

Moses' Three Objections

- And as I pondered on that, God brought to mind the natural logical topic to address to a group made up of men only – circumcision
 - Actually, I won't be teaching on circumcision so much
 - Rather we are going to study a couple of moments in the life of Moses, including one that involves circumcision
 - In fact, the real point of the story goes far beyond the practice of circumcision and addresses both the calling and equipping of God on our lives
 - So men, you can relax
 - Actually, I want to talk to you today about God's calling on your life and His equipping for that ministry
- Turn with me to Exodus chapter 4

[Ex. 4:1](#) ¶ Then Moses said, "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.'"

[Ex. 4:2](#) The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he said, "A staff."

[Ex. 4:3](#) Then He said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it.

[Ex. 4:4](#) But the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grasp *it* by its tail" —so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand—

[Ex. 4:5](#) "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."

[Ex. 4:6](#) ¶ The LORD furthermore said to him, "Now put your hand into your bosom." So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow.

[Ex. 4:7](#) Then He said, "Put your hand into your bosom again." So he put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like *the rest of* his flesh.

[Ex. 4:8](#) "If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign.

[Ex. 4:9](#) "But if they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."

- I'm sure many of us are very familiar with the story of Moses and the Exodus of Israel

- After all, even if we haven't read the Biblical account, we've all seen the movie with Charlton Heston, right?
 - But just in case there is someone here who doesn't know the story, let me give you just a moment or two of background
- As we begin reading today in chapter 4, Moses is standing before the burning bush on Mt. Horeb
 - The scene actually begins in Chapter 3
 - And it continues into the first half of chapter 4
- In this moment, God is calling Moses to serve Him in a remarkable way
 - Moses will be God's messenger to Pharaoh declaring God's intention to remove His people from Egypt
 - More over, Moses will eventually become the mediator of the Old Covenant
- For now, though, Moses is full of doubt
 - In the course of this chapter, God is going to contend with three distinct issues in Moses' life that Moses uses as barriers to serving God
 - And as we study these three barriers, I'm asking you to take time along the way to consider whether these barriers are present in your own life
 - The first barrier comes quickly, in the question Moses poses to God on this mountain in verse 1
 - What if they don't believe me
 - Now notice something interesting at this point
 - God has told Moses that he will be sent to Egypt to free his people from Pharaoh's grip
 - And God has said that Pharaoh won't listen so God is prepared to bring miracles against the King to compel him to listen
 - So naturally Moses' first concern in answering this call of God would be how can Moses convince Pharaoh to listen to him

- But that's not Moses' first thought
- Moses' first thought is what if the Jewish people don't believe him?
 - He's worried that the Jewish people won't recognize Moses' authority and accept him as their appointed deliverer
- What a fascinating thing to be concerned about
 - Aren't you surprised that Moses didn't raise the problem of the Egyptians first?
 - Shouldn't he be more concerned about Israel's captors and their ability to thwart the plan God given Moses?
 - Instead, his first concern is that God's own people would be an obstacle to answering God's call
- In a way, this makes sense
 - Moses already knows the Egyptians will put up a fight
 - And God has already given Moses a heads up on how that fight will be won
 - But Moses is more worried about God's people
 - To put it into my own words...
 - God, what if no accepts me as your representative?
 - Isn't that often the way we feel
 - Ministry would be so easy if it weren't for all the people
- Moses' doubt in this moment is one that every godly man faces sooner or later in his walk with the Lord
 - In fact, lets acknowledge something up front: God calls men to serve Him
 - And I believe God calls every believing man to serve Him fully
 - Paul says we are to present our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* our spiritual service of worship.
 - In other words, we weren't saved for our own sake

- God didn't save us because Heaven wouldn't be Heaven without us
 - He saved us to bring glory to Himself
 - And we do that best when we serve Him fully with our lives
 - And therefore, to each man God will extended a specific calling into ministry
- Sadly, I often meet men who have come to equate the concept of a calling into ministry with a profession or job
 - Ex.: Pastors have ministries
 - Evangelists have ministries
 - Worship singers or musicians or Bible teachers or counselors or anyone involved in professional church careers – they have ministries
- But “normal” men in the Lord...we don't have a calling into ministry
 - Brothers, that's not true
 - The opposite is true

