

You Are Sent

Exodus 3:10-4:31

Introduction

Mess it Up: Have you ever been in a situation where you felt unqualified and you were worried you'd mess it up? Freshmen year, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, yell at you if you speak out of turn or are disrespectful.

Recap: In the grand arc of God's promises to his people in the Torah, we've already witnessed a few bumps along the road. We have a perfect garden temple ruined by the first disobedient couple. Then we have a burgeoning civilization nearly destroyed by a flood for their wickedness. Then the family of God finally makes it to the promised land only to have to flee to Egypt because of famine. And now we see the man chosen to save the people from slavery hiding from the Egyptian regime as a shepherd on the backside of a Midianite mountain for the last 40 years.

Holy Invitation: And to Moses' surprise God shows up in a burning bush to display his compassionate character and invite Moses to join him in rescuing the Israelites.

1. Divine Commission (3:11) ¹⁰ Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

Initiation: God sees the suffering of the Israelites, remembers his promise to Abraham, and is sending Moses as the agent of their salvation.

In this section, we see Moses' response to God's divine commission. Through their interaction, we learn more about God's character and what it looks like to participate in his mission.

In His Shoes: How would you feel? Moses is less than enthused.

- It appears that the brash, confident, and reactionary Moses who slaughtered an Egyptian has mellowed during his four decades in the wilderness. Numbers 12:3 says Moses was "very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth" (God often uses difficult seasons of waiting to shape us into the people he wants us to be, people fit for the mission he has for us). Maybe you're in a wilderness season God is using to shape you into his faithful follower for the task ahead.

2. Doubting Deliverer (3:11-4:17)

- Moses asks a few questions intended to get out of his assignment. "God, I'm not sure if you thought through all of the issues." 😊

A. Who Am I? (vv. 11-12)

Doubt: ¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

- Moses doubts himself in this endeavor God is calling him to. Shouldn't he “skip with joy” that God has chosen him?
- We give Moses a hard time but this is a good response (“Who am I?”)! **You should doubt yourself more and doubt God less** (e.g., not *self*-esteem but *God*-esteem; humble confidence with a sure foundation). Our confidence is not in ourselves but in God.
- God doesn't argue with Moses that he is qualified. We often tell people, “you've got this,” “you can do it.” God doesn't say that. **God doesn't build Moses up through flattery** (“I believe I can fly”; Phil 4:13 “dunk a b-ball”). It's not who you are that matters, it's who God is.
- “We want to be a part of something that can only be explained by the power of God.”
- Our perseverance and power come from the God who sends us, not ourselves. We are *sent* ones like Moses (cf. apostle).

Presence of God: ¹² He said, “But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.” God promises his personal presence will be with Moses the whole way. The primary way that God proves his faithfulness is by his **personal presence** as he sends us.

- The task in front of us is too great (there is no doubt about that). The question we must ask ourselves is simple, **do we have faith in the God that sends us or fear of Pharaoh that stands in our way?**
- The fear that sent Moses running to Midian can either keep him there or surrender to the fear of God.
- **If God is for us, who can be against us?** (Rom 8:31b).
 - We can follow God where he leads because he is with us. **I think I forgot this lately, God has gone before me and goes with me, so I need not fear or doubt.**

Measurable Success: Moses will have a sign when the people return to that mountain to worship God. I wonder if Moses got up to Sinai and looked back at the journey and had a moment of gratitude that God kept his promise.

B. Who Sent Me? (vv. 13-22)

¹³ Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” ¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

YHWH: Moses is concerned about how he will be received when he shows up to the Israelites and says, “God sent me to rescue you” (riiiggghhhhttt?!?). Ok, God, you’re “going with me,” how do I explain that to everybody? Moses is also doing some projecting: Moses is putting his own doubts on the people of Israel (e.g., **evangelism**).

- “I Am who I am” has sent you (three words based off the “to be” verb).¹ Many scholars believe this is the origin of the name “YHWH”. “I am” is the God of Abraham (i.e., LORD).
- “I am who I am” (Does it matter? I am not changing). “He is who he is whether they acknowledge it or not”
- He’s not going to run into a greater or more authoritative power. Fundamental (being), Personal (I), Unchanging, Foundational, Self-sustaining. Ever-present, inexhaustible, unchangeable, comprehensive, independent God.
- Moses must bring the message that God remembers his promise to his people and is going to deliver them from bondage to the promised land and, through them, to bless all the nations of the world. But he does this with the personal presence and commissioning of the God of the universe.
 - **It’s not just *that* we believe but in *whom* we believe.**
 - **It’s not just *that* we are sent but by *whom* we are sent.**

¹⁶ Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, ¹⁷ and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.”’ ¹⁸ And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.’ ¹⁹ But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. ²⁰ So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go. ²¹ And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, ²² but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.”

