



Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text

Exodus 4:1-17

Topic

God tells Moses He will use his mouth
in a mighty way when he confronts Pharaoh

Title

"Here He Comes to Save the Day - Mighty Mouth is on His Way"

For the last ten years, job listing site *CareerBuilder* has put out a list it calls "The Most Unbelievable Excuses for Calling in Sick." Here are a few of them:

- An employee said he couldn't come in because his false teeth flew out the window while he was driving down the highway.
- Another claimed that someone had glued her windows and doors shut so she couldn't get out of her house.
- Another said he caught his uniform on fire by putting it in the microwave to dry.

- This one is my favorite because it's a personal fear of mine: "I got stuck in the blood pressure machine at the grocery store and couldn't get out."

In chapter three of Exodus, Moses learned that God had a job for him: "Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (v9).

In chapter four, Moses will give a series of excuses why he thinks he is not the man for the job. They are altogether lame excuses; God easily overcomes each one of them.

Having run out of excuses, Moses finally says, "I don't want the job; send someone else."

That's not going to go over well; God is going to get angry. But before we get to God's response, these verses give us an opportunity to discover **if we are making excuses for refusing to serve the Lord.**

I'll organize my comments around two questions: #1 Have You Ever Excused Yourself From Serving The Lord?, and #2 Have You Ever Refused Yourself From Serving The Lord?

#1 Have You Ever Excused Yourself From Serving The Lord?

(v1-12)

Only recently did I first hear the word, 'volun-told.' It means to volunteer someone to do a task (usually not an enjoyable one) without their consent or knowledge.

God was calling Moses to serve Him. Moses reacted as if God was volunteering him against his will; as if he was being volun-told.

Was God forcing this on Moses? Hardly. Think back forty years. Moses had boldly rejected his upbringing in Egypt to identify with his Hebrew brothers and sisters. He stepped-up as a deliverer and killed an Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a Hebrew slave. Moses thought everyone would recognize his calling.

They did not. Instead, the Hebrews accused him, and the Egyptians sought to kill him, forcing Moses to flee into the desert as a fugitive.

The strong desire in Moses' heart was to deliver his people. God wasn't calling Moses to do something against his will; God was giving him the desire of his heart - only it was forty years later, after Moses had received the proper spiritual preparation.

As we discuss serving the Lord, consider that the thing or things God might be calling you to do might initially seem contrary to your will. Trust that He knows you better than you know yourself, and that He is wanting to give you the desires of your heart.

Exo 4:1 Then Moses answered and said, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.' "

Moses was still at the burning bush, where God was talking to him. We saw last week that this was none other than Jesus speaking.

In verse eighteen of chapter three Jesus had said, "they will heed your voice." Moses' suggested that they might not. It's always an excuse when we think or suggest God's Word may not be accurate.

Exo 4:2 So the LORD said to him, "What *is* that in your hand?" He said, "A rod."

This was most likely his long shepherds crook, although we know that shepherds also carried a shorter rod for discipline and defense. We read in the psalms about the rod *and* the staff.

Many devotions have been written about Jesus using what is already "in your hand." While we are never to trust in our natural abilities or talents, they can be offered to God, and He can anoint and use them.

The apostle Paul provides the great example. He said that he considered his life before meeting Jesus a pile of manure. But as we follow his journeys in the Book of Acts, we see God using what was in Paul's past - things like his dual citizenship in Israel and Rome, and his command of several languages.

Jesus can, and even wants to, use what is in your hand. Don't grasp for something not in your reach. Let Him anoint what you already have.

Exo 4:3 And He said, "Cast it on the ground." So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it.

In his forty years as a shepherd Moses had encountered many snakes. This one was a red-on-yellow, kill-a-fellow variety. Commentators suggest it was a cobra like the one that adorned Egyptian headdresses, but that's mere speculation.

Exo 4:4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Reach out your hand and take *it* by the tail" (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand),

Even non-poisonous snakes should never be handled by the tail. It's the head that you need to immobilize. Moses showed a great deal of faith in obeying the Lord.