[Eph. 4:11](#) And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers,
[Eph. 4:12](#) for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

- Paul says there are those called into specific spiritual roles within the Body
 - But these leaders then use their gifts and time to prepare everyone else in the Body for the work of ministry
 - The word for service in Greek is diakonia, which means ministry
 - Ministry is simply serving people in Christ's name
 - And we are all called to some form of ministry
- But when we receive that call, as Moses did here, our first thought may not be how will I succeed

- Ironically, we sometimes think like Moses and turn to God in our hearts and we ask, "God, who will receive me?"
 - Will any of your people listen to anything I say
 - And will they believe that you sent me to serve in your name?
- Do you know what the true answer is to that question?
 - No one is going to receive you
 - In fact, no one should receive us
- Look how God answered Moses when he asked this question
 - God didn't say, "Oh come now Moses, why wouldn't they accept you?"
 - You're so smart, your so handsome
 - After all, you look just like Charleton Heston
 - You've been trained in the Pharaoh's courts
 - You went to the best seminary, you had the best professors
 - You've written all those great books
 - Of course the people will receive you
- No, God didn't say that
 - God told Moses I will validate your ministry
 - First in verse 2 God showed Moses how He could use Moses' staff to perform a miraculous sign
 - In other words, I will prove your calling in the work of your hands
 - Then in verse 6 God showed Moses how he could turn Moses' hand leprous and then heal it
 - In other words, I will prove your calling in your own body
 - In the way I make your life becomes a living sacrifice to Me

- Finally, in verse 9 God's tells Moses how He will turn the Nile into blood
 - In other words, God will validate Moses' authority and calling by the results of His ministry
 - By the fruit of that calling and its effect on the land
- The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable, Rom 11:29
 - And God is fully prepared to validate His call in your life and ministry to ensure we meet His intended purpose
 - And He will do so by displaying His power in our work, and in our bodies and in the fruit of our ministry
 - So we can't point to our lack of qualifications as an excuse for not serving His people
 - We should respond like the prophet Amos, a shepherd sent to prophecy against the evil king Jeroboam of the northern kingdom

[Amos 7:14](#) ¶ Then Amos replied to Amaziah, "I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs.

[Amos 7:15](#) "But the LORD took me from following the flock and the LORD said to me, 'Go prophesy to My people Israel.'

- So gentlemen, we may not be prophets or apostles or whatever
 - But like Amos, the Lord has saved us and set us on a path to serve in ministry
 - So what has the Lord called you to do in serving Him?
- But what about lack of ability? Certainly that can be a reason not to serve
 - Moses had concerns about his ability to answer that calling

[Ex. 4:10](#) ¶ Then Moses said to the LORD, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."

[Ex. 4:11](#) The LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes *him* mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?"

[Ex. 4:12](#) "Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say."

[Ex. 4:13](#) But he said, "Please, Lord, now send *the message* by whomever You will."

[Ex. 4:14](#) Then the anger of the LORD burned against Moses, and He said, "Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.

[Ex. 4:15](#) "You are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do.

[Ex. 4:16](#) "Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you and you will be as God to him.

[Ex. 4:17](#) "You shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs."

- Moses' hesitation to answer God's call hasn't lessened
 - So now his objections move from authority to ability
 - First he was concerned the people wouldn't receive him
 - Now his concerns turns to the Pharaoh and the possibility that Moses doesn't have the physical skills to be a messenger
 - And he tells God that if God needs someone to speak to the Pharaoh, He should look for someone who is eloquent
 - Someone who can actually do the job
 - Moses describes himself as slow of speech, slow of tongue
 - Actually he says I'm not a man of speech, I have a heavy mouth
 - Have you ever heard it taught that maybe Moses stuttered?
 - Or that he had some kind of speech impediment?
 - That may be true, but it doesn't have to be the case
 - These phrases more accurately describe someone who isn't good at speaking on their feet
 - Someone who can't form thoughts and words in a difficult situation – heavy mouth
 - In others, Moses is just like you and me

