

Lord, Please Send Someone Else!
Exodus 4:10-31
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Introduction: Glossophobia

In addition to the fear of dying, fear of heights, fear of different animals like snakes and spiders, and claustrophobia, apparently a relatively common fear that people have is glossophobia, the fear of public speaking. Some people even rank this a higher fear than the fear of death. I never felt that strongly, but when I was young I certainly felt afraid to get up to talk when all eyes were on me. How many of you enjoyed giving presentations in class when you were in school? I didn't even like to participate in class discussion very much unless I absolutely knew I had the right answer – probably my fear was of being ridiculed more than speaking. But also, when it wasn't voluntary and you had to recite a poem or give an oral report in front of class, I was the classic sweat like crazy, heart-pounding, just get up there and mutter through it so I could sit down before I passed out. The only way that I became comfortable speaking in public was a) realizing that it was mostly in my head and that people were actually rooting for me to do well, not hoping that I'd fail (that's awkward for everyone), and b) to just start doing it and get over it with experience and confidence.

I remember my Young Life leader asking me to give my testimony as a Junior in High School. I only said "yes" because I knew I needed to conquer this fear and get better at speaking in front of people. I worked hard on that speech and practiced it a bunch, but, man, did I stumble through it. And then I had the brilliant idea that I would sing a song with my guitar because that would bail me out if I wasn't speaking really well. But that made things worse because my voice cracked and shook through the whole thing. There were a couple girls tearing up at the end; I like to think that it was because the song and talk were so convicting, but I think they just felt so bad for me!

Today's text is going to highlight another person who was scared by the thought of speaking in public, and also did not consider himself qualified to accept the huge task that God had called him to. The plots of so many classic stories involve an unqualified person taking on a task that they are initially reluctant to accept because they feel they are not up to it:

- Frodo taking the Ring to Mount Doom
- Harry Potter defeating Voldemort
- Luke Skywalker joining the fight against the Empire
- Hamlet challenging his uncle
- Esther saving her people from Haman's plans of genocide

If you haven't been with us for the past couple of weeks, we have been reading through Exodus chapters 3 and 4 where God calls Moses into action from the burning bush. Today's passage is the end of the conversation between God and Moses, as well as the actions that Moses takes to start fulfilling God's mission for him. The first eight verses:

I. God Provides Moses a Mouthpiece (vv. 10-17)

¹⁰ But Moses said to the Lord, "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." ¹¹ 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? ¹² Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak." ¹³ But he said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else." ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. ¹⁷ And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs."

So Moses' objections have been "I'm not the right guy" and "they won't believe me," now he moves on to "I am not a good speaker." We don't know if he had a speech impediment, or just not a lot of confidence because he had been a shepherd for 40 years, and probably hadn't spoken Egyptian in a long time. I think I agree with Douglas Stuart's commentary, though, that says that Moses does a lot of speaking later in his life and in the Pentateuch, and there's no mention of speaking problems then. The issue is not as much a speech problem as it is exaggerated humility in the face of being asked to do something or offered something, which was common in the area and the time. Abraham called himself ashes and dust when he speaks to the Lord in Genesis 18; David calls himself a poor man and little known, even after he has killed Goliath; Jeremiah said he couldn't speak and was only a child. Like those men, Moses was "responding to a great assignment with the proper sort of exaggerated humility and self-effacement expected and valued in his culture."¹

Whatever the reason, God essentially responds that He is aware of Moses' exact abilities *and* limitations. After all, He created Him, and He created him exactly how he needs to be. It's ultimately not going to be Moses' speeches that convince Pharaoh to let the people go anyways; it's going to be the plagues that God sends. But God has still called Moses to go and to be His mouthpiece. God will be his speechwriter, Moses just has to deliver the speeches and God will give him the ability when he needs it. There's a real sense of the old phrase that I grew up hearing, "God doesn't necessarily call the equipped, but He equips the called."

