

Sermon 9, The Mediator Creates a Mediator, Exodus 3:10-4:17

Proposition: The Angel of Yahweh calls Moses to the work of deliverance and equips him to do that work.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have spent the last two Sunday evenings looking at God's encounter with Moses at the burning bush. We saw what the sign of the burning bush revealed about the nature of God as fire. We saw that our God sends a man to accomplish His purposes regarding the salvation of His people. And tonight, we will look a little more at the man whom He sends. How does God prepare a man for the task of saving His people? He does it by talking to him, empowering him, and patiently working through all of that man's objections to doing God's work.

I. God's Commission: You Bring Out My People, Moses, v. 10

The dialogue begins with God telling Moses "You're the one. You will deliver the Hebrews." That is Moses' calling. And we see right off the bat that when God calls, He also equips. That equipping is what we call "discipleship." It means taking someone and helping him learn and internalize a set of rules and practices that fundamentally shape him. Many of you have some experience of being discipled on the job. You got a job, maybe one of your first jobs, and you didn't know how to do that job. During your first months there, though, a more experienced coworker or perhaps your boss took you under their wing and showed you how things were

done. I certainly still remember being taught to see all the seams in the drywall, all the splashes and irregularities in the paint, all the doors with brass knobs but nickel hinges, and everything else that doesn't quite match that it was our job as construction guys to fix. In my next major job, in the Walmart produce department, I learned so much about rotation, about organizing and stacking the crates of vegetables, about culling the old and putting out the new, about how to increase sales in what many people consider a "boring" department but is nonetheless the one Walmart puts right at the front of every store. Maybe you learned how to handle money and accounts at your job; maybe you learned how to work with students, or how to operate and maintain heavy equipment. No matter what it was, you know what I'm talking about. And the same goes for this job of rescuing God's people. Moses needed to be discipled; he needed to be taught how to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt.

II. God's Discipleship: An Overview, 3:11-4:17

A. He Disciples By His Word

And how did that training program get started? Well, it began by addressing Moses' felt needs. I promised last week that we would look at the theme of the reluctant prophet. Well, here we go. The next twenty-eight verses contain a dialogue between Moses and God. The dialogue consists of five objections mounted by Moses, and God's five answers to the objections. The crucial point is that discipleship comes by hearing the word of God. Discipleship comes by hearing the word of God. I'm not saying that God will always condescend to argue with you and patiently work through your objections in an audible, visible way like He did with Moses. But it is clearly taught in the Bible that to prepare us for any mission or service in His Kingdom, God speaks to us. Hearing the word of God is how we get trained to do a task as big as leading Israel out of Egypt's land or as small as comforting a frightened child.

So God discipled by His word. Mark that.

B. He Reveals His Overwhelming Patience

But God is not only a God who speaks; He is a God who is patient beyond the lot of mortals. I don't know that any of us could have a conversation like this with our child or employee and keep our cool the way God does. Some of these objections are frankly absurd. And yet God treats them all respectfully, patiently working through them and showing how they do not matter as much as Moses thinks they do.

1. Moses' Objections

With that in mind, then, let's look at all of these objections.

a) Who Am I?, 3:11

Moses' first objection is his simple inadequacy for the task. "Who am I?" The answer to that question, as we have noted, does not sound especially promising. By this point in time, whatever his identity as the Prince of Egypt may have been, that was a lifetime ago. Many of you had some pretty exciting stuff going on in 1981. But you wouldn't dare identify yourself as what you were then. Humanly speaking, the answer to this "Who am I?" question is "You are a hired shepherd in the middle of nowhere with no diplomatic credentials and no recognition in elite circles. You are not the man to deliver an entire nation of slaves. The grand vizier of Egypt, or

maybe some Cushite or Hittite princeling, someone who can approach Pharaoh as something of an equal, is probably the guy we're looking for to do this mission."