- It's just as likely and perhaps ever more likely that Moses was simply expressing the concern that we all share
- We don't feel confident speaking boldly in difficult situations
- What if the president of the US called you and asked you to lead the delegation negotiating a difficult treaty with Iran?
 - Wouldn't we doubt we had the speaking skills to do that job?
 - Are we eloquent enough? Can we think fast enough to counter difficult arguments?
- I think that's Moses' concern here
 - He worries that his abilities aren't up to the immense task God is assigning to him
- Well, you know what, Moses is right
 - His tongue isn't good enough, he isn't smart enough
 - He doesn't have enough ability
 - But God does
- Look at God's response in verse 11
 - God offers two ways He will make Moses' abilities equal to the task
 - First God reminds Moses, who made your mouth? Who gives man the power to hear or see...or for that matter, do anything?
 - Is it not the Lord?
 - Our ability to do anything of value for God is always dependent on Him working through us
 - Not only when we speak to kings, but when we speak quietly to our hurting friend
 - For He is the one who formed us and gave us life and saved us and directs us

[Prov. 16:9](#) The mind of man plans his way,
But the LORD directs his **steps**.

- Secondly, God says I will raise up others to provide you with the necessary support
 - You're not in this alone
 - I will give you words to tell Aaron and I will be with Aaron as He speaks, and I will get it all done through you
- When we consider what God is telling Moses here, we come to one of the most humbling yet empowering truths of scripture
 - If we ever hope to do any good work in God's name, it will never be done in our own power
 - It will only be done by God working through us
 - As a Bible teacher, no matter how much I study, no matter how much I practice or prepare
 - If I accomplish anything for God, it is merely God doing the work through me
 - It was not my practice or preparation or knowledge
 - And yet God still demands that I devote myself to the task in those ways, so that He might mold me for His purposes
- The principle is simple: the one God calls, He will also equip
 - And He is equipping Moses to get this job done
 - How is God equipping you for the ministry He has called you to perform in His name?
 - Maybe a better question is are you making appropriate use of that equipping?
 - Are you exercising it to bring Him glory?
- But since my time is short, allow me to move to the final lesson God will teach Moses in this chapter

[Ex. 4:18](#) ¶ Then Moses departed and returned to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Please, let me go, that I may return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see if they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."

[Ex. 4:19](#) Now the LORD said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead."

[Ex. 4:20](#) So Moses took his wife and his sons and mounted them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt. Moses also took the staff of God in his hand.

[Ex. 4:21](#) ¶ The LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.

[Ex. 4:22](#) "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, "Israel is My son, My firstborn.

[Ex. 4:23](#) "So I said to you, 'Let My son go that he may serve Me'; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn.'"

[Ex. 4:24](#) ¶ Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the LORD met him and sought to put him to death.

[Ex. 4:25](#) Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, "You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me."

[Ex. 4:26](#) So He let him alone. At that time she said, "*You are* a bridegroom of blood" —because of the circumcision.

- As I opened today, I said we would study three issues in Moses life that served as barriers to his serving in ministry according to God's call
 - The first issue was Moses' doubt that His calling might be accepted by the people
 - The second issue was Moses' doubts concerning his own ability to answer the call
 - But now we see a new issue altogether
 - This is an issue of obedience and devotion to God's call
- In verse 19, God tells Moses its time to depart for Egypt since his adversaries have all died
 - And then God let's Moses in on a part of the plan
 - God will say to Pharaoh release my firstborn, Israel
 - And when Pharaoh doesn't, God will kill his firstborn
 - God plans to make a point of Pharaoh's disobedience through the life of his son
 - And then in verse 24, we reach one of the most enigmatic passages in scripture

- The passage is difficult because of a unique feature of Hebrew grammar
 - Hebrew doesn't have pronouns (he, hi, her)
 - So, the subject or object of an action are implied in the language and must be determined by the context
- In this case, we hear that the Lord met him and sought to put him to death
 - In Hebrew it reads Lord encountered and sought to take life
- We know that Moses was traveling with his wife Zipporah and his two sons
 - And it appears that at least one of the boys wasn't circumcised
- All Jews were bound by the covenant made with Abraham to circumcise their children on the eighth day

[Gen. 17:10](#) "This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised.