In the midst of doubting Jesus, and objecting to Him, Moses still had faith. One of the things that makes it hard for us to see when we are making excuses is that in most areas of our walk with the Lord, we might be doing His will. We thus tend to overlook any areas where we are prone to make excuses.

If I'm going to church, and people know I'm a believer, and things are generally going well, I may not hear the Lord calling me to further sacrifice; or to something new. I need to constantly ask the Lord to search my heart, revealing new ways of serving Him, and invigorating the old ways, too.

Why a serpent? Maybe to show that Jesus had power to take up the devil and defeat him. After all, the promised Savior in the Garden of Eden would crush the devil's head. (That's why Moses took the serpent by the tail. Crushing the head was not his task).

Later in the history of Israel, when they are out of Egypt and in the desert, they grumble against God. Poisonous serpents come into their camp. Their bite is fatal. Moses constructs a bronze serpent on a pole. Any Israelite who gets bit need only look at that pole to be healed.

In the New Testament, Jesus compares Himself on the Cross to that pole. All we need do is look upon Jesus - believe in Him - to be saved.

Exo 4:5 "that they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."

The Hebrews had descended from Abraham through his son Isaac, and from his son Jacob. More than just a reminder, the Lord meant for them to understand there was a bigger historical movement that they were part of.

Exo 4:6 Furthermore the LORD said to him, "Now put your hand in your bosom." And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand *was* leprous, like snow.

The term "leprous" described a bunch of skin maladies - from slight to serious. This was evidently a very serious case.

Exo 4:7 And He said, "Put your hand in your bosom again." So he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his *other* flesh.

I wonder how much time elapsed? There must have been some anxious waiting on Moses' part.

Reaching in to yourself, there's only sin - represented by the rotting flesh disease. God can nevertheless heal indwelling sin, as it were, and use your hands to serve Him.

Exo 4:8 "Then it will be, if they do not believe you, nor heed the message of the first sign, that they may believe the message of the latter sign.

Two signs would be better than one. How about a third?

Exo 4:9 And it shall be, if they do not believe even these two signs, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river and pour *it* on the dry *land*. The water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry *land*."

The Nile had claimed the lives of untold Hebrew babies who had been drowned in it by the decree of the previous Pharaoh. That blood cried-out to God.

Moses was promised three powerful signs that would confirm that he was speaking on behalf of God. God thereby easily overcame Moses' objections.

Are we ever hesitant to share the Gospel because we don't think people will listen to us, or believe us?

According to Barna, “When asked if they have a personal responsibility to share their faith with others, 73% of born again Christians said yes. When this conviction is put into practice, however, the numbers shift downward. Only half (52%) of born again Christians say they actually did share the Gospel at least once this past year to someone with different beliefs, in the hope that they might accept Jesus Christ as their Savior.”

We think it would be great if signs and wonders could accompany our sharing. Maybe they do.

When we share our testimony of being saved, we’re proclaiming that Jesus has defeated the devil, and given us victory over sin.

Your walk with the Lord - **that’s a miracle of spiritual birth.**

Moses was not through offering excuses. In fact, he was just getting started.

Exo 4:10 Then Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I *am* not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I *am* slow of speech and slow of tongue."

We have an important decision to make. We need to decide if Moses had a speech impediment, e.g., stuttering.

If this statement were all that we had to go on, we might come to that conclusion. Thankfully, we *do* have more to go on; it comes from the speech of Stephen, the first martyr of the church age. In the Book of Acts, while reviewing the history of Israel to his Jewish accusers, Stephen said a lot about Moses. Concerning his speech, we read,

Act 7:22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was **mighty in words** and deeds.

It is the inspired testimony of the Holy Spirit through Stephen that growing-up Egyptian Moses was “mighty in words.”

Add to that Moses himself forty years earlier “supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand” (Acts 7:25).

No disability is ascribed to him - not stuttering, not anything.

OK, so what might Moses mean? What was his real excuse?

My father was a first generation Italian immigrant through Ellis Island. He came to the United States when he was sixteen. He spoke only Italian. He had to teach himself English.

