

## Encouragement for the Reluctant and Insecure

### Exodus 3:1-4:14

#### INTRODUCTION

“We have been given a charge by Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations, teaching and baptizing them, calling people to repentance and forgiveness, and proclaiming the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We believe that each person who is part of this church has been given the right and responsibility to intentionally make disciples, and we are committed to sending people out to unreached people groups throughout the world.”<sup>1</sup>

In the 2003 movie, *Master and Commander*, there is an unforgettable scene that has stuck with me over the years. A sailor is deliberately insubordinate to a midshipman, named Mr. Hollam. After witnessing the altercation and Mr. Hollam’s timid unwillingness to face the situation, the captain invited him to his cabin for a pep talk on leadership. Mr. Hollam defended his lack of action saying, “The right words didn’t come.” “The men have taken a set against me, whispering when I go past, and giving me looks.” The captain responded by encouraging him, “You’re not a bad sailor. You have the knowledge. Leadership is what they want, and strength; **find that within yourself and they’ll respect you.**” Mr. Hollam reiterates, “Strength, respect, and discipline,” but clearly doesn’t get it. Later, the men conspired together to mock and intimidate him again below deck. He got spooked, had a mental breakdown, and later that night grabbed a cannonball and jumped off the ship to his death. Maybe when it comes to leadership, you too are reluctant, unwilling, uncomfortable, and maybe fearful. Maybe like Mr. Hollam, maybe you would rather die than practice leadership.

As Christians we are all called to leadership on some level. Whether in the home to your children, in your extended family, your workplace, the halls of the school, your shepherding group, Sunday school class—we are called to a shared mission which requires us to have the strength, courage, and discipline to speak God’s words to others and make disciples. We should all be concerned about the general well-being of this local church and should seek to increase in numbers and in maturity. We are invited to join in God’s redemptive activity. This is our calling and our privilege.

**Exodus 3:1-10.** Of course this is a familiar story. You know the context. God’s covenant people are enslaved in Egypt. Moses was miraculously delivered as a baby and set apart by God. God commissions him at the burning bush to lead the Israelites out of captivity. Moses was reluctant, uncomfortable, and insecure. Then there was a back and forth between God and Moses that each includes a protest and an encouragement. And from these exchanges we gain five encouragements to press on in our mission—

#### 1. Look to God’s PRESENCE rather than Our IDENTITY

**The Protest:** “Who am I that I should go?” (3:11)

Moses immediately understood the gravity and significance of the task. His objection was a mixture of true and exaggerated humility. He was having an identity crisis. He had grown up in Egypt and probably never planned to return. He grew up as an Egyptian only to discover he was actually a Hebrew. When he killed a harsh slave master to protect his people, he was rejected by both the Egyptians and Hebrews and then he ran away. When Moses looked inward, he did not like what he saw. He found no

---

<sup>1</sup> “The Common Mission of Every Believer,” Grace Church, <https://gracesimi.com/about-us/>

confidence, no inherent skill, and no motivation to carry out what had been asked of him. He also felt inadequate and unworthy for this monumental task. **Even though he had just witnessed a miraculous manifestation of God’s glory, he was filled with this intense self-doubt.**

**The Encouragement:** “I will be with you.” (3:12)

God responded Moses’ protest, “Your perception of yourself doesn’t matter, I will be with you.” Jesus makes the same promise to his disciples in the Great Commission—“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20). And further, God gave Moses a sign—a guarantee—that the rescue mission would be successful. He said, “*When* you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.” Moses was at Horeb, the mountain of God—Mount Sinai. If we want to be faithful to our commission, **we should not look to own perception of ourselves, but to God’s presence.** There we will find our true identity as well as help and guidance to assist us in our feeble efforts. We go out on mission as ambassadors of God and he goes with us.