Do you ever throw out a bunch of excuses when someone asks you to do something you really don't want to do? "Hey, I love bowling, do you want to with me sometime?" And you start saying, "Um... I don't know what the family schedule is, we're really busy, I'm getting ready to travel." You throw out these really vague excuses that you hope the other person just backs off and quits asking, right? But some people just keep asking until you're really blunt with them: "Hey, actually I'm not going to bowl with you because I hate bowling, I'm terrible at it, and I'd rather get my teeth drilled than put on those shoes." This is what it feels like is the dynamic between Moses and God. Moses is out of lame excuses, but God is still insistent, so he just finally honestly admits, "I don't want to go. Send someone else."

And God is angry. I can understand God's anger: I told you the plan, that I am mighty and will go with you, that everything will work out, and you still don't trust me! It's not so much that you have a speech problem as an obedience problem!² Remember another prophet named Jonah who refused to carry out his mission from God? He had a couple of really dark, fearful nights inside a big fish to contemplate why it would be smart to obey God. God doesn't do anything that dramatic with Moses; he gives in and says that Aaron, his brother, is conveniently on his way and he can speak in Moses' place. (In church lingo, Aaron is going to get volun-told.) It's interesting, God doesn't just set Moses aside and decide to just deal directly with Aaron. Moses is going to be included in everything, God will teach them both what they need to say. There's a little bit of sense that Moses is the go-between, "*you shall be as God to him,*" "*you will put the words in his mouth.*"

¹ D.K. Stuart, *Exodus, Vol. 2* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), p. 135.

² Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), p. 114.

Aren't you glad that the Bible shows us true pictures of the people that God used? That they weren't perfect saints, they didn't all have great confidence, that they hemmed and hawed, and lied and cheated, did stupid stuff, and commit grievous sins? Praise God that He used them anyways, because then I know that He can use me and you! Since God put up with all of Moses' excuses and issues, He can put up with mine, even as I grow in my obedience and willingness to trust Him.

Apparently having Aaron go with him is enough to get Moses to stop bringing up objections and get going on this mission. Verse 17 was the end of their conversation and we're going to see Moses pack up and go after this.

II. God Spares Moses' Life (vv. 18-26)

18 Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Please let me go back to my brothers in Egypt to see whether they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace." 19 And the Lord said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead." 20 So Moses took his wife and his sons and had them ride on a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the staff of God in his hand. 21 And the Lord said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. 22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, 23 and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.'" 24 At a lodging place on the way the Lord met him and sought to put him to death. 25 Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it and said, "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!" 26 So he let him alone. It was then that she said, "A bridegroom of blood," because of the circumcision.

Moses went back home to ask his father-in-law's permission to return to Egypt. I don't know if this was a polite son-in-law thing or a two-weeks notice because Moses had been working for Jethro as an employee. Notice that he doesn't say anything about his encounter with God and his mission to free Israel. He says, "I want to check and see if my brothers in Egypt are alive," not "I'm on a mission from God." He probably thought that wouldn't be well-received by his father-in-law; either wondering about Moses' sanity or the safety of his daughter and grandkids.³ But Jethro lets him go, and we'll see him again in Exodus 18 when he visits Moses to give him some advice.

Moses heads back to Egypt on the back of a donkey with his family and his staff. And verses 21-26, as bizarre as they initially seem, all have to do with firstborn sons, three of them to be exact:

- 1) Israel is God's firstborn son, so Pharaoh needs to be told that the people he's enslaving are God's firstborn son.
- 2) If Pharaoh refuses to let the Israelites go, then God will kill his firstborn son. This is the first time that God has mentioned this as a possibility.
- 3) And finally, Moses' firstborn son is uncircumcised, which is a violation of God's covenant with Abraham. Back in Genesis 17:10, God had told Abraham, "*This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.*" God almost took Moses' life for this violation in verse 24. How can God have the leader of His people be someone who doesn't even obey Him and bring his own children into God's covenant?⁴

It seems that Zipporah, Moses' wife, sensed what was wrong, and as all intuitive, proactive wives do, she stepped in and got the job done. Perhaps there was dialogue that didn't get recorded in this account, but she realized that God was angry that Moses' son has not been circumcised. So she

³ Dennis Prager, *Exodus: God, Slavery, and Freedom* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2018), pp. 55-56.

