

**GOD'S RELUCTANT SERVANT**

Moses - Part 4

Exodus 3:11-4:23

**Intro:** I doubt if any of us can, or could, understand how Moses felt when the Lord appeared to him from the burning bush. The Scriptures give us the impression that as far as the people of God in Egypt were concerned, Moses had been totally isolated from them for forty years when all of this happened. At least nothing is said about any communication between Moses and Aaron or Miriam. They may not have even known where Moses was. But it is certain that Moses had not heard from God like he did at the burning bush. Probably Moses had prayed. He may have confessed his sin of murdering the Egyptian. We don't know. It must have been for Moses an almost, or a completely, dry period in his life spiritually. I think we all know what that is. But suddenly to see and hear from the Lord, was the most shocking thing that could have possibly happened. And to hear the Lord say, after He had informed Moses that He was well aware of what was going on in Egypt with the Israelites, and what He intended to do about it, that He wanted to send Moses back to Egypt to bring the Lord's people out, was the most incredible part of this whole scene!

There are some things that we do know.

We know because of what Moses had done in taking himself out of the royal family of Egypt, that God was going to be faithful in taking the Israelites back to the land. Moses must have known that even though we fail the Lord, we don't change the plans and purposes of the Lord.

But how that was all going to come to pass, Moses did not know. He must have felt that he had eliminated himself, but who was going to take his place, he did not know. So to hear the words we find in Exodus 3:10 must have been the last thing that he expected. (Read Ex. 3:10.)

Obviously we are not going to have the time today to take all of the rest of chapter 3 and most of chapter 4, but what I want to do is to point to you the four objections that Moses raised with the Lord as to why he was not the right man to do what the Lord wanted him to do. In chapter 2, verse 23, we were told that the Pharaoh who had wanted to kill Moses, was dead. But Moses did not know that, as far as we know. But in chapter 4, verse 19, after Moses had decided to go back to Egypt, the he was told,

“Go, return into Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life.” But it is apparent that this was not an issue with Moses as far as his objections were concerned. Most of Moses’ objections had to do with himself, and it is very instructive to see how the Lord answered each of Moses’ objections to His call.

### **I. MOSES’ FIRST OBJECTION (Ex. 3:11-12).**

Moses had listened as the Lord identified Himself in verses 5 and 6. And then the Lord told Moses what He had seen, and what He had heard, and what He knew about the children of Israel. All of this is in verses 7 and 9. And then He told Moses what He was going to do. This is in verse 8. But then He told Moses what is recorded for us in verse 10. These were words which Moses never expected to hear.

Forty years of silence, and then it was broken with these words. Forty years of silence, and suddenly the light of God’s presence was shining before Moses. Forty years of silence, but the man Moses was a different man from what he had been forty years before. Before he had been self-confident. Before he had been impetuous and impatient. Moses may not have been conscious of the presence of the Lord during that time, but the Lord was not only present; He was working in His servant, teaching him that there was a great difference between his own ways and God’s ways. He was learning that doing the will of God includes not only what to do, but when to do it. Moses had learned, or was learning (because we never learn any lesson perfectly) what James was directed to put to words many years later. This is what James wrote, and we find his words in James 1:19-20:

19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Solomon, about 500 years after Moses, wrote: “Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools” (Ecc. 7:9). The first murder that was ever committed was because Cain, in his jealousy of Abel, because Abel’s sacrifice was accepted by the Lord, while Cain’s sacrifice was rejected, murdered his brother. And what had the Lord said to Cain beforehand? “Why art thou wroth, and why is thy countenance fallen?” (Gen. 4:6).

In Moses’ case, what that Egyptian was doing to the Hebrew, was wrong, very wrong. But Moses’ way of dealing with it was certainly not God’s

way. It was providential that Moses was not killed by Pharaoh for what he had done. But he was able to escape from Pharaoh, and he went down to Midian where he “went to school” for forty years, not an ordinary school, but to a place where the Lord could train him for future ministry. It is amazing how much we can learn when we are alone as compared with those times when we are surrounded with people. I have learned more in the quietness of my study than I have any other place in all of my life. We all need places and times when and where we can be alone with the Lord.

Well, what was Moses’ response?