[Gen. 17:14](#) "But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."

- If someone was not circumcised, they were cutoff
 - Another way to translate cutoff from the Hebrew is destroyed, killed
 - So when God confronts Moses, he is angered because Moses has not obeyed this command to circumcise his son
 - Many say it was Moses who was in danger of being killed
 - But I tend to favor that it was his son who was at risk of dying
 - First, because the penalty of death applied to the one who wasn't circumcised
 - Secondly, in the earlier verses God had just finished telling Moses that the Pharaoh's lack of obedience would result in the death of his son
 - And here we find Moses failing to obey God's commandment concerning circumcision

- So it seems reasonable that God was ready to bring the child's life to an end because of Moses' disobedience
 - Then we see Moses' wife react by circumcising the son on the spot and then throwing or touching the skin to someone's feet
 - Again, with no one name and no pronouns in Hebrew, we're left guessing a little as to what happened
- But here's what I think happened
 - Moses' wife Zipporah was not a Jewish woman
 - Moses had met her in Midian, present day Saudi Arabia
 - She knew nothing of this practice of circumcision
- Perhaps when Moses told of the practice after the birth of his first child, Gershom, she didn't really understand it
 - So she didn't object, and Moses performed the circumcision
- But after the first experience, Zipporah had seen enough
 - She was appalled by the bloody affair
 - So she objects to it when the second son, Eliezer comes along
 - And most troubling, Moses never counters that decision
 - Here's a man appointed to lead God's nation of people
 - To represent God to Pharaoh and to the nation of Israel
 - But it can't lead within his own home on an issue as basic as obedience to God's commands
 - I think this principle is best reflected in Paul's expectation for leaders in the church

[1Tim. 3:5](#) (but if a man does not know how to manage his own **household**, how will he take care of the church of God?)

- Moses had abdicated his responsibility to lead the family spiritually, and it resulted in the son's very life becoming a target of God's wrath

- And when Moses and Zipporah sense God's anger, the wife quickly acts to correct the problem
 - Only to show her disgust, it seems, by throwing the skin at Moses
 - What's most troubling about this whole situation is the way Moses refuses to act even here to correct his earlier mistake
 - He seems completely unable or unwilling to take a leadership role in his own family,
 - Much like he has been reluctant to assume the leadership role God has given him
- I believe God has brought Moses and his family to this point because it's not enough that Moses has heard God's call
 - It's not enough that He trusts in God's ability to validate that calling
 - It's not enough that Moses trust in God to do the hard work in and through him
 - Those things are important, but they're not enough
 - Moses needed to conform his own life to God's commands and expectations
 - Moses needed to be obedient in his own life before He could be useful to God in calling other men to obedience
 - Consider the irony had Moses gone to Pharaoh and to the Jewish people and demanded their obedience to God,
 - Only for them to learn that Moses had failed to keep the most basic of commandments in his day – circumcision
- Gentlemen, where are you in your readiness to serve God in ministry?
 - As Christian brothers, we have all been saved to serve the Lord
 - We all have a calling into ministry, regardless of how we earn our living
 - And yes our ministries begin in our homes as godly husbands and fathers and sons

- But our ministry – our service to the Lord – goes everywhere we go
 - Which means it goes to work with us
 - And to school
 - And to the ball field
 - And certainly to the mission field
- But so many men are going no where with their calling in ministry because they are held back by the same three barriers Moses erected in his life
 - Are you hesitating to step out in ministry because you don't know if someone will recognize your calling
 - They will recognize God working in you
 - Are you hesitating because you don't think you can accomplish anything to glorify God?
 - God can do a mighty work in a willing servant
 - And perhaps the toughest question of all...
 - Are you hampered in answering God's call to ministry because you haven't made obedience a priority in your own life?