

GOD'S CALL TO MOSES

Exodus 3:1-4:17

Key Verses: 3:4, “When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’”

And, 3:12, “[God] said, ‘But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you; when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.’”

Do you have questions or make excuses? Of course, we all do. More specifically, do you have questions or make excuses about God’s call or God’s will for your life? Today’s passage includes the call of Moses, a great servant of God in the Bible and in Jewish history. Moses was a great deliverer, who led his people out of slavery in Egypt into a land that God promised to the descendants of Abraham. But surprisingly, Moses was not so eager to accept the call of God. He is quite different from Mary the mother of Jesus who said to the angel Gabriel, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). Rather, Moses had five questions or objections to God’s call. Let’s consider his five questions and God’s answers.

Let’s review Exodus chapter 2 briefly. Moses was born in a time of genocide. Pharaoh king of Egypt was afraid that the Israelites were growing too numerous, too fast. So he enslaved them. Even worse, he ordered that baby boys be killed by throwing them into the river. Atrocities like these have been committed throughout human history, even to this day. Moses’ parents hid him for three months. When they could hide him no longer, they put him in boat basket in the river. By God’s providence, Pharaoh’s daughter found the child and was moved to keep him. She named him, “Moses,” which means “draw out,” because he was drawn out of the water. A slave child became a prince in the Egyptian palace, rather than dying a tragic death. After Moses became aware of his Jewish identity and had grown up, he killed an Egyptian who was mistreating a Jewish slave. Because of this, he had to flee the country to the desert of Midian. He was 40 years old when he fled. For the next 40 years, he got married, had two sons, and tended sheep. It sounds like he was content to be in his life situation. But God had much bigger plans for him.

This leads us to chapter 3. Moses was tending sheep on a mountainside. Verses 2-3 tells us something very strange happened: “And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, ‘I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.’” It was a strange sight that caught Moses’ attention. What happened next? See verses 4-6: “When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’”

And he said, 'Here I am.' Then he said, 'Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' And he said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God." Moses saw a burning bush, and he heard the voice of God.

God knew his name: Moses, the name his mother had given him. The name that identified him. The name by which he knew himself. Moses answered, "Here I am." When you answer the telephone and someone asks to speak with you, you say, "Speaking," or, "It is I." Moses responded to his name. Still, he was perplexed. God told him it was holy ground and he was to take off his dirty shepherd sandals. God said it was holy ground. What made that ground holy was the presence of God. Where God meets us is holy ground. Where we encounter God is holy.

God introduced himself to Moses as "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." He is the God of history. He is the God of the Bible. He is the God who chose and called Abraham, and who was the Fear of Isaac (Gen 31:42,53), and the Shepherd of Jacob (Gen 48:15). He is the God of covenant promises given to Abraham. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We'll consider this more later.

Moses' response was to hide his face, afraid to look at God. Would we not all respond the same way? Who can stand before or look at the holy God? So, why was God meeting Moses? God tells him in verses 7-10:

Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey...And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

God called them "my people." They were God's covenant people, even though at that moment they were slaves in Egypt. God said he saw their affliction. He was not ignorant or oblivious of their plight. He saw their oppression. He heard their cry. He knew their sufferings. He came down to deliver them and to bring them to a better place he promised them.

And he had a mission for Moses. He told him, "I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." God wanted Moses to lead them out of their slavery in Egypt. But consider this: Egypt was a super-power nation and God's people were slaves. That would make Pharaoh king of Egypt laugh. He would think that their God had no power. Why would their God allow them to be slaves? They had no power. They had no army.

They had no clout. If they had, they would've revolted or God would've saved them from this predicament. God's words to Moses might have raised many questions in his mind. In fact, he had some questions and opinions about this mission that God was giving him. Let's consider all five of them.

First, "Who am I to do such a task?" Look at verse 11. "But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?'" Isn't this a very different Moses from the Moses who killed an Egyptian? There seems to be a time when Moses thought he could do something to help his people who were in slavery. In fact, Acts 7:24-25 comments regarding his killing the Egyptian: "[Moses] supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand." But now, Moses felt like he was a nobody to do such a monumental, huge task of bringing over half a million people out of enslavement by the super-power Egypt. In fact, he was justified to think this. Do you ever feel that the evil in the world is too great to overcome? Do you ever think that the problems of this world are too difficult or insurmountable for you or me to make any difference? Or, do you ever think that you can do something by your own effort and experience? Perhaps God wants to humble those who think so. I suppose that the devil smiles both when we feel helpless and just want to surrender before fighting against the ungodliness that permeates our society and world, and also when we are overconfident, like Peter making boasts that he would never disown Jesus.

How did God answer Moses? Look at verse 12. "He said, 'But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.'" God's great promise to those he calls is "I will be with you." God's presence with us is sufficient. If God is for us, who can be against us? The Risen Jesus said to those he gave his Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). God also promised that they would all surely come and serve God on that very mountain. So, was Moses ready for the task? Not yet. He had a second question.

Second, "What is your name?" Look at verse 13. Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" It's not every day that God speaks to people as he did to Moses and gives them a huge mission, like saving an entire nation. Indeed, we might think someone who said God spoke to them in this way had a mental illness, especially if they said they heard a voice. Moses objected that the people would question his sanity. If they accepted his sanity, they would want to know what voice gave him these instructions. Did the voice have a name and identity?

God gave an awesome and mysterious answer. See verse 14. God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Have you met

God? Do you know his name? God is who God is. God exists in and of himself. God lives and never dies. God is the eternal, Almighty Creator who gave us life. God reveals himself to those he pleases. God revealed himself to Abraham and to Moses. God has most fully revealed himself on earth in the person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Jesus reflects the mind and heart and spirit of God.

