

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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Exodus 3:9-4:17 “When God Calls, What's Your Excuse?”

Intro. Jim is really down & depressed. He has reached a certain point in this life where he is wondering what his purpose in life is. Right now he feels like he doesn't have much to live for. He goes to a dead-end job 5 or 6 days/week. He & his wife don't get along, and he has few friends. He's tried most of what the world has to offer, and he has not found lasting satisfaction. Much of what he has tried has made things worse in the long run, not better. He's picked up some bad habits along the way that he can't break. Is *this* all there is to life? He's getting a little older now, and death doesn't seem so remote. He is beginning to wonder more about what happens after death. Could the afterlife be any worse than this life? One reason Jim seems down is because he has little hope that things are going to get any better.

Jim doesn't have a sense of purpose. He doesn't get up each day with any meaningful mission to accomplish. He just exists from day to day.

What about you? Do you have a clear purpose in life beyond meeting your own physical needs & desires? Do you have a sense of mission that involves something big, something important, something of lasting value? Have you come to realize that God has not only called you to salvation, but also called you to service?

Well in our text of Scripture today, Moses receives a call to service. He started out in a palace. He was well educated. He was probably groomed for an important position within Egyptian government. He may have even become Pharaoh some day. He probably had big dreams. But then in a moment of rash, hot-tempered behavior, he killed a man. I don't think he intended to kill him. He was just trying to be a hero to his oppressed countrymen, but it turned out badly. So he had to flee to the desert. On the other side of the desert he met a man with 7 daughters, and he married one of them, and settled into the family business of tending sheep. For years he lived the mundane life of a shepherd. Is this all there is? Is life simply about earning a living? I'm sure being a husband and father brought some satisfaction, but there must be more! He was doing fairly well while his countrymen were still in bondage.

Then that fateful date came. Moses was on a long journey, trying to find a new place to graze & water his sheep. He saw somewhere on the side of a mountain a burning bush. Then as Moses drew near, God called out to him from the midst of the burning bush. “Moses, Moses!” That was the beginning of a new direction in his life. God had a mission for him to accomplish. His mission was to be God's instrument for the salvation of his people from Egyptian bondage. His mission was far bigger than anything he could have imagined.

I believe that God is still calling people today. God has a purpose for your life that is bigger than you can imagine. People are in bondage to sin, & God may be calling you to help set them free. We are surrounded by multitudes of people who have yet to receive God's forgiveness. So God is still calling missionaries & preachers. God is calling people to serve in this ministry of this church. Is He calling you to witness to a neighbor or coworker? Is He calling you to sing in the choir, or to work in our AWANA program? Is He calling you to teach a class? He may be calling you to a support role. This church is making a difference in the lives of people. Is God calling you to have a part?

Moses should have rejoiced that he was to be the instrument of God's long-awaited salvation. Instead, he tried to escape God's call to rescue Israel from slavery. He had plenty of excuses to offer God, explaining why God should not call him. And when God calls today, people offer plenty of excuses. God calls upon people to turn from their sins and trust in His Son Jesus. What's your excuse for not doing so? God calls upon people to serve Him. What's your excuse for not doing so? Well based on Moses' own experience, let's consider some of the excuses people use for resisting God's call upon their life. Then, I will give God's answer to these excuses. Let me address these excuses by asking a series of questions:

I. DO YOU FEEL INFERIOR?

Let's suppose that God is calling you to serve Him in some way. You may feel the task is too big for you. You're just a nobody. Even so, Moses said to God in v.11, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" The son of Pharaoh's daughter had become a shepherd, and felt too weak to go to Pharaoh. He's saying, "I'm a nobody compared to Pharaoh. I am weak compared to Pharaoh. God, you've got the wrong man."

Is that the way you feel sometime? You feel too small, too weak, too insignificant? Well, that's no excuse. Notice God's answer in v.12, "I will certainly be with you." Likewise, when Jesus gave the Great Commission to His disciples, He said, "Lo, I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20). This is a word that every one engaged in Christian service needs to take to heart. When God is with us, we need to shift the focus off of ourselves, and on to God.

Again, Moses said, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" He was a nobody compared to mighty Pharaoh. But God delights in using nobodies. He takes an ordinary person, fills them with His Spirit, and does something extraordinary for the glory of God. A converted Hindu once said to his countrymen, "I am by birth of an insignificant and contemptible caste, so low that if a Brahman should touch me he must go and bathe in the Ganges River for purification. And yet, God was pleased to save me, and even call me to the high office of teaching the gospel to others. Do you know the reason for God's conduct? It is this: If God had selected one of you learned Brahmans and made you the preacher, when you were successful in making converts, by-standers would have said it was the amazing learning of the Brahman and his great weight of character that were the cause; but now, when anyone is convinced by my instrumentality, no one thinks of ascribing any praise to me; and God, as is His due, has all the glory."

