

## EXODUS 4:1-17

### INTRODUCTION

Last time we looked at two questions that were really excuses that Moses made for not obeying God's call to be God's man to lead His people out of Egypt. His questions concerned his own unworthiness (v 11) for the task, which as I said is not a bad thing, but for Moses it was, for he was using it as an excuse not to heed God's call. Moses was obviously fearful of going back to Egypt he had lived there for 40 years so he knows what it is was like there but God had called him and he must obey.

His second question had to do with God (v 13) what do I tell the Israelites who sent me. What sort of God are you Moses asks. To these questions God gives Moses answers that simply blow his excuses out of the water. Sometimes chapter divisions are very helpful at other times they are not very helpful this is the case here for chapter 4 is a continuation of Moses response to God's call and it goes on right up to verse 17.

### 1. WHAT IF THEY DO NOT BELIEVE ME?

Here Moses questions how the Israelites will react to him and his message. What if the people say that Moses is deluding himself, God did not appear to him or call him. It once again sounds a reasonable question doesn't it? After all there is no scriptural evidence of any appearance of God since God appeared to Jacob at Bethel, so at least on the human level it seems that Moses had some justification for thinking that Israel will not listen to him. But the truth is that Moses is exercising unbelief here for God has already told him what will happen when he appears before the elders of Israel; they will listen to him (3:18). What Moses is saying is that I know Lord what you have promised and said but what if things don't turn out as you have said, what happens if you are wrong and they do not listen to me? What authority do I have, Lord, that they should listen to me? On this occasion the Lord doesn't reason with Moses nor does he give him any promises. Instead he gave him three signs. God asks Moses what he has in his hand. It was an ordinary staff, such as anyone might have carried in those days. It was used for many purposes walking, rescuing sheep pushing back brambles and even in extreme situations fighting off wild animals.

Moses is asked to throw it to the ground and when it landed on the ground it became a snake. It was a real snake for Moses is afraid and runs away from it. Then God tells Moses to pick it up by the tail. Now try to imagine what Moses must have felt like when he received that instruction. Moses knew from his experiences that snakes are very dangerous and sometimes deadly. But Moses to his credit obeyed and the snake became a staff again. Moses is learning to obey God's word here; this is all part of his training. God has given this sign to Moses so that Moses would learn to obey God's word above everything else in life; even when what he is being asked to do seems impossible. There will be many future occasions when Moses will simply have to rely upon God's word against all the odds (7:16-18).

Moses is given this sign in order that the Israelites might believe that God has indeed appeared to Moses. It is a sign to help them believe now this is exactly why Jesus did miracles which John in his gospel calls signs. He did them to help us believe that Jesus is the Christ and Saviour of sinners. If we read about the miracles and do not acknowledge that Jesus is who he claimed to be then we have missed the point of the signs.

Now before Moses could say anything further the Lord gave him a second sign (v 6). Moses is told to put his hand inside his cloak and when he brought it out it was leprous (skin disease). He was then told to put it back in again which was dangerous if he was suffering from leprosy for it is very contagious. Once again Moses is learning to obey and he obeyed and his hand was restored again. Before Moses could raise any more objections the Lord promises Moses a third sign (vs. 8-

9) that would only happen at a later date. What Moses is being asked to do is to trust the Lord he will give him these signs when they are needed in order to prove his authority as the Lord's man to lead Israel out of Egypt. But I want us to see some very clear applications here before we move on to look at another question that Moses raises.

Before we are too hard on poor Moses we need to ask how we would respond if we were in his shoes and more importantly how we respond to his word today. How many times have we failed to trust our God even though he has given us his promises in his word? Look at the many promises that we have concerning prayer in the New Testament alone (Matthew 23:22). Yet if we were honest how often we fail to pray in spite of those promises. Is that not unbelief.

Are we not saying 'Lord I know you say this but I don't believe you therefore I am not going to pray as instructed to do so.' Are there not times when we do pray that we have real doubts that God is going to keep his word and answer our prayers? God promises to speak to us through his word but how often do we really expect God to keep his promise and speak to us? Are we not so often guilty of the same unbelief the same lack of trust?

Now God does not give us signs today to help us in our faith we have God's recorded word to aid our faith but there are many times in our lives when God answers our prayers even though we didn't expect him to do so and when God does that he simply says to us trust me. As we learn to trust our God in perhaps the small and mundane things of life then our trust will grow so that when that moment comes when we have to trust him in what seems an impossible situation we will do so because God has been teaching us to trust Him.

There is a third application here and it has to do with what God used to bring about his purposes. He used what Moses had available in his hand a simple staff. Yet God used the ordinary to do the extraordinary for his own glory. That is exactly what God does with us as a church. He uses what we have to accomplish his purposes for his own glory. He uses our intellectual abilities and gifts to do his extraordinary work of accomplishing his purposes for this church and for his glory.

He simply uses you with your personality and limitations to do his work. That I suggest to you is amazing and what he calls us to do today is simply to trust him and obey his word and let him do the extraordinary through the ordinary. This church is nothing special we have many gifts but we have many failings and weaknesses yet God uses us for his own purposes. What do we have in our hand? Not much you might think, but whatever we have given to God can achieve his purposes and bring glory to his name. So do not hold back anything from God, whatever we are and whatever we have let God use it for his purposes and we too will be amazed how God can use a simple church like ours to do great things for God.

