

“THE SERVANT OF THE LORD” – A Study of the Life of Moses**“Graduation Day” (Exodus 2:23-3:1-22)**

Moses sought to get on the fast track to leadership but the Lord sent him to walk on a different track. This path took him to the wilderness for forty years to prepare this man to be His instrument to deliver Israel. The Lord not only ordained this place but the time Moses must spend there. It was a slow and trying crucible of preparation. In Egypt he had been somebody but in Midian he was a nobody. Now at this point, God would once again step in and use him.

No doubt Moses thought his time for leadership and deliverance was over. Israel needed a younger and more charismatic man than the aged and inadequate shepherd who dwelt in Midian raising a little family. It might also seem from a human perspective that the best years of Moses' life were wasted. If he weren't the last man you would guess could be used to deliver Israel, he would certainly be at the bottom of the list of candidates. But God's ways are never our ways. He can take the broken vessel and remould it into a mighty instrument for His glory (cf. 2 Cor. 4:7). That is why He is God and we are not.

The Lord had a *magna cum laude* graduate from His *Wilderness University* that He planned to use as no man had been before. Forty years had radically changed this man not just physically but also spiritually. Swindoll notes,

When it comes to walking with God, there is no such thing as instant maturity. God doesn't mass produce His saints. He hand tools each one, and it always takes longer than we expected.

And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them. (v23-25)

It may have appeared that for the preceding 80 years that God was not interested in what was happening to Israel. But God proves once again that His silence should never be read to mean He is indifferent. In fact the text makes clear, “*And God heard their groaning*” and “*God had respect unto them.*” God has His own timetable for the future of Israel. It is based on His unfailing covenantal promises.

Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. (v1-3)

We find the once great prince of Egypt languishing at “*the backside of the desert*” for four long decades. Here he lived in obscurity, solitude and discomfort as a stranger in a strange land. At this point his life was so humble that he didn't even have a flock of sheep to call his own. His constant companions were no longer the great and the good of Egypt but the sheep of his

employer, Jethro. He seemed destined to be buried in a nameless obscure grave in the desert. How the mighty have fallen.

Moses' day started, doubtless, just as one of his days of the previous forty years. He went out with the sheep to seek pastures in the desert. There were seemingly no hints from the Lord that this day would be any different to the 14,600 days he had spent in Midian. But this day would be one that changed his life forever. Suddenly, we are told that as he neared the mount of Horeb, "*the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.*" An extraordinary thing occurred on an ordinary day. Often that is the way the Lord intervenes in our lives. On an ordinary day as we go about our divinely ordained tasks, He steps in to change the direction of our lives. You may come across one of God's burning bushes today.

Now there was nothing seemingly remarkable about the bush. Moses would have passed tens of thousands of such bushes in his forty-year sojourn there. He may well have seen many spontaneously ignite in the searing desert heat or ignite from a lightning strike. What drew Moses' attention was the strange fact that "*the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.*" The experienced desert shepherd knew that this "*fire*" was far from ordinary.

And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God. And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.
(v4-10)

Moses was right. This was no ordinary spectacle. The angel of the Lord, the preincarnate manifestation of the second Person of the Godhead, was present in this burning bush. The Lord spoke the name of Moses two times no doubt to emphasise this was a personal encounter. He then ordered him to remove his shoes as he was in the presence of God on this holy ground. The Lord revealed His covenantal relationships to the ancestors of Moses, "*I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.*" This should also have been a reminder that the Lord was the God of the imperfect and failed as Moses would have known the chequered history of these three men. The Lord made clear that He knew what was happening in the lives of His people and that He cared about them.

Moses immediately discerned he was in the presence of God. He is now not merely curious, he is awed, "*And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.*" This man knew that his eighty years of inconsistent faith gave him no grounds to come before a holy God. He knew that God was not a man that he could approach and look upon lightly. It was not the bush or the ground that was holy in and of themselves but the presence of God that made this place holy. That is true today in any place where we experience the presence of God.

After introducing Himself the Lord informed Moses that He would now act to deliver His people, "*And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out*

of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey.” The Lord then gave Moses his role in this divinely ordained plan, *“Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.”* This was not an invitation but a direct command by the Lord. It was not complicated to understand. It is important to note that God did not state that Moses would be the power to deliver Israel but just the instrument that God would use. These human instruments come and go but God and His work go forward in every generation. The deliverance of Israel would be God’s plan and by God’s power – it always is!

And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? And He said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain. (v11-12)

Forty years before Moses assumed he was ready to deliver Israel by his leadership. But he was a different man now. Time had humbled him and taught him many things about Moses. No longer did he trust his great mind, political connections, eloquent tongue, and powerful physical body. No longer did he feel he had the ability to lead anything more than a few sheep. All his dreams were buried in the burning desert sands in over 4 decades of tedious shepherding. The consequence of his earlier failure by being headstrong and self-confident was now that Moses was crippled with inadequacy and self-doubt. However, God’s sovereign purpose will not be thwarted by the whims and moods of His servants.