Many in the church feel the way Moses did! We feel that we aren't as qualified as someone else, or that we just don't have the ability to get the job done properly. But just remember. God makes no mistakes. If he has called you, you are not too small for Him to use.

Now let me address a second excuse people use:

II. DO YOU FEAR BEING UNINFORMED?

In other words, what if they ask something, & you don't know the answer? You don't want to appear dumb, or uneducated. This keeps a lot of people from witnessing or teaching. "What if someone asks a question, and I don't know the answer?" Well Moses felt that way. He anticipated an important question posed by the Israelites. He said in v.13, "Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they

say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" Moses is saying to the Lord, "I just don't know enough about you." He did not know how to explain God to them. He felt too uninformed about God.

Now this excuse is a big one for men. We don't want to appear dumb, uninformed, untrained, or inadequate. I suppose it's largely a pride thing. So we would rather not attempt something, or just keep our mouth shut. Proverbs 17:28 says, "Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent..." (NIV).

Well, that's no excuse for not venturing out to answer God's call to service. He will equip you. He will give you the knowledge & wisdom you need if you ask. He will teach you by His Spirit. In v.14 we see that God revealed His name to Moses. His name teaches us much about the nature and character of God. He is the great I AM, the One who was, who is, who always will be. As Moses faced an uncertain future, God showed him that He Himself would be in his future. God gave Moses the answer he needed. Now he was fully equipped to answer the people's question regarding who God is, and what He is like.

Too often we feel that we just don't know enough about God, His Word, etc, to get the job done. Never allow a lack of an education, a lack of skill or any other thing stop you from being everything God wants you to be. The Holy Spirit is ever with us and will teach us what we need to know along the way (John 16:15).

Not long before God called me to preach, I was so unprepared when it came to knowing the Bible. I grew up in a church that did very little to teach & preach the Bible. By the time I was 16 I had never read even one book of the Bible. In fact, I hated to read. I had never read a book in my life. I had poor reading comprehension. When God called me to preach, I could have said, "Lord, you're calling the wrong man." But God took care of that problem. He created a love for the Word of God in me, and I started reading the Bible. I discovered that the more I read, the more I was able to comprehend what I was reading. If I had an excuse, God took it away from me.

III. DO YOU FEAR REJECTION?

Moses did! After God revealed more of His plan to Moses, notice what Moses said in chapter 4, v.1, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.'" Moses was afraid that the children of Israel would not accept him.

I want to be honest with you and say that this is a problem with me. I faced ridicule and rejection as a child, and it has left some scars. I was the one that was picked last, or next to last, when they picked sides to play a game. I have always feared rejection. In fact, I dropped so many hints to Cheryl that I wanted to marry her, that by the time I asked her, I was sure she would say, "Yes." I just didn't want to face rejection.

Once again, God gave Moses an answer to calm his fear of rejection. He would perform up to 3 miraculous signs to convince most anyone that God had sent him. First, Moses was to throw his shepherd's staff or rod on the ground, and it would turn into a snake. When Moses did that, sure enough, it turned into a snake. Moses did the sensible thing & "fled from it" (v.3). Then God told him to pick up the snake by its tail. That would require an act of faith! When he obeyed, it returned to its former state. If that didn't convince them, he was to put his hand into his bosom, then pull it out, and his hand would appear leprous, that is white and scaly. Then he was to put his hand back in his bosom, and it would be fully restored. Leprosy was a feared,

incurable disease (2 Kings 5:7). Yet God demonstrated that He could do the impossible. Now if that didn't convince them, he was to take water from the River Nile, and pour it out on the ground. Then, as it was being poured, it would turn into blood. The Nile received honors by the idolatrous Egyptians as the source of every good and all prosperity in the natural life of Egypt, and was even identified with Osiris, the Egyptian god of life, death, and fertility.¹ If Moses therefore had power to turn the life-distributing water of the Nile into blood, he must also have received power to destroy Pharaoh and his gods. With these three signs Moses was overcome any natural tendency to reject Him as a prophet of God.