⁴ W.W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993)

grabs a knife and circumcises him. Keep in mind that her dad was a priest, so she knew the what and the why here. What does the “*you are a bridegroom of blood to me*” mean? I don’t know exactly. It seems most likely that she is including herself with Moses in the covenant family that was bringing their son into the covenant. Acting on her own, God might not have accepted these actions, but joined to Moses, God will credit this action to Moses as well. So God relented and did not take anyone’s life.

As we close out this chapter, we see the mission to Egypt start off on a good foot as

III. God Gives Moses Favor with the People (vv. 27-31)

27 The Lord said to Aaron, “Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.” So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. 28 And Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which he had sent him to speak, and all the signs that he had commanded him to do. 29 Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel. 30 Aaron spoke all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people. 31 And the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.

Aaron was told by God to leave Egypt to go find Moses. It’s likely they met on Mount Horeb, the mountain where God had spoken to Moses in the burning bush. Moses lets him in on the game plan for how they’re going to approach Pharaoh, what the signs are, and then they go see the Israelite elders. And they rehearse all of what they’re going to do before Pharaoh in front of the elders and the people, even showing the signs (*remember the 3 signs?*) of the staff turning into a snake, the healthy hand getting leprosy, and transforming water into blood. And despite Moses’ fears that the elders might not believe him, they all do. And more than that, this encounter and news makes them worship God in gratefulness. That’s not always a given – we’ll see that the people are fickle and often turn on Moses and don’t believe that God is working. But we’re off to a good start, with Moses and Aaron received well in their initial return to Egypt. In the next chapter, Moses and Aaron will begin their visits to Pharaoh where things will not go so smoothly.

Conclusion: Not As I Will, But As You Will

Do you remember anyone else in the Bible who admitted that they didn’t have the greatest eloquence like Moses, but despite that was still bringing God’s word to the people? In 1 Corinthians 2:3-5 (that was part of the Responsive Reading) the Apostle Paul said, “*And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*” At some point along the way, Paul had learned that his eloquence was not the most important thing when he preached. 2 Corinthians 11:6a: “*Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge.*” The message of the Gospel and the power of God were much more important.

That is a really hard thing for modern churches and pastors to hear. We tend to elevate the really powerful speakers automatically, that’s human nature, right? But the speaker who brings the truth, the power of God in the Gospel is a better preacher and ambassador for the Lord than one who is a great public speaker who gives the listeners something other than Jesus and God’s word. I have visited churches and seen men preach online who were absolutely riveting, excellent public speakers; but their messages were not grounded in the Biblical text. I left thinking, “I don’t really care what you think, I care what God thinks. I wish you would have opened the Scriptures to me.” That’s what Paul did right, and that’s what Moses needed to realize was more important than being confident in his speaking abilities. I’d rather have a stuttering, shy, uncreative person give me the

gospel, the love of God from the word of God than a polished, technically brilliant speaker tell me to rely on my own righteousness. That's not an excuse for pastors and speakers not to try to get better at their craft; I'd rather have both – good delivery and solid content. But if I have to pick one, give me Jesus! (“American Gospel” documentary on Netflix)

So where do we see Jesus in this text? Maybe a couple of places, but I'm reminded of a moment of conflict near the end of His life. While praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus cried out: “*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me*” (Matthew 26:39). We have to understand the agony, both physical and spiritual, of what lay ahead for Jesus with the cross. He was in such torment that He sweat drops of blood. He was saying, a bit like Moses, in gut-level honesty, “please send someone else, find another way.” But God could not send anyone else. There was no Aaron who could step in and do what needed to be done. Jesus was the God-Man who had come into the world to live a perfect life and die a sacrificial death so that He could be our substitute and accomplish our salvation on the cross. No one else could do that.

So, unlike Moses, who insisted on his own terms, his own way with God, Jesus, the Greater Moses, followed up that earlier request with: “*not as I will, but as you will.*” And just before this, Jesus had prayed, “*Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify You, since you have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom You have given Him.*” (John 17:1b-2) Jesus knew that He had been set on this path to fulfill God's mission for His life. His whole life was a life of obedience, and He would not stop even at the hardest moment.

And God was willing to have His firstborn Son, His only Son, killed in order to free the rest of us to be His sons and daughters. “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*” Romans 5:10 – “*While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.*” Amen.

Benediction

2 Corinthians 13:11

“Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.”