That's the human answer. Moses' objection, in other words, has some validity. The way the story is told, we are most familiar with his Egyptian upbringing. We know that he is familiar with the ways of Egyptian royalty. But for Moses now, standing in front of the bush, that was all a long time ago, before marriage, before children, before 40 years watching sheep in the desert with nothing but his own thoughts for company. In other words, it was the most honest and compelling thing he could think of to say.

Similarly, when you are confronted with a nomination to office in this church, you may very well say "I've never held ecclesiastical office. I like the direction the church is going in and I think the leaders we have are doing just fine. Who am I to try to do better?"

When you are given an opportunity to evangelize a coworker or neighbor, you may say "Who am I to talk about Jesus? My own life has so many problems. I don't even take myself seriously!"

When you have the chance to say "I'm not going to do that because I'm a Christian," you may say "Who am I to stand up like that? I'm only a kid. I'm just four years old! I can't stick up for Jesus. My church doesn't even admit me to the Lord's Supper!"

Brothers and sisters, as we'll see in a minute, the "Who am I?" question is totally irrelevant in God's book. He doesn't call the equipped; He equips the called. If He wants you to evangelize, disciple, lead the church, He will give you the ability to do that.

b) Who Are You?, 3:13

Well, to radically simplify Moses' second objection, we can say that he asks "Who are you?," or better, "What is your name?" What kind of an objection is this? It has generated much discussion, not least because the sons of Israel do *not* say "What is the name of the God who sent you?" or appear to show the slightest interest in the question of whether Moses had obtained the name of their God. John Stott commented that Moses here, like many of us, might be good at posing hypothetical objections that are actually totally irrelevant to the situation.

But leaving aside the problem that the Israelites appear to have never asked this question, what can we make of this objection? Well, in one sense it is not an objection in the sense that the previous and following objections are. God had just promised to be with Moses, and it would seem to be entirely legitimate to say "If you're going to be with me, who are you? Who is it that will be with me on this difficult task?" God gives an incredible answer to that question, and we'll look at that answer next week because it deserves a sermon in itself. For now, let me just observe that God's answer to the question of who He is emphasizes His being and His being-for — "I am," and "I am the one who is present with you."

c) What if they don't believe me?, 4:1

But this next objection seems very far-fetched. In v. 18, God had promised Moses that they would listen to him. In this verse, he asks, like a good worrywart, "But what if they don't?" Of course, you can mount (and have mounted) this objection against absolutely anything God says. God says "By humility (the fear of the LORD) are riches, honor, and life." You say, "But what if

they aren't?" This isn't a logical objection. It is simply asking God to reaffirm His promise by asking what will happen if He fails to keep it.

Don't tell me that you're unfamiliar with this objection. Of everything Moses said, this is the one that resonates the most with our anxious hearts. God promises to be with us; what if He's not? Our hearts want to know. God promises to give us a straight and smooth path through life if we trust Him instead of our own understanding. But what if He doesn't? God promises that we will not miss out on any pleasure worth having if we keep His commandments. But what if we do? God promises that those who can merely kill the body, who can only take our stuff and our families, cannot ultimately harm us and therefore shouldn't be feared. But what if they do ultimately hurt us? What if losing my family hurts so much that I lose my faith and go to Hell?

Anyway, we can play this game all day. I can give you a promise from God's word, and you can shoot it down with a "What if it's not? What if He doesn't keep that promise? Whatabout whatabout whatabout?"

Brothers and sisters, it looks stupid when Moses does it. We all want to grab him and say "Just believe the self-subsisting fire, okay?" But when God's promises get sucked into your anxiety vacuum, through the hose up into the bag of worries where they are choked by the dust of hypotheticals, it's not so easy to get them back out, unchoke them, wash the dust off, and say "I believe these promises and I'm going to unplug my anxiety vacuum and throw away the bag of worries that I've so diligently vacuumed up from all corners of my life."