Even so, I believe God will help you overcome fear of rejection. First, don't assume that people will reject you or your ministry. If you trust him, God will so work in your life that people will sense that God has called you, and sent you to do a work for Him. He probably will not enable you to transform a rod into a serpent, but God can do something better. He can transform you! He can turn people from snakes to saints. He can turn demons into deacons. He can turn losers into winners. No life can be touched by the salvation of Christ and remain like it was! The greatest sign that should cause people to accept you and the God who sent you is a changed life! Paul said in 2 Cor. 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

IV. DO YOU FEEL INADEQUATE?

Moses used this excuse next. Surely anyone called to confront the king of Egypt and motivate his own people to follow must have powers of verbal persuasion. So he said in v.10, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." Later, in 6:12, he said, "I am of uncircumcised lips." We don't know for sure what Moses' speaking problem was. As he was facing the prospect of standing before the leaders of his people, and standing before Pharaoh & his staff, he may have simply felt inadequate as a public speaker. He says, "Lord, you need an eloquent speaker for the job and I cannot speak well." Indeed, one of the greatest fears people have is having to speak in public. He may have feared that after 40 years he was no longer fluent in the Egyptian language. On the other hand, the Hebrew literally indicates that Moses says that he was "heavy" of speech & tongue. He spoke with difficulty (cf. use in 18:18; Num. 11:14; 1 Kings 12:4). So he may have had some speech impediment. Many have believed that Moses was a stutterer.

Once again, God had an answer for Moses. He said in vv.11-12, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say." God makes a really good argument here. Moses should remember that He was the One who created the mouth in the first place. He can certainly repair any defect! Moses' weakness and inadequacy was no obstacle when God promises to be with us. He works with "bruised reeds," and breathes His strength into them. Subsequent events proved that Moses became a very capable speaker both to Pharaoh & his own people Israel. God certainly enabled him when he stepped out on faith and obeyed the commission of the Lord.

God often calls us to tasks that seem too difficult, but he doesn't ask us to do them alone. God offers us His resources, just as He did with Moses. Years later, the apostle Paul learned this principle: "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). It is good to acknowledge our

¹ He is one of the oldest Gods for whom records have survived and first appears in the pyramid texts around 2400 BC, when his cult is already well established (<http://en.wikipedia.org>).

own weakness. God can use us far better when we have no confidence in the flesh. Instead, our confidence should be directed toward God, and the strength that He can provide. We should not hide behind our inadequacies, as Moses did, but look beyond ourselves to the great resources available. God sends no man on errands which He does not give him power to do. Paul said in Phil. 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Do you remember how God revealed Himself to Moses? He revealed Himself by the bush that was burning, but it didn't burn up. Even so, God's power is never diminished. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

God had already shown Moses what He could do. He took an ordinary wooden staff & transformed it into a serpent. Later, God used that staff to do many other mighty miracles. In fact, afterwards it was called the rod of God (4:20). Even so, God can take a common, ordinary person and do extraordinary things. God used a donkey to speak to Balaam; He used a rooster to speak to Peter; and He can certainly use you. All He asks is that you be available and that you be usable.

I grew up with a speech impediment. I stuttered and stammered, and had trouble getting my words out. You think *you* have a fear of public speaking, imagine *my* fear! In fact, my greatest fear in school was to be assigned any kind of oral presentation in class. I was powerless to speak with any fluency. Yet, when God did a great work in my life one summer at youth camp, I felt that God was calling me to preach. At first, I thought that I must be mistaken. I could not understand why God wanted me to preach, and I resisted that call for months. I was a musician at the time. I thought I had misunderstood my calling. Surely, God was calling me into the music ministry. Any stutterer can sing without stuttering! Yet the impression persisted. So I talked with a young preacher friend of mine, David Allen. He played a sermon on tape by Dr. Adrian Rogers entitled, "God's Hall of Fame." Based on I Cor. 1:26-31, he showed that often God's plan is to choose weak people to do His work. He told several stories of how God filled a weak person with his power and accomplished great victories, such as the shepherd boy David slaying Goliath, the giant. He explained that God's power is more easily seen in weak human instruments, and He gets the glory. Then, a light went off in my head. I understood why God was calling me to preach. What God did for others, He could do for me. And so trusting in God's power, the day after my 18th birthday I announced my call to preach before a Sunday morning crowd of about 1,000, and for the first time I was able to speak fluently!

When we look at the size of the task and compare our abilities to it, we often see ourselves lacking what is needed for true success. However, we tend to leave God out of the equation! So let us take this lesson thoroughly to heart, and seek that grace which will enable us to place God between us and our difficulties, instead of putting difficulties between God and us. When God calls, He also equips us to do what He has called us to do.