## 2. HE IS SLOW OF SPEECH (v 10)

Moses has had all his other excuses demolished by God so now he raises another one. Moses claims he is not eloquent in speech. He never has been either in the past or since God's call to him. In other words God's call did not change him he did not suddenly require the gift of speech after he received God's call. Exactly what Moses problem is with his speech we do not know? Some suppose he had a speech impediment like a stammer.

Others think that he is concerned because he has lost his ability to speak in Egyptian. Whatever the problem the point is that Moses felt incapable of speaking in Pharaoh's court. But notice once again how God answers Moses claims (v 11). What God says in effect is Moses I made you the way you are; I am sovereign over your life and if you have a speech impediment that is how I have made you. I knew Moses what you were like before I called you and your lack of speaking ability is no hindrance to me. Eloquence of speech does not guarantee that a person can speak for God. God uses the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. Perhaps we feel just like Moses.

You have felt God saying to you to witness to someone who perhaps is more intellectual than you or someone who is you feel so small beside. Well be assured that God knows all about your weaknesses and your lack of ability but he wants you to obey him.

He is perfectly capable of using you with all your limitations for his own purposes and glory. It is not for us to wriggle out of obeying God just because we have some defect which we might think will put people off the message of the gospel. The Lord refuses to enter into a debate about Moses speaking ability instead he urges him to obey (v 12). He is to go and the Lord will help him in speech and in what to say. He will never experience the Lord's power in his life unless he goes and so it is with us, unless we obey God's word we will never experience God's power in our lives.

I find this on the doors, I feel I am lacking in ability to go on the doors and yet when I do go I often experience the Lord's help in knowing what to say to each person I meet. However unless I go I will never experience his power within my life. What is true of door-to-door work is true in other areas as well. Whatever excuse we are using for our failure to obey his word we must stop making excuses and by God's grace obey and allow God to empower us for the task he has called us to do.

### 3. PLEASE SEND SOMEONE ELSE (V 13)

The NIV translation is really an interpretation of what the translators think is meant by the Hebrew words. The Hebrew words read like this "O Lord, send now by the hand of whom you will send." It is a formula used in Hebrew which leaves the action unspecified and it gives freedom to the subject to act in any manner. It could be that Moses is asking God to send whoever he wants for this task, but Moses already knows that God has called him and is sending him.

So at very least Moses is showing no enthusiasm to do what God has directed. It could be that what Moses really wants is for God to send somebody else anyone as long as it is not him that is how the NIV understands this verse. Moses doesn't want to go back to Egypt and all the excuses that he has been making point to that fact. He is now asking God to send someone else to do this task.

The Lord's response this time is one of anger, the Lord's patience is running out. But along with God's anger is God's grace and mercy for unbeknown to Moses; God was already at work knowing how Moses would respond he is already providing an answer for Moses final excuse. Aaron, Moses brother was a good communicator and God had already sent him on his way to meet with Moses. Aaron will be Moses spokesman; God will help them both to speak and will tell them what to say. Aaron will speak to the people on behalf of Moses, Moses will tell him what to say in that sense he will be like a God to him. All Moses questions are answers all his excuses are brushed to the side. Once again he is instructed to take his staff in his hand so can the promised miracles can be performed if needed (v 17).

But Moses must now go, that is what God is saying. Is it possible that you have heard God's call upon your life in some way recently? It might be his call to salvation and you have made many excuses and raised many questions but slowly those excuses have been brushed aside by God and your questions have all been firmly answered. It leaves you with the need to respond. That response is one of true repentance from sin and true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Saviour of sinners.

Perhaps you have heard God's call in your life for some sort of service within the church. Perhaps God has been calling you to a greater commitment to the meetings of the church or calling you to some specific service within the church. You have presented God with all your reasons why obeying his call is not possible at this time in your life. But God through his word has been dealing with each one of your excuses and now you have run out of them.

You are left with a very simple decision. Are you going to obey or disobey? That is the point that Moses has reached we will see next time what he does but what about you what are you going to do? It could be that God has been calling you to what we call full time service. You have presented all your reasons for not heeding the call and God has answered every one of them.

You have then given all your excuses but God has exposed them for they are and now like Moses you are left with a decision to make either to obey or disobey. You might have fears and doubts I am sure Moses did but are you going to obey that is the final question you are left with.

Finally it might be that God has been speaking to you about some area of your life that needs to be addressed. It might not be a specific call to some specific service for him but it could as simple as praying more or reading the Scriptures more or witnessing to someone who is on your heart or giving more of your resources to his work or exercising a writing ministry to someone and so on.

But you simply do not want to do it, you have made your excuses and presented your questions but you are being asked once again by the Lord to obey. Are you going to do it or are you going to disobey. Only you will be able to answer that in your heart and then by your actions.

Whatever God has been calling us to do over the last few weeks may God give us the grace to obey him?

Amen