He didn’t expect to hear the Lord say what He said. But he responded immediately and said, as we read in verse 11 of Exodus 3: “Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?” The Lord was listening to a man who had been thoroughly humbled and evidently felt that he was the last man on the earth who should be given such an assignment from the Lord. If you had talked to Moses you probably would have found out that he didn’t even think that he was a very good shepherd. He honestly could not understand why the Lord would choose him for such a task. He zero self-esteem at this point in his life. He was thoroughly taken by surprise by what the Lord had said to him. I can imagine that what Moses said was with an emphasis on the word “I” as he came to it in his response to the Lord.

How did the Lord respond to him? Did He try to feed his ego? Did he tell him he would feel better once he got back to Egypt? No, the Lord didn’t do any of the things a psychologist might have done to make Moses feel that he was the man for the job. In a way, the Lord was agreeing with Moses. Who was Moses? In himself he was nothing. It was too big a job for him, or for anyone else. But the secret of his success in doing what the Lord was calling him to do, was not in who he was, but it was that he would not be working alone. The Lord said, “Certainly I will be with thee.”

Move ahead with me for another forty years. Moses had died, and Joshua had been chosen to be his successor. How did the Lord speak to Joshua? Let me read just three verses to you from Joshua chapter 1. The first is verse 5:

5 There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days

of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee (Joshua 1:5).

The other two verses are verses 8 and 9:

8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

9 Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest (Joshua 1:8-9).

The important thing was not who Moses was, or who Joshua was, or who you are, or who I am. In ourselves, we are nothing (although it may take us forty years to realize that), but if God is with us, we can do all things through Him who will be our wisdom, our strength, and all that we need. For God to be with us does not just promise us His presence, but it is His way of assuring us that He is on our side, that He will be with us to prosper us in what He has called us to do. This is truth for you and for me today, right now!

But still Moses was not satisfied, so he raised a second objection'

## **II. MOSES' SECOND OBJECTION (Ex. 3:13-22).**

Moses had come to realize a second deficiency in his life. He realized that he did not know the Lord the way he needed to know Him, the way he would have to know the Lord if he were to be the right kind of a leader. This is a point that many of us as pastors overlook. And it is generally true of all of us when it comes to serving the Lord. Oh, we may be able to repeat and explain the attributes of God, but that is not the problem. The problem is that we don't know the Lord in personal fellowship with Him the way we should. God is not a personal living reality to us. We are saved, and we know a lot about Him, but we have not yet realized the importance of what Paul wrote to the Philippian believers when he said, "That I may know Him"!

Notice what Moses said in verse 13. (Read.) And then notice how God answered him in verses 14 and 15. (Read.) I feel sure that Moses knew this about God, but it had not yet really gripped his heart so that he lived each day in the light of this truth.

I have told you many times before that Jehovah is a name that is formed from the Hebrew verb, to be. He is the “I AM” God, the ever-living and unchanging God. God will never die, nor will He ever change. What He was to Abraham, He also was to Isaac, and what He was to Isaac, He also was to Jacob. And what He was to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He would be to Moses!

So this strengthened God’s answer to Moses’ first objection. This ever-living and unchanging God would be “with” Moses, and Moses would find that God alone would be sufficient in every situation that Moses would face leading the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the promised land!

How important it is for all of us to realize that we are not self-sufficient, but we need to learn that God is our sufficiency. We can so easily be overwhelmed and overcome by life with its problems and disappointments, but that is so we will learn, as Paul told the Corinthians, that “our sufficiency is of God.” The full statement of what he said, was this:

5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;

6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life (2 Cor. 3:5-6).

None of these truths were truths that Moses would be expected to learn overnight, but he, like all of us, would spend the rest of his life learning them in ever deepening ways.

But Moses had still another objection, and this was a real possibility.

### **III. MOSES’ THIRD OBJECTION (Ex. 4:1-9).**

Moses remembered enough about the children of Israel to know that they were not a spiritually minded, God-fearing people. And at this point in Moses’ life they were forty years worse than when he had left Egypt. If a people are deteriorating spiritually, a lot can take place in even a year or less. Moses was wise enough to know that the people were a major problem. How do you lead people out who are content to stay where they were? It is true that they did not like the slavery, but they didn’t know that anything else would be any better. And they would question if the Lord had actually appeared to Moses. Moses knew they would deny that.

I think that most of you know this story well enough that you remember that the Lord gave Moses three signs as proof to show the people that the Lord had appeared to him. The first was changing his rod into a serpent, and then back into a serpent again. The second was putting his hand into his robe and then bringing it out leprous. Then putting his hand into his robe again and bring it out clean and healthy like it had been before. The third was to take water out of the river, pouring it out on the land, and seeing the water turn into blood.