Moses has raised 4 excuses or objections. God could not have made it any clearer to Moses that his objections were inconsequential. God has answered each one. He knows he cannot escape God's call upon his life. So he tries one more approach. Based on Moses' response, I ask you one more question:

V. DO YOU FEEL SOMEONE ELSE SHOULD DO THE MISSION?

Oh, how common this one is! When our Nursery Director calls upon you to serve in the nursery, do you say, "Get someone else to do it. I'm too old." Or "I tend to children all week. I need a break." Well, shifting the responsibility to others did not work in Moses' case, and it

usually will not work for you. Notice what Moses said in v.13, “O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send.” Years latter, when God called Isaiah, he said, “Here am I, send me!” But Moses said, “Send someone else!” He is trying to find a substitute. He just doesn’t want to do what God is calling upon him to do.

Back in the days of the Civil War, they had a substitute policy. If you were drafted to serve, you could get out of your service by furnishing a substitute. In fact, my great grandfather’s cousin, Jesse Felker, did that. Usually a substitute was obtained by paying him a pretty sizable sum of money. By the way, his substitute died in the Battle of Franklin, TN 2 years later.

Well, the government permitted a substitute policy, but God is not pleased when we try that. God has been patient with Moses so far. He has answered every objection & excuse. But now we read in v.14, “So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses...” When God calls you to do something, and you try to shift the responsibility to others, it makes the Lord angry. Do you want to make the Lord angry? I don’t think so. We need to accept the principle of personal responsibility. If you have brought a child into this world, it is *your* primary responsibility to raise that child, and provide for that child. Don’t try to shift that responsibility to others. Hillary wants the government to raise your children, but that’s not the government’s job. It’s the parents’ job.

The Bible teaches that every Christian is a member of the Body of Christ, the Church. And each member has a role to fulfill within that body. Are you doing the job that God has called you to do? Or are you saying to God and to this church, “Get someone else to do it”? I believe that God is leading us to build this new building, so we can expand our ministries & reach more people. Is God calling upon you to give, to help us build? Or are you saying to God, “Let someone else give!” I am calling upon each of you to listen to God’s call upon your life, and respond like Isaiah did of old, “Here am I, send me!”

Conclusion: Moses was timid, hesitant, fearful, unbelieving, rebellious, and yet God used him! If God were to wait until He found a human instrument that was worthy or fit to be used by Him, He would go on waiting until the end of time. The truth is that God uses whom He pleases. He even made a concession to Moses’ weakness & unwillingness. He referred Moses to his brother Aaron, who could speak well, and would address the people for him (vv.14-17).

God can use you, in spite of your past sins, your weaknesses, & your fears. What excuses are you using when God calls you to serve Him? Do you feel that you are inferior to others. That’s no excuse. God can use anyone. Do you feel you are too uneducated, or too lacking in skills? That’s no excuse. God can teach you. He even gives spiritual gifts to enable us to serve Him effectively. Do you feel inadequate? Do you feel that you have some disability? Well stop looking at yourself and start looking at God. He will enable you. He will give you the strength you need. Do you feel you are too young or too old? Well we had teenagers do a great job in Bible School this week, and we had some people over 80 years old do a great job as well. Moses was 80 when he began his mission. In truth, these are not legitimate excuses for not serving the Lord. It appears to me that regardless of the excuses that man concocts for not doing the will of God, God always has an answer.

Our heart’s desire should be and must be to serve Him at all costs, regardless of what He asks from our lives. After all, He gave His all, and He asks no less from us. Will you answer God’s call to fulltime Christian service? Several have answered that call from our church. Ian Smith answered the call. Greg Laughlin answered the call. Jonathan Turner answered the call. Will you answer God’s call with a “Yes, Lord, here am I, send me!”

Most of you have not been called into fulltime Christian service, but God is calling you to serve Him in some way. Have you answered God's call? Are you serving God, or making excuses? For some of you, the first step in answering God's call is to join our church. Most of our positions of service require you to be a member. Will you say "Yes" to God's call to join our church?

I'm sure there are some here today who still need to answer God's call to salvation. He is convicting you that you are a sinner in need of a Savior. Don't resist answering that call any longer. Don't make excuses any longer. It is time to give your heart to the Lord. Do it today!

Sources: Ronald A. Beers, ed., *Life Application Study Bible* (Tyndale House & Zondervan, 1991); Alan Carr, www.sermonnotebook.org; Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Bible Commentary* (accessed from *Online Bible*), completed by 1832; Peter Enns, *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2007; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978 reprint); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 1 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1981); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Exodus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972); Warren Wiersbe, *Be Delivered: Exodus* (Colorado Spring: Chariot Victor Books Publishing, 1998). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

Music: *Send Aaron* by Woody Smith. Performed by the group "This Hope" on the *This Is Our God* CD.

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