So, when we are faced with the daunting responsibility to go and speak, we also tend to look inward. We often find no strength, skill, or motivation. Oftentimes we identify ourselves by nature and nurture, by our personalities and geographies.” I’m an introvert. I’m from a small town.” It doesn’t matter how Meyers-Briggs, the Enneagram, or the Strength Finder define you. There is no legitimate excuse to avoid your mission. There is always room for growth and improvement. You can always push past your deficiencies and inadequacies whether real or imagined. Like in the *Karate Kid*, Moses failed to see that in his 40 years of shepherding, God was forming him into a leader much like the patriarchs before him.

## 2. Look to God’s REPUTATION rather than Our SIMPLICITY

**The Protest:** “What is [Your] name? What shall I say to them?” (3:13)

In order to understand this next protest, we need to understand the religious context of the Ancient Near East. All of the nations were polytheistic, pantheistic, and syncretistic. They had multiple gods and multiple religions. Like our culture today, there was no general consensus on religion and spirituality. There was no absolute truth, no standard of morality, and no social consciousness of the one true God. Israel was distinct in their monotheism, but had been living in this foreign land for 400 years. Egypt believed in a pantheon of regional gods that were present in and around creation. The Nile, the sun, even the pharaoh were considered manifestation of the gods. Moses who was raised and educated with the elite of Egypt was probably more conversant in Egyptian religion than Hebrew religious history. So Moses question makes sense. The educated Moses would ask a simple question—“How will they know which God I am talking about?” He was inquiring about the nature and essence of God.

**The Encouragement:** “I AM WHO I AM . . . I AM has sent me to you.” (3:14-18a)

This is not the first time we come across this name in the Scriptures. It was used earlier by the patriarchs. But with 400 years of captivity in a foreign land, the Israelites’ unique religious consciousness had slowly deteriorated from generation to generation. And this name was not prominent in this generation. There was some lost knowledge of God. This name that God chose to reveal to Moses is the literal rendering of *Yahweh*, which comes from the Hebrew word “*hayah*,” meaning “to be.” This is a

verb of existence. **It sets the one true God apart from all manmade gods and religions.** It is not meant to be vague, but it is intended to reveal fundamental truths about God's nature—

- Personal: self-giving and relational by nature;
- Eternal: the uncreated one with no beginning or end;
- Transcendent: completely other and separate from all creation;
- Incomprehensible: infinite in majesty and unable to be fully grasped;
- Self-sufficient: completely self-existent; not dependent of anything outside himself.

This name conveys that he is the exclusive and eternal, the Creator and Sustainer of the world, distinct from it. **He is the uncaused first cause and the unending last end of all things.** And even though he is transcendent and incomprehensible, he chooses to be close to his people by way of covenant. God is holy, yet intensely personal as we see in his invitation to Moses to approach him. He desires to save.

We don't need to be concerned about knowing all the ins and outs of every belief system out there. There are so many religions, secular philosophies, humanistic ideologies. They all conflict with each other and are each self-contradictory. They don't fulfill the deepest longings of the heart or answer the most crucial questions of the human condition. But God, by his very nature, stands out among all idolatry, religion, and philosophy. He stands apart from all other ways of thinking. **He is the only true and living God—the greatest good who can satisfy mankind.** Why? Because the one true God is infinite and weighty, yet he is a personal God who delights to save. This name would give Moses comfort and credibility when he goes to the elders. This is the God that you tell the world about. Only he can deliver, redeem, satisfy, and fulfill mankind! We see the message of the Scripture encapsulated in this name.

### 3. Look to God's POWER rather than Our TIMIDITY

**The Protest:** “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice.” (4:1)

Moses had good reason to question whether the people would listen to him. Imagine with me that Jordan disappeared for 40 years. And then one day randomly showed up and wanted to lead again. We'd all wonder where he was when we needed him most. We'd all be appalled at his audacity. Moses is concerned that the people will not believe what he saw or listen to him. Earlier, he was consumed by his own perception of himself, now he is paralyzed by other people's perception of him.

