and proclaim it!
 - vi. Note: Moses’ rod reminds us of Christ whom He typifies and the coming day when He will rule the nations with a rod of iron (Rev. 2:27, 12:5 & 19:5).
 - b. The demonstration of the sign (Vs. 3-4)

Come out for God – Exodus Series

- i. Moses is commanded by God to throw his shepherd's staff on the ground and when he does so, it miraculously became a serpent and Moses flees from it in fear.
- ii. Moses is then commanded to pick it back up by the tail and when he does so, it turns back into a rod.
- c. The purpose of the sign (Vs. 5) God gave the sign specifically so that the people of Israel would believe Moses.
- d. The significance of the sign
 - i. The significance of this sign would not be lost on Moses or the children of Israel. The serpent was a symbol of Egyptian power. They believed in the serpent as a source of power and healing. The symbol of the serpent was common in Egyptian paganism. The Pharaoh's headdress often included a serpent.
 - ii. Philip Ryken writes, "The snake was a symbol of Egyptian power, for the Egyptians worshiped the serpent as a source of wisdom and healing. In doing so, they were ultimately worshiping that old serpent, the devil. By changing the rod into a serpent and back again, God demonstrated His authority over the gods of Egypt, and over Satan himself."
 - iii. "The cobra represented in particular the national god of Lower Egypt and was the foremost symbol of Pharaoh, reflecting his claim to Divine royalty, sovereignty, and power. Therefore, it constantly appears on his crown or helmet, as depicted in reliefs, paintings, and statues. His sceptre is often a stylized cobra. Even the Egyptian gods are frequently depicted with a sceptre in the form of a snake. We are safe in concluding that the transformation of the rod to a snake is a sign aimed precisely at the very symbol of Pharaoh's alleged power." Goran Larsoon, *Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions.*, p. 8.
 - iv. The serpent in the Bible is a clear symbol of Satan. Satan was behind the false gods of Egypt and its wicked regime. Even today, the serpent is a common symbol in pagan religion (e.g., Hinduism, the New Age, the Occult). People are often led to believe the serpent represents good fortune, renewal and rebirth but in reality, the serpent represents the dark, depraved personage of Satan who desires your destruction.¹ He is a deceiver, a liar and a murderer! Twice in Revelation Satan is called "that old serpent" (Rev. 12:9; 20:2).
 - v. The symbolism was clear. God's power working through Moses would defeat the serpent's power in Egypt.

¹ Illustration: Death of a Guru story. In time he realized the "gods" that were possessing his body were actual sinister and evil.

Come out for God – Exodus Series

- vi. Moses is a type of Christ (Deut. 18:15-19; Acts 3:20-23) who did more than grab the serpent by the tail. He crushed the serpents head at the cross, thus defeating him so that you and I could be set free. See Gen. 3:15; Col. 2:15. Further, at the end of time, God Almighty will take him by the tail and fling him into the everlasting flames of the lake of fire for all eternity (Rev. 20:10).
2. The leprous hand miracle (Vs. 6-8)
 - a. The particulars of the sign (Vs. 6-8)
 - i. Moses was commanded to put his hand into his bosom. When he did so it came out white with leprosy, a feared, dreaded disease in the ancient world for which there was no cure (Vs. 6).
 - ii. Moses was then commanded to repeat the process and when he had done so, his hand was turned back to normal (Vs. 7).
 - b. The purpose of the sign (Vs. 8). The second sign was there to further convince the people if they were reluctant to be convinced by the first sign alone.
 - c. The picture of the sign. Leprosy is a type of sin in the Bible. The hand being drawn out leprous from the bosom, the region of the heart, symbolises the inner sin condition we all have (Rom. 3:10, 23). The cleansing of the hand is a fitting symbol of salvation whereby God cures us of our sin condition.
3. The water to blood miracle (Vs. 9)
 - a. If the first two signs were not believed, Moses was to take water from the Nile River and pour it out onto the ground and it would turn into blood.
 - b. The Nile River was highly revered by the Egyptians. They believed it to be the source of life. Moses' ability to turn some of its water into blood would clearly demonstrate the power and superiority of Israel's God over the false gods of Egypt.
 - c. Interestingly, the first plague would be the turning of the Nile River into blood (Ex. 7:14-25)
4. William Macdonald writes, "The three signs to Israel spoke of God's power over Satah (i.e., the serpent), and sin (pictured by the leprosy) and of the fact that Israel would be redeemed from both of these through blood."

II. THE SPEAKING ABILITY EXCUSE – LORD, I CAN'T SPEAK WELL! (VS. 10-12)

A. The Argument of Moses Excuse (Vs. 10)

1. The distraction of this excuse – "I am not eloquent".
 - a. Even if this was true, it was irrelevant as God didn't need human eloquence to get the job done. God was simply looking for a yielded, willing and obedient vessel through whom He could work. Moses self-focus was all wrong! God had promised He would be with Moses and that was all that was needed – "Certainly I will be with thee" (Ex. 3:12). Further, when we tell

Come out for God – Exodus Series

God about our weaknesses, we aren't telling Him something He doesn't already know!