Moses was worried that the people wouldn't listen. It's almost like he knew how stubborn and annoying human beings are! As far as worries go, worrying that a bunch of Jews will not listen to or agree with you is a pretty solid worry. But God resolutely forbids and condemns all worrying. He doesn't want us living based on what our anxiety vacuum can pull up into that bag of worries — a bag, by the way, that we never empty but always carry around with us as a heavy burden unless God forces us to throw them away. When He does force us to do that, as He does with Moses at the end of this dialogue, we realize that we actually can live without all the worries — and we realize how freeing it is!

d) I'm not a good speaker, 4:10

The fourth objection that Moses mounts is "I'm not a good speaker." Honestly, we should not mock this one. Do you know what people are terrified of? Public speaking! I know, this congregation is weird. We have out here a ton of you who either speak to courtrooms for a living, or go to Toastmasters for fun in your spare time, or have to address crowded classrooms Monday-Friday during the school year, or otherwise do more than your fair share of public speaking. But the average Joe just hates getting up in front of others and opening his mouth. What? Me? Public speaking? I'm terrible at it! I have literally had one of you tell me that you wouldn't be an elder because you're not a good public speaker.

Again, brothers and sisters, we can see how silly these objections are in someone else's mouth. We know that God *did* deliver Israel from Egypt, and we know that He used Moses to do it. We think of Moses as this figure with legendary self-confidence and drive and leadership dripping off his giant muscles. We think of Moses as Michelangelo portrayed him on Pope Julius

II's tomb. This is the kind of fellow who is no more afraid of public speaking than Donald Trump is afraid of the TV cameras. But whatever Moses may have grown into over 40 years in the wilderness, the man who says in Exodus 4:10 "I've never been good at public speaking" is not some musclebound hunk who last knew fear when he was two years old.

Are you letting fear of public speaking keep you from listening to God's call to serve in this church? Are you letting it get in the way of a call to the ministry? Are you letting it get in the way of evangelizing your coworker or speaking to your children? Brothers and sisters, don't. It sounds dumb when Moses says it. It sounds dumb when you say it too.

e) Please Send Someone Else, 4:13

Well, at the end of all the objections comes the real objection. It never was about Moses' rhetorical abilities, or about his worrywart tendencies, or about God's name, or about Moses' job as a shepherd (which made him an abomination to the Egyptians). No. All of the objections resolve themselves into this final objection: I don't want to do it.

How many men are sitting out there in churches this evening, not serving as deacons because they don't want to serve as deacons? How many of you are not serving as elders because you don't want the responsibility of guiding the church in a difficult and dangerous time? How many of you are not willing to minister at the food pantry, at the Christian school, in your own family by leading family worship or in your workplace by letting others know that you are a Christian and that if they want to talk about it you're ready to talk with them? How many of you are watching TV instead of getting a penpal, listening to news instead of Scripture on your drive to work, talking to your brother instead of to God as you walk the dog every night? Brothers and sisters, may it never be that you are not heeding God's call to faithful obedience in your place and calling because at the end of the day, you don't feel like it!

If you are fighting God's call this evening, Heaven help you, because I can't. The patience of God is enormous; indeed, it is infinite in an important respect. But it is not infinite in this: It's not infinite in waiting for you to obey! There is a fixed time when the opportunity to obey ends and Hell begins. God will not leave you on probation forever. At some point, that window closes. We see it in our text as God's anger is kindled against Moses immediately after this fifth objection. God, enraged, says "You will go" and that is the end of the discussion. So in that sense, I'm comforted. I'm not the cowboy; it's not my job to drive you all into service in the church, in the home, in the community, in the workplace and classroom. I don't have to drive you — but it is my job to warn you that God will drive you. If He is calling you, He will not give up until He wins. And He is going to win. Don't make Him get angry before you answer the call. Don't force His anger to burn against you as you dither and object and finally admit that you just don't want to do it. That answer doesn't cut it with God.

2. God's Patience

Why? Precisely because He is patient. He will meet you where you are. He will answer your objections, even taking seriously objections that any normal human being would openly laugh at. That's our God. That's who we serve. That's how magnificent and kind and patient He is. Do

you know this God? Do you worship and admire Him for His patience? Brothers and sisters, you should. Indeed, you must. What God is great like our God?