God also said to Moses: “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘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.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.” God is the God of covenant. He made a covenant with Abraham. He made a covenant with Israel. He made a new covenant with us through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

God gave further words and instructions to Moses in verses 16-22: “Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to...a land flowing with milk and honey.”’ And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.’ But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.”

Third, “What if they don’t believe me?” Moses had further doubts about this mission. He said to God in 4:1. “...they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you.’” Indeed, when people say God spoke to them, we are usually hesitant to believe them. So God gave Moses signs to prove the power of God with him. His shepherd’s staff became a snake, then returned to a staff. His hand became leprous and then whole again. The water would turn to blood. God was showing by these signs that God controls animals, human well-being, and nature. These signs would be manifested in ten plagues against Egypt, so that they would know that the LORD is God. These judgments would be against the false gods or idols of Egypt. For example, the Egyptians had a sun god they worshiped; but God would bring darkness over the land. God would judge the idols and powers of Egypt. God would bring his people out of Egypt with his mighty hand. God’s power and authority would be with Moses to prove that God was with him.

Fourth, “I can’t even speak well.” Moses said, “Oh, 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.” Some scholars have suggested that Moses might have been a stutterer when speaking. Whatever the case, Moses did not feel qualified for this task that God was giving him. Perhaps he worried that he lost his Egyptian speaking proficiency. Or perhaps he was not so quick to reply in heated conversations. He seems to be apologizing even for his awkward questions to God.

What was God’s reply this time? See verses 11-12. “Then the LORD said to him, ‘Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.’”

Did you know that all the abilities you have, have been given by God? Maybe you thought you were just lucky, or that you somehow acquired your skills, talents and abilities by your own effort or hard work. Did you even stop to thank God for the ability to see or speak or hear or taste and eat or heal or breathe? Have you instructed your stomach how to digest or your skin how to heal a bruise or a cut? Have you informed your lungs how to breathe in oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide? Have you thanked God for the ability to walk or sing or smell or feel? Here’s another question: are you using all these abilities to the glory and praise of God?

Do you ever feel, like Moses felt, unqualified to do the Lord’s work? Do you feel that you need a seminary degree or more experience or practice before you can share God’s word with someone? Could it be that you are just making an excuse not to speak up for God when you have a chance to? Jesus told his followers not to worry about what to say even before courts or officials for the Holy Spirit will give you words to say.

Fifth, “Choose someone else.” This is the most surprising suggestion of Moses to God. Moses said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.” Moses was trying to pass on God’s calling. He really didn’t want to do it. He said, “I’m not your guy. But I’m sure you can find someone willing and better qualified.” This might be the very reason why many people don’t hear God’s call. They don’t want to hear it. They don’t want to do God’s will. They have their life plans pretty well figured out. Or, they just want to live a mundane, mediocre, “normal” life. In other words, they just want to take it easy as much as they can. I can relate.

Sin is not just doing evil; that is, sin of commission (sins we commit). Sin is also not doing the good we know we ought to do, that is called the sin of omission (not doing the good we should do). I know I should work harder, or forgive someone, or be more humble. Yet I fail in all of these again and again. I am a sinner, through and through. I may not sin to the maximum degree possible. That would make me the devil. But I sin hundreds or even thousands of times a day. Who will rescue from my sins? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ my Lord!

There is a saying, “The grass always looks greener on the other side.” That means we have a bad tendency to compare ourselves with others and think that others have it better. Their life is easier. They don’t suffer like I suffer. Moses thought that the job God was telling him to do was too hard. And he didn’t even apply for the job! He was ready to walk out of the interview that God had set up! Perhaps many people in history, even now, have turned down God’s call and will for their lives. Perhaps you or I are doing that right now. Isn’t that a sad thought? Isn’t that a scary thought? I mean do we actually think that we can choose a better, more fulfilling life than God wants to give us, a more important task than we can think up for ourselves? I think not.

This time God was not so happy. See verses 14-17. “Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, ‘Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs.’”

God wasn’t taking no for Moses’ answer. As far as I know, God had no plan B. Moses was the right guy that God wanted for the job. But God did give him a helper: his older brother Aaron, who was 3 years older, 83, while Moses was 80. (By the way, Moses lived to be 120.) Isn’t it a great blessing and encouragement that God gives us coworkers to go with us in carrying out God’s mission? Thank God that we don’t have to go it alone. God gives us helpers. Also, Moses’ staff represented God’s presence, power and authority with Moses. Moses just had to remember God’s purpose, God’s promise to be with him, and God’s authority given him, and to trust and depend on God.

God was angry at Moses, but he didn’t curse or abandon him. God worked with Moses in spite of his questions, doubts, and insecurities. God’s most assuring words were not about Moses, but about God: “I will be with you...I will give you words...Pharaoh will see what I will do.”

God intended to humiliate and defeat the proud and evil king Pharaoh of Egypt, by the power of God and for the glory of God and of his covenant people. God raised up a deliverer, Moses, for the task. For us, God defeated an even greater enemy through an even greater Deliverer. God defeated the devil and his evil power through our Great Deliverer and Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus did not hesitate to obey the will of God to save all sinners from the clutches of sin and death. Jesus defeated sin and death and the devil once and for all by his atoning death and resurrection. Praise Jesus our Great Deliverer!

In conclusion, if our life purpose is rooted in what God wants to do and who God is, we cannot choose a better life, and we cannot fail. Like Moses, may we answer God’s call, “Here I am.”

Like Moses, may all our questions be answered and excuses be overcome to accept God's call and follow God's will. In Jesus' name. Amen.