Growing up, I remember my dad calling our Italian relatives back east every Christmas Eve. My grandma never learned English, so my dad had to talk to her in Italian. Every year it became more difficult for him. His speech was hesitant - a curious mix of Italian and English, with a lot of asking, “how you say?” All those years speaking only English had taken its toll on his native tongue.

Moses was forty years removed from speaking Egyptian or Hebrew. The most natural explanation was that he was objecting that he no longer had the eloquence to address either Pharaoh or his own people. “Slow of speech and slow of tongue” make more sense as a lost skill than a physical disability.

Exo 4:11 So the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? *Have* not I, the LORD?"

Let me preface the next few minutes by first stating this: **Read this verse in its context.** If you read this as a stand-alone verse, out of its context, it seems to teach that God makes certain people mute or deaf or blind.

Indeed, a lot of commentators read it that way, and then glibly explain, "God is sovereign and does what He wants."

I've used this illustration before, but it's a good one to remember. In the famous Frost/Nixon interviews, David Frost asked Nixon if it was ever alright for the president to do something illegal. Richard Nixon responded by saying, "If the President does it, *it's not illegal.*"

Commentators who appeal to the sovereignty of God to explain difficult statements are basically saying, "If God does it, *it's not evil.*" We reject that as an explanation.

What, then, do we make of verse eleven? First of all, even if we do look at it all by itself, it isn't saying anything about creating people with disabilities. The words "made" or "make" have nothing to do with forming humans in the womb. That's something we read into the verse that it doesn't say.

Moses was objecting that his words were not eloquent enough to accomplish the task. He was afraid Pharaoh would hear him, but not be persuaded by him. We might use the expression, "his words would fall on deaf ears."

They would indeed fall on deaf ears, but in a *spiritual* sense. Pharaoh would be “mute and deaf and... blind” to God’s Word and ways.

What this verse is pointing to are *spiritual* disabilities - **not** *physical* ones.

It’s not unusual for God to describe physically healthy people as having spiritual sensory disabilities:

- When God first commissioned Isaiah, God told him, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed” (6:9-10).
- The prophet Jeremiah was told by God, “Hear this now, O foolish people, Without understanding, Who have eyes and see not, And who have ears and hear not” (5:21).
- In the New Testament, we are told, “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Romans 11:25).
- The people attending the church in Laodicea are described as “blind” in Jesus’ letter in the Revelation (3:17).

There are many such passages where people are described as spiritually deaf and dumb and blind.

Look carefully at verse eleven. It says, “who makes the mute, the deaf, **the seeing**, or the blind.”

In a list of disabilities, why mention making some people “seeing”? It only makes sense if God means *spiritual* hearing and *spiritual* seeing.

God was sending Moses with His words knowing Pharaoh would be deaf to them, blind to their truth. As far as physical disabilities, from the womb or otherwise, I like what theologian Greg Boyd says: “God created a world in which blindness is occasionally the result of natural processes such as disease and genetic defect or accidents. (And occasionally due to violent, sinful acts by people).”

Another commentator shared this insight:

We should acknowledge that we are **all** disabled or handicapped in some way. The need for eyeglasses indicates impaired or “handicapped” vision. Dental braces are a sign of imperfect teeth. The whole human race lives with the reality of imperfection. We are all broken in some way. The handicaps we live with are simply a matter of degree.

When babies are delivered in the hospital, they are issued an Apgar score. The Apgar scale is determined by evaluating the newborn baby on five simple criteria on a scale from zero to two, then summing up the five values thus obtained. The resulting Apgar score ranges from zero to 10. The five criteria are **A**ppearance, **P**ulse, **G**rimace, **A**ctivity, and **R**espiration. The fact we score newborns is a reminder we live in a fallen world.

If something is evil, it’s evil to suggest God is its source. As one commentator put it, “Hell is the source of the trouble which God tolerates for the sake of our freedom.”

God **is** sovereign - so sovereign that He gave and has given mankind free will. We exercise free will sinfully, and bad things happen. God's resolve was to come into our world as the God-man and pay the penalty for sin. Delivering Israel from Egypt was a major movement in that plan.