Sovereign: God is reminding him of the promise he made to Abraham that he is keeping with the current generation, he is showing Moses that he knows what is going to happen and he is in complete control. He knows that Pharaoh will not listen unless compelled.

- He’s reminding Moses that even though they will suffer, even though it will be difficult, the Israelites will not just escape Egypt but will leave with abundant provision.
 - God’s plan and suffering are not incompatible. God’s promises are meant to prepare you to endure suffering, not escape it.
 - When things get hard (and they will) and you are tempted to doubt (and you will) you have the promise of the ultimate promise keeper who has never failed to keep every promise he has ever made.

¹ YHWH comes from this same root.

C. What If They Don't Believe Me? (vv. 1-9)

¹ Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.'" ² The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff." ³ And he said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it. ⁴ But the LORD said to Moses, "Put out your hand and catch it by the tail"—so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand— ⁵ "that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you." ⁶ Again, the LORD said to him, "Put your hand inside your cloak." And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. ⁷ Then God said, "Put your hand back inside your cloak." So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. ⁸ "If they will not believe you," God said, "or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. ⁹ If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."

Le Sigh: Still doesn't believe God (Gideon moment, wet to dry/dry to wet). Moses is still too worried about proving God than obeying him. Are you more worried that people won't believe you than you are that you aren't obeying God? God continues to patiently answer Moses' objections. He is using this opportunity to make Moses into the person he needs to be.

Three Signs: The three signs he gives him are universally powerful but pack a particular cultural punch in the Egyptian worldview.

- **(1) Snake Staff**

- Not only would this be a terrifying moment (Moses rightly ran from it). The only good snake is a dead snake. I've read the Bible, there's a reason Satan chose a serpent to embody. "That ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev. 12:9).
- Snakes were a particularly vibrant personification of danger and evil² (e.g. the same is true of us today... want to see me scream and run, let seaweed touch my foot in the ocean or let me see a snake on a walking trail... if you're a snake person, how dare you!).
 - Heard a story of a man who had a pet snake that one day constricted on his arm. He had to kill the snake and now has permanent nerve damage in his arm. He was like, I don't know what happened? For 10 years everything was fine. He didn't love you for 10 years. He is cold-blooded, your natural enemy, and was just getting bigger for 10 years and finally was tired of living in the fish tank!
- Snakes were also used in Egyptian royal jewelry as emissaries of Egypt's gods.

² Cf. the bronze serpent pericope in Numbers 21:4-9. Job 26 describes Egypt (i.e., Rahab) as shattered by God, "his hand pierced the fleeing serpent" (Job 26:13).

- So for God to transform a staff in to a snake and *vice versa* and allow Moses to pick it up by the tail shows not only his basic power over creation but his implicit superiority to the false gods of Egypt.
 - He can control the powerless gods of Egypt at will. He is the destroyer of the false Egyptian gods. And he is greater than any false idol our culture foolishly worships.
- **(2) Leper Hand**
 - Leprosy in the ancient world is the generic term for an incurable skin condition. This is the kind of disease that is beyond their medical abilities to heal.
 - For God to just inflict and cure leprosy as easily as putting your hand in and out of one's pocket demonstrates his power over disease.
- **(3) Bloody Water**
 - The Nile was the source of provision and life for Egyptian. It grew their crops and sustained their people. Now Moses would take that water and it would be blood poured on the ground. Life turned to death.
 - God is dramatically reminding everyone that he is the giver and sustainer of life.

Powerful: YHWH, the God of Israel, the promise keeper, the one sending Moses is Lord over creation, Lord over disease, and Lord over life itself. He is more powerful than the rulers and gods of Egypt, more powerful than the diseases that terrified the people of Egypt, and more powerful than the very thing they think they need to live.

- And Jesus is God come to save us, who walked our world. In his earthly ministry Jesus turned water to wine, healed those afflicted with leprosy, and raised the dead to life. The Lord of life died on the cross so we can have life in him.
- The Israelites in Egypt were stuck. They couldn't free themselves. God had to break through and miraculously rescue them. I imagine that some of you are stuck in your sin, not happy or comfortable, complaining and whining, but not doing anything to get out. God needs to break into your life and rescue you.
- If you have not placed your faith in Christ, you are a slave to sin. But God offers you deliverance and he has purchased through the powerful life, death, and resurrection of his son. Your freedom has been paid for at the cost of Jesus' very life. Jesus has come to set you free. Repent and believe today.