**He was fearful of man.** Proverbs 29:25 says, “The fear of man lays a snare.” The fear of man is a trap. And with any trap, there is bait—something we desire to get. When we fear man, we want something from them. We desire their approval. We want to be liked. We want them to think highly of us. We want to avoid confrontation and rejection and looking foolish. But when we want something from someone, we are failing to truly love them. **He was also fearful of hypotheticals.** Oftentimes, we play out the same “what if” game in our minds. Fear causes us to be irrational. Our minds immediately go to the worst-case scenarios. But the thing with our hypothetical “what ifs” is that they are often things we have no control over and they rarely, if ever, actually occur.

**The Encouragement:** Three distinct signs (4:2-9)

God provided him with three distinct, miraculous signs to support to backup his claims and to help him gain credibility from the elders of the people and Pharaoh. These signs reveal God's sovereignty and his power over all things and cause others to be in awe of God. Moses witnessed much of God's power on this day—the burning bush, the serpent, the leprosy, the blood. God's power should cause us to fear him rather than mere men. **We need to replace our fear of man with awe and reverence for God.** John MacArthur writes, "Pleasing God and Jesus Christ is the issue, not pleasing men. The judgment of men is flawed and eternally inconsequential. The judgment of God, perfect and eternally consequential, is the only verdict that matters."<sup>2</sup>

Think about each of these miracles and even the manifestation of God's glory in the burning bush. These signs point to God's creative and redemptive power. He can take ordinary things and change them—a dry bush into a flaming fire, a staff into a snake, a hand into leprosy, and water to blood. God has the power to transform. And transformation is the goal of our shared mission. Radical transformation is the proof and verification of our message. **We need to replace our pessimistic hypotheticals with expectant ones.** David Brainerd once wrote in his diary, "To an eye of reason, everything that respects the conversion of the heathen is as dark as midnight; and yet I cannot but hope in God for the accomplishment of something glorious among them."<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. Look to God's MESSAGE rather than Our ABILITY

**The Protest:** "Oh, Lord, I am not eloquent, I am slow of speech and of tongue." (4:10)

So far, Moses protests have been somewhat legitimate—he sees his general inadequacy for the task, he desires to represent God accurately, and he anticipates rejection—but now he seems to cross the line and he begins to resist based on his own deficiencies whether real or imagined. God revealed himself to Moses in a stunning revelation. God gave him a compelling message. God provided him with miraculous signs. And now he has the audacity to direct an implicit criticism against God—"You haven't made me eloquent." Like Adam, he is protesting "the [mouth] you gave me" (Gen. 3:12). He is discounting the power of God and the message of God. **He is still consumed by self and others perception of him.**

**The Encouragement:** "I will be with your mouth and teach you what to speak." (4:11-12)

God again responds with an appeal to his creative power. "I made you just the way you are, even your mouth." **God doesn't need your cleverness. He wants your faithfulness. This requires clarity, conviction, and courage—not eloquence.** The desire for eloquence comes from our desire to be well thought of and to impress our audience. The Scriptures are replete with weak, timid, deficient people used by a powerful God. "The Gospel is the power of God to salvation" (Rom 1:16). We cannot save people. We cannot change people. Only God can. Like Moses declaring to Pharaoh, "Let my people go," all we can do it proclaim the message. Moses characteristic sin was to do things in his own strength. He gravitated toward self-sufficiency. But God wanted him to speak to the rock, not to strike it. God wanted him to speak to Pharaoh and not strike him. The message itself is powerful. "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God . . . For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:18, 25). **God values our faithfulness over our skill and over our results.**

<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word, 1992), xv.

<sup>3</sup> The Diary of David Brainerd, June 25, 1744.