Exo 4:12 Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say."

Do we ever use Moses' excuse? Sure. We excuse ourselves for not being adequate to the task. We don't know enough... We're not holy enough... We don't have the time, or the resources.

Anytime we look at our own abilities they seem disabilities that hinder our saying "Here am I; send me."

You know how sometimes in a meeting, or at an appointment, you know you've been dismissed? God said, "Now therefore, go." That's pretty final.

If Jesus calls you to a ministry, or asks you to serve Him in some way, small or great, "Now therefore, go." He wouldn't commission you unless He had overcome all possible excuses by His grace.

In our reflection and prayer at the end of the study, be brave and ask the Lord to show you any excuses you are using that are keeping you from serving Him. In Moses' case, it was a big ask: Leave everything you've built for forty years and serve full time.

It could be that for you, too. Probably it's something lesser, but no less important.

#2 Have You Ever Refused Yourself From Serving The Lord?

(v13-17)

“Mr. McGee, don’t make me angry. You wouldn't like me when I'm angry.”

McGee was the investigative reporter who was trying to expose David Banner as the Incredible Hulk on the original television series.

God’s about to get angry with Moses. But we shouldn't think of Him as Hulking-out.

Exo 4:13 But he said, "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever *else* You may send."

“God, I don’t want to go; send anyone else.” It was a refusal.

Exo 4:14 So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses...

Yes, God gets angry; but His anger is hard to get a handle on, because it’s not sinful. So much of our anger is sinful. We get mad or fed-up and lash out. We know intellectually that there is such a thing as “righteous anger,” but unrighteous anger tends to characterize us.

I’d offer this illustration to explain God’s anger with Moses. Let’s say you’re having a teachable moment with one of your young children.

You're dialoging, overcoming their excuses and objections, when suddenly they get defiant and just say, "No" to you.

You go into a whole different mode, do you not? You get angry - but not sinfully. You don't lash out, etc. No, you get determined to see it through, to the bitter end, in which you must win. You have a measured, but determined, anger against their rebellion.

That's a little like God's anger with Moses.

Exo 4:14 So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and He said: "Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.

Moses had a big sister, Miriam, and an older brother, Aaron. Since this is an origins story, Moses includes the detail that Aaron was a Levite. This will be important later, when God establishes the priesthood. Only Levites can serve as priests.

God sees several moves ahead and provides accordingly. Aaron was probably coming to tell Moses that the Pharaoh who wanted him dead was himself dead. Little did Aaron know that he, too, was going to be volun-told to serve God - more so by Moses than God.

Exo 4:15 Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do.

Exo 4:16 So he shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God.

Aaron had no problems speaking Hebrew or Egyptian. He would be able to serve as a translator for Moses. "You shall be to [Aaron] as God" simply means that the words Moses spoke to Aaron should be considered the very words of God.

On the one hand, having Aaron to talk through was a blessing. However, Aaron would pose problems for little brother. Most notably, when Moses goes to receive the Law of God, Aaron makes the Golden Calf, leading Israel into an orgy.

We should not trust in man, but in God. Eloquence is not what God needed to reveal Himself to Israel, or to confront Pharaoh. A case can be made that God would have been far more glorified by Moses' slow, heavy use of language.

Exo 4:17 And you shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall do the signs."

Pharaoh and the Hebrews would recognize the rod (or staff) as the implement of a shepherd. It would communicate that God had decided to lead His people like sheep away from Egypt.

By the signs, it would also show His power to do so.

Would a show of power help our witnessing? I'm always reminded that it didn't for Jesus. I'm not saying signs and wonders can't or don't still attend the preaching of the Gospel; but we should not count on them, whether they occur or not.

I can't determine anyone else's refusals to serve; I can only look at my own life. But I can suggest this: The Christian life is a sacrificial life. We are to continuously offer ourselves as living sacrifices.

If I am not making sacrifices of my time, and my finances, and my availability, **specifically for the sake of the Gospel** - *then I am refusing to serve.*

As we go into our time of reflection, ask the Lord, "Am I sacrificing?" Listen for His answer and make the necessary changes.