- b. Paul's own ministry testimony is a powerful reminder that the great need is for Scriptural, Spirit empowered preaching, not clever human rhetoric, philosophy or oratory. 1 Cor. 2:1-4 "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came **not with excellency of speech or of wisdom**, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching **was not with enticing words of man's wisdom**, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."
 - c. Some church folks could serve in certain ministries but they use the "I can't do it excuse" even though they know deep down in their hearts that with God's help they could if they were willing to try!
2. The dishonesty of this excuse
 - a. Moses' claim to not have speaking abilities are contradicted by the facts. Acts 7:22 reveals that "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds." It's like a Christian saying they can't play an instrument in the orchestra even though they know they studied the instrument to a high grade!
 - b. This is the nature of excuses. They usually contain an element of dishonesty. Someone wisely observed that an excuse is really "a lie wrapped in the skin of a reason".
 - c. Many believers who use the "I can't speak" excuse (e.g., for not sharing the Gospel with others) have no trouble talking a lot about just about everything else.
 3. The disrespect of the excuse
 - a. Moses was arguing with God! For someone who claimed to be of a slow speech, Moses sure seemed to be able speak pretty quickly when it came to arguing against God's will for his life!
 - b. Moses was accusing God! Notice that Moses claims he had never had a speaking ability ("neither heretofore") and that he had not gained one in the miraculous encounter at the burning bush ("nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant"). Moses is basically blaming God for his claimed speech impediment. When he said "since thou hast spoken unto thy servant" it was as if to say, "Look, Lord, I've been standing here talking with you for fifteen whole minutes, and you still haven't done anything about my speech problem." (Ryken)
 - c. When we complain about how we have been made, we are really accusing God of having made a mistake.

B. The Answer to Moses' Excuse (11-12)

God's answer to Moses was to:

1. Remind him of His Power (Vs. 11)

Come out for God – Exodus Series

- a. God reminds Moses of the truth that He is the Creator (Vs. 11a). Again, we note that God seeks to draw Moses' focus and trust away from himself and his own abilities to God's Person and Power. The God who created man's mouth also had the power and ability to use Moses' mouth to speak His Word. Utterance (the words to speak) and Uncion (the power to speak them) come from God.
 - b. God reminds Moses that even man's disabilities are not limitations to Him (Vs. 11b).
 - c. 2 Cor. 4:7 reads, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."
 - d. 2 Cor. 12:9 "And he said unto me, **My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.** Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."
 - e. Our weaknesses, inabilities and even disabilities are not constraints on the power of God but rather can be occasions for the display of God's power.
 - f. C.H. Mackintosh writes, "Unbelief is not humility but thorough pride. It refuses to believe God because it does not find, in self, a reason for believing. This is the very height of presumption. If, when God speaks, I refuse to believe, on the ground of something in myself, I make Him a liar (1 John 5:10)."
2. Reassure him with a Promise (Vs. 12)
 - a. God repeats the command to Moses to "go" (for the third time. See Ex. 3:10, 16) and then promises to be with his mouth and to teach him what to say. God would give Moses the words to speak and the power and ability speak them. Remember this promise was coming from the lips of the Great I AM! If the Eternal, Unchangeable, All-Powerful God goes with us and enables us, we have no cause for doubt or fear.
 - b. Illustration: Jeremiah's call - Jeremiah 1:4-9 "Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, *and* I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I *am* a child. But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I *am* a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I *am* with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD. Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth."

III. THE SOMEBODY ELSE EXCUSE – LORD, PLEASE SEND SOMEONE ELSE! (VS. 13-17)

A. The Argument of Moses' Excuse (Vs. 13)

This final objection of Moses really revealed the true heart attitude behind Moses' objections. He really didn't want to accept God's call.

Come out for God – Exodus Series

1. The disrespect of this excuse – Moses basically orders God to send someone else and yet in the same breath says “O my Lord”. Don’t we do the same at times? We call Him Lord but at the same time express our rebellion to His Lordship in our lives? Apparently, the tone in the Hebrew is “curt and ungracious” (Butler) He not only says to get someone else to do the job, he says it in a rude manner. Disrespect and disobedience go hand in hand!
2. The disobedience of this excuse – this was an act of disobedience. It is one thing to say “Lord, I can’t do this” as an expression of genuine humility and saying “Lord, I won’t do this”.

B. The Answer to Moses’ Excuse (Vs. 14-17)

1. God’s indignation with Moses (Vs. 14a)
 - a. The Bible reveals that God in His nature is “slow to anger” (See Neh. 9:17; Ps. 103:8; 145:8). The fact that God’s anger was kindled against Moses tells you how far Moses had provoked his God. The word ‘kindled’ means to glow or blaze. God’s answer waxed hot against Moses for his disobedience, stubborn attitude. God was not angry in the sense of losing His temper in a sinful way as we do but rather, he was filled with righteous indignation at Moses stubbornness.
 - b. Challenge: Is God righteously angry with you for your dishonest excuses not to submit to Him and serve Him?
2. God’s solution for Moses (Vs. 14b-17)
 - a. God again responds to Moses’ objection with grace and provides his brother Aaron his brother to be his co-worker. Aaron would be:
 - i. A happy coworker – “when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart” (Vs. 14)
 - ii. A helpful coworker (Vs. 15-16) – Aaron had a speaking gift (“I know that he can speak well”) and he would act as Moses spokesman before Pharaoh.
 - iii. A hindering coworker (at times) – Sadly Aaron would later be complicit in the golden calf incident and also join Miriam in her criticism of Moses’ leadership.
 - b. If Moses had just surrendered, he could have been used without Aaron’s help but his stubbornness meant that in the end he would share the role with another. In the overall Providence of God, and on the balance of things, it was a blessing for Moses to have an assistant. But it is a sobering reminder that we are not indispensable to the work of God. If we stubbornly refuse to heed God’s call, He can and will find someone else to accomplish His work. It is a grave mistake to think God needs us or that His work can’t succeed without us. God’s work will go forward and succeed with or without you. The best thing to do is surrender and let God use you!

Conclusion: Praise God the rest of the chapter reveals that Moses did ultimately yield to God’s call. Will you?