This story should be a reminder to us all that just because a person seems to be finished by age and previous failures doesn’t mean that God is finished using him. The Lord placed Moses in the wilderness to teach Moses that he needed to depend on God for everything. The forty years were certainly not wasted. You may be in the wilderness years of your life at the moment. God is simply remaking you by this humiliation so you can be useable.

Moses gave a series of excuses why he believed God had made a mistake in calling him. Here we find Moses with a sense of inadequacy to do the Lord’s will for his life. He could not believe that God would be interested in him. He forgot that God needed simply a servant not a celebrity. Moses made five excuses to the Lord:

- (1) I am not significant (v11)
- (2) I am not a theologian (v13)
- (3) I am not convincing (4:1)
- (4) I am not eloquent (4:10)
- (5) I am not interested (4:13)

EXCUSE ONE – INSIGNIFICANCE

The first excuse Moses raised was his sense of insignificance for the role, *“Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?”* Previously Moses thought he had the right qualities to do this but now he recognised he was unable. What Moses needed to learn was that God was not impressed with his lack of talents, as He knew he had none to do spiritual work. It was the Lord Jesus who reminded us, *“without me ye can do nothing”*

(John 15:5b). Moses' reply might look humble at first, but it should have been "Here am I, Lord."

The Lord never directs our attention to our own talents and abilities but to His Person and Promises when He wants to motivate us to do his will. He assures Moses, "*Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.*" In other words He is telling Moses it is not about you but ME – it never has been about you. What others think of you, or even Moses thinks about himself, is really not important. The Lord is the God who uses ordinary men and women to do extraordinary things. The Lord is still looking for people who are available and willing, "*For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him.*" (2 Chron. 16:9). It is He that makes them able.

It is also interesting that the Lord only promises a sign to Moses after he obeys His will, "*this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.*" The sign was that he would return to the very spot where this 8,000 feet mountain stood with all of Israel and there they would corporately worship the Lord. There are many believers who think that God must give them a tangible sign before they must obey His revealed will. Bob Deffingbaugh observes,

The practical application of what has taken place in this case is evident. Many of us are waiting for God to give us a sign before we are willing to step out in faith. When God has made it sufficiently clear who He is and what it is that we are to do, God may well require that we act in faith before we are given a sign of His presence and His power. Such is the case here.

EXCUSE TWO – LACK OF THEOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. (v13-14)

The second excuse offered by Moses was that he did not really understand enough of God to be able to speak in His name. He bemoaned, "*Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?*"

One thing we should learn never to do is to try and argue with God over His plans. This second excuse was an even lamer one than the first one. The Lord replied to Moses, "*I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.*" This Hebrew expression is a verbal form that simply makes clear that the living, self-existent, infinite God of this universe has sent Moses. The Lord is making clear to Moses that He is not dependent upon anything in His creation and everything in His creation is dependent upon Him. In other words, forget about who you are Moses and remember I AM the past, present and future – the omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient God who never changes.

And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my

name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations. Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt: And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The LORD God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God. And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty. But every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians. (v15-22)

The Lord is not finished speaking to Moses. He then adds three promises to help him when he eventually meets with the leaders of Israel and Pharaoh. The first promise is that the leadership of Israel “*shall hearken to thy voice.*” Forty years before Israel had rejected his attempt to lead them. Back then he had been a mighty prince but now he was an aged shepherd. Now, the Lord promises that because He is with Moses that they would follow him. This promise would have been especially sweet to the heart of the fearful Moses.

The second promise is that God will deal directly with Egypt Himself, “*And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof.*” Four decades before Moses struck an Egyptian and it brought disastrous consequences, but God now informs him that He will do the striking and this time it will work. The final promise the Lord gives him is that although Pharaoh will initially resist in the end, “*he will let you go.*” This exodus would bring material blessings, as the Egyptians would give them great spoil.

It should be noted that by these revelations, the Lord demonstrated His sovereignty by His foreknowledge of the predestined future that He controls. For He could not have absolute certainty of the future if the future was not in His hands. We should also discern carefully that the Lord sees the whole thing as a “done deal.” It is not “if ye go” from “*when ye go.*”

God had asked Moses to confront his greatest fears in returning to Egypt where he was a wanted man. However, you would have thought that with such great promises from a God who cannot and will not lie would have been enough for Moses. After all, this is the man who singlehandedly wanted to launch his own campaign of deliverance forty years before! Moses had no right to protest further. Instead, we will find that man is very frail and fallible as Moses begins to argue more.

As we read through these excuses we should learn something about the excuses we often use in our own lives to avoid doing the will of God. Like Moses, it is not a lack of knowledge but desire to obey God’s will. Isn’t it fascinating how we all like to negotiate with God rather than obey Him? But like Moses we will also discover that God’s will is always the best way. Will we obey or stall for time by making excuses? God is not looking for ability because you don’t have any to do His work – no one has. What He is looking for is availability. Are you available? If you are, He is able.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What was God doing to Moses in the forty years of his wilderness years?

2. How did God deal with the excuses of Moses?

3. What excuses do you use to avoid doing God's revealed will?

4. What have you learned from this chapter?