So let's just look at these six answers that God gives, these half-dozen ways in which He reassures Moses, answers His questions, and promises help in every area where Moses is weak.

a) He Reveals His Presence with Moses, v. 12a

The first thing He says is that He will be with Moses. This is a special kind of presence. I've compared it to the difference between being at a concert alone (yes, hundreds of people are in the room, but you don't know any of them!) and being at a concert with your girlfriend. Her presence makes a major difference; indeed, it makes all the difference between a miserable concert and a fun one!

Well, the presence of God is even better than your girlfriend's presence. God shows His patience by saying, "Moses, I will be with you!" You and I wouldn't want to be with someone who complained as much as Moses. But God promises to address Moses' lack of expertise in delivering people by going along with him and being there with him. Isn't that refreshing? You say "I don't know how to do this! Who am I to do this?" And God says, "I'll be right there with you the whole time." In other words, God will take you through the whole thing, step-by-step. It's the difference between trying to replace your bathroom sink alone and trying to replace it while Chip Gaines is right there the whole time. Actually, of course, it's even far better than that. God's presence is such that your identity and personal inadequacy literally don't matter. Of course Moses is not the one who can deliver the people. But God is; and if He is with Moses, then that is all the answer that Moses needs.

b) He Promises a Sign: Worship at the Mountain with God's People, v. 12b

But God answers the question Moses didn't ask. Rather than just saying "I'll be with you, and therefore who you are doesn't really matter," He also gives Moses a sign. Now, this is a sign that requires faith. It's a sign that will not be revealed until the Israelites have been delivered. "You'll know it was really me," God says, "after I've delivered the people and brought you all back here to worship Me at Horeb." It's a sign that demands faith — but it's a sign. Can you trust this God? He has given a similar sign. We'll know it was really Him when we are safely worshipping in Heaven. We'll know that Jesus really has conquered death when we see Him resurrected and alive in Heaven.

c) He Reveals His Name, vv. 14-15

But not only does God promise His presence and give a sign; He also reveals His name. This is so important that we'll look at it at full length next Sunday. But I want to emphasize that this name is "Being." God is. "I am," He says, and adds that His being is determined by and limited by Himself alone. Moses is not dealing with someone weak, someone derived, someone with limitations. He is dealing with the God who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. This is the God who has set out to deliver His people.

d) He Gives Moses the main points of all his speeches, vv. 16-18

Further, God gives Moses the main points of his speeches! He specifies what to say to the elders, what to say to the King of Egypt, and even what to say to the neighbors when Israel is leaving. If you really are bad at public speaking, well, it helps to have the main points set out for you by a competent speechwriter.

e) He Promises Extraordinary Power and Favor, vv. 19-22

Indeed, God even promises extraordinary power and favor, power sufficient to make Pharaoh let his slaves go, favor sufficient to make ordinary Egyptians happily hand over their silver, gold, and nice clothes, in quantities so vast that you can put it on your children! Now, I don't know about you, but I don't give my children real jewelry. They're children! They might break it, lose it, eat it, or some other completely inappropriate thing. But Israel is going to have such extraordinary favor that they will have so much jewelry they'll even let their kids play with it. That's a lot of jewelry. That's absolutely extraordinary. People might give you a little food or something if you ask nicely. But no one gives away jewelry just because you asked. God, however, has control over the hearts of their neighbors such that He will do this for them.

f) He Gives Signs, Words, and an Assistant, 4:1-17

Finally, He even promises miraculous signs, words in the mouth, and an assistant who will do the actual public speaking! Can you imagine being equipped so thoroughly? God did not have to give all this to Moses. But He did because He's loving and generous. Behold your God! See how He loves you. See what He'll give to free His people, and how even here the mission, as glorious as it is, doesn't run roughshod over the comfort and even over the objections of the man God sends to lead it.

Can you worship this God in His patience? Can you imitate Him by being patient with your own children, employees, friends, and church family? Brothers and sisters, He is your God. Worship Him. Know that the tenderness of God and the generosity of God is for you, and that they call you to be tender and generous too. Amen.