## 5. Look to God's CHOICE rather than Our HESITANCY

**The Protest:** "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else." (4:13-14)

Feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness are okay. They actually reveal an understanding of the gravity of the task before us and they can reveal our authentic humility. But this unwillingness to go is a sign of false humility. It is itself deliberate insubordination. It crosses the line. He went from being uncomfortable to unwilling. His reluctance turned into refusal. This is why God gets angry. Moses is communicated a contemptible lack of faith. He doesn't want to be used because it all seems so impossible. **His intense self-consciousness has blinded and paralyzed him to God's amazing plan.**

**The Encouragement:** "Moses, Moses!" (3:4)

Just like in *Master and Commander*, the world encourages us to look within ourselves and muster up the courage to lead. Nowhere does God encourage Moses to do that. Rather he says, "I'm going to do it all." I just need you to go and I need you to speak. God doesn't make much of us, he chooses us to make much of him. God didn't choose you because you're great. He seeks to showcase his greatness through your weakness. His choice of you speaks more clearly than your perception of yourself or others' perception of you. "The Gospel brings me explosive news: my search for approval is over. In Christ I already have the approval I need . . . I no longer live for approval; I live from it."<sup>4</sup> So we don't look to our selves, within ourselves, or to others. We look to the personal, incomprehensible God who created us, redeemed us, and chose us. **Of course we are unworthy; so we serve out of gratitude, humility, and awe.** "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor. 4:7).

## CONCLUSION

Moses was God's choice. Overwhelmed with the task and insecure in himself, he was uncomfortable and reluctant, yet ultimately he was willing. **The paradigm we see reinforced in each of these exchanges is that we are not to look to ourselves or within ourselves but to God for the courage to carry out our mission faithfully.** What a privilege it is to be used by God despite our deficiencies and inadequacies! What a joy to participate in his redemptive activity in the world. We are his mouthpieces. Like Moses, we speak his message of salvation. We proclaim the good news to the captives in hopes that He will rescue them. It doesn't matter if they listen to us or mock us. It doesn't matter if we stumble over ourselves. What matters is faithfulness. If we are willing and faithful, think of what God could do!

We don't wait till we're comfortable or ready. Even in the midst of real fears and insecurities, we push through all the negative feelings, the self-doubt, the hypothetical "what-ifs," and we make much of God. **Why?** Because lives are at stake! People are in captivity and God desires to deliver them. Do you hear their sighs and groanings? Do you hear their cries for help? Do you see their affliction and suffering? They are blinded by falsehoods. They are enslaved to their sin. They are headed for destruction. **How selfish of us to refrain from speaking because of our self-absorbed insecurities!** We serve a great God, a powerful God, a self-giving God, a rescuing God. Moses couldn't see past his own nose to see God's

---

<sup>4</sup> Dave Harvey, *Rescuing Ambition* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 56.

glory and he couldn't hear past his own self-loathings to listen to the screams of his enslaved people crying for deliverance. The driving force is not that we are able, but that God is willing. The fields are white for harvest. People are in desperate need of rescuing. And God stands ready and able to do so.

D. L. Moody said, "Moses spent forty years thinking he was somebody; forty years learning he was a nobody; and forty years discovering what God can do with a nobody." You were created to reflect a glory that is not your own. Do not attempt to harbor any for yourself. Without the creative breath of God, you are but meager dust particles. Without his redemptive breath, you are but filthy, disheveled rags.

The Apostles were commissioned much like Moses. They didn't stand before God in a burning bush, but they stood before the resurrected Christ—the great I AM—who commissioned them to speak to the world on his behalf and make disciples. Our mission must be free of selfish ambition and self-preservation. It requires sacrifice. But any sacrifice for the Gospel is worth it.

"Christians are a body whose truest interest lies in the exaltation of the Messiah's kingdom. Their charter is very extensive, their encouragements exceedingly great, and the returns promised infinitely superior to all the gains of the most lucrative [business]. Let then everyone in his station consider himself as bound to act with all his might, and in every possible way for God."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, 1792.