Now the Lord doesn't appear to us like He did to Moses, in the burning bush. Nor does He give us signs to demonstrate that the Lord has appeared to us, and called us to do a specific work. But there are ways that the Lord will enable us to demonstrate that we are truly the Lord's servants.

One is that our main objective will be to get people to hear the Word of God. It wasn't complete in Moses' day, but it is now. And if God is going to speak to us, He speaks through His Word. Our unwillingness to proclaim anything but the Word of God, shows that we are the Lord's servants. But, at the same time, we do not take the credit for any blessing that comes through our ministry to others. We insist on giving the glory to God because it rightfully belongs to Him, not to us. God has different ways of giving His blessing to us, and people will know His blessing when they see it because it is so different from anything else in the world.

But I must hurry on to Moses' fourth and last objection.

#### **IV. MOSES' FOURTH OBJECTION (Ex. 4:10-23).**

It was, "I am not eloquent, nether heretofore, nor since thou has spoken unto they servant, but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Ex. 4:10).

I have always had a little trouble with this excuse that Moses was giving to the Lord because, when we read what Stephen said about Moses in his speech to the Jews in Jerusalem, he said this about Moses' speaking ability:

22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds (Acts 7:22).

I think this means, among other things, that Moses was a great speaker. But perhaps there are a couple of explanations to harmonize what we read in Exodus 4 as compared with this statement by Stephen in Acts 7.

The first is that that statement of Stephen's was made about Moses in the first forty years of his life. But here in Exodus 4 we are reading what Moses said about himself forty years later. Moses hadn't spoken to a group of people for forty years. He only spoke to sheep. And we sometimes here it said that if we don't use a gift, we lose it. Think of a young person who learns to play a violin, for example, and he plays it well. And then for forty years he doesn't touch the violin. Can he immediately play like he did forty years earlier when he was playing his violin several hours every day? Obviously not! So that could explain the difference even with Moses' ability to speak.

But the other point that may explain the difference is that Moses was thinking of his ability to convince the Israelites by what he said that the Lord had sent him to be their deliverer. It is like many of us used to be. We thought that our ability to lead someone else to Christ was dependent upon our saying the right thing in the right way at the right time. And if we spoke to some person about the Lord, and they didn't respond by trusting Christ, we blamed ourselves because we didn't express ourselves the way we should have to reach that particular person. There is no doubt but that we need to be clear in presenting the Gospel, but our best presentation will not be sufficient if the Holy Spirit is not working through us. On the other hand, a few words from a very immature Christian may be used to bring someone to Christ.

How did the Lord respond to Moses on this point?

First, he asked Moses who made man's mouth? The ability to speak is a God-given ability for all of us, whether it is talking to just one other person, or talking to a hundred people. It is God Who enables us to speak His word. But then the Lord gave Moses a wonderful promise. You can read it in verse 12: "Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say" (Ex. 4:12).

But Moses didn't get it, and he asked the Lord to send someone along with him to do the speaking. This angered the Lord. His patience was exhausted with Moses. And so Aaron was appointed his spokesman, and Moses missed many blessing that otherwise he would have had. But the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy show us that Moses got over his hesitation about speaking and that he probably did as much speaking as any other person in OT times.

(See p. 8.)

**Concl:** What are some of the important lessons we need to learn from these two important chapters?

First, we all need to be very careful that we do the will of God in God's time, and in God's way, and for His glory. But if we fail (as most of us have), we must realize that our failure does not nullify the purposes of God. They might be delayed, but God's Word is immutable, and so is His will.

Second, we learn from the life of Moses that God's silence does not mean that God is not working in us and for us. God is very patient, and He is very gracious. He does not excuse our sins, or overlook them, but He works to bring us back to Himself different from what we were when we left, "meet for the Master's use."

Third, we learn from these chapters that God sees what is going on in our lives. He hears as we cry out to Him for help. He remembers His promises. And He cares for us. We may grieve Him, and grieve Him deeply. But He never gives up on any us who belong to Him. If you feel like you are on the sidelines, remember what Paul taught in Phil. 1:6. It hadn't been written yet when Moses lived, but Moses is an illustration that it was true even then.

To God be all of the glory!