D. What Am I Going to Say? (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.”

Another Excuse: Moses would make a great Baptist. He has a never-ending supply of excuses not to do what God told him to do. “Prayer will become effective when we stop using it as a substitute for obedience” (Tozer).

- Moses gives the same excuse I hear from most Christians about why they can't share their faith (I don't know what to say; I don't talk good).

No Excuse: God made your mouth, God can give you the words to say. “I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.” Faith is not just for salvation but for everything. We walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor 5:7). How can you trust God for your eternity but not trust him to give you the words to say to share his message? God will give us the word when we need them.

Truth Be Told: The truth comes out, all of these excuses were attempting to obscure the truth, Moses wanted God to send someone else. ¹³ But he said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.” This angers God. His anger “was kindled” (the word for anger in Hebrew means “burn”). You can imagine the burning bush flaring up as God shows his displeasure to Moses' recalcitrance.

- Moses actually *is* eloquent. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds (Acts 7:22). Moses is the one who will give Aaron the words to say.
- God, in his kindness *does* send Aaron. He takes note of Moses' weakness and infirmities and makes provision for them without changing his plans.

Moses, like a lot of us, wanted deliverance but not obedience. He wanted God's will as long as someone else did it.

Moses' Story Isn't Over: This isn't the end of Moses' story, because in the ups and downs of following God, he becomes a man of faith.

- “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned” (Heb 11:23-29)
- Moses is an example of faith, but I think less as a faithful hero and more as a recipient of God's grace. He accomplished great things not because he conjured up a great quantity of faith but because, despite every stumble and sin, he clung to God. The faith of Moses is preceded and built on the faithfulness of God.

- Will Moses walk in uncertain faith toward the task in Egypt or turn around in fear back to Midian? Moses' trembling faith is still better than fearful disobedience.

5. Road to Redemption (4:18-31)

Go: 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.

- So Moses begins the path of obedience. He has hundreds of miles to go (lots of time to reconsider), and lots of difficult moments ahead, but he obeys.
- He carries the staff of God, a symbolic reminder of the power, authority, and commission of God. **He is going in God's strength, not his own.** But to Pharaoh it must have looked silly for him to be caring as his only weapon a shepherd's staff.

Warning: 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."

- God let's him know that Moses will face resistance (so it should take him by surprise). Why are we surprised that following Jesus involves opposition when he tells us this very thing?
- There's a complicated interplay in Exodus and in the NT between God hardening Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh hardening his own heart. The Bible is making clear Pharaoh's resistance and rejection as well as God's sovereign plan (a whole 'nother sermon from Romans 9:17-18).
- God is using Pharaoh's rejection to show just how far he'll go to save his son, Israel. He will get glory for the salvation of his people so that the Egyptians will know that he is the Lord (Ex 7:3-5). He is showing just how much love and affection he has for his child.³
 - God will do whatever it takes to save his special child.

Firstborn: The identification of Israel as the special son of God is important in the NT because Jesus is the true Israel, the true son of God who obeys the Father perfectly. He passes the test in the wilderness that the Israelites failed.

- The firstborn son language is also a foreshadowing of the great redemptive event of the Passover where God kills all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians and Israelites unless they are covered by the blood of the lamb.
- This brings us to a problem in the story of Moses...

³ Firstborn son (πρωτότοκος), Lk 2:7; Rom 8:29; Col 1:15; Heb 1:6; Rev 1:5. Firstborn implies a child that is an heir and has current or future siblings. Often discussed among church fathers in distinction from μονογενής which emphasizes the child as beloved, unique, and cherished.

But There's a Problem: 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.

- This is my new favorite passage to preach on Mother's Day sermon. Also some cultural questions: historians and archaeologists suggest Midianites were circumcised before their wedding (no thank you) and Moses was approaching 80 years old (so his son must have been in his 20s or 30s). "Mom, nope."
- There are a few textual challenges. Who is the "him" God is seeking to kill? And who's feet does she touch with the foreskin (both MT and LXX say "him" not "Moses").
- I think it's his firstborn because Moses has not circumcised him. Moses is going as God's representative to rescue Israel, God's firstborn, and he hasn't even obeyed God and had his own firstborn circumcised.
- Moses was certainly circumcised (how did Pharaoh's daughter know he was a Hebrew baby in the basket; there was a tail tell sign).
 - This bloody covenant that marked the people of God had been neglected by Moses and so, until the blood of the covenant was spilt, God would not spare even Moses's son.
 - And it takes his Midianite wife to save him, and she doesn't seem happy about it (another woman like the Midwives, or Moses's mother and sister).
- All of this reminds me that God takes his word and his commands seriously. God must be obeyed. **We cannot expect to fulfill the mission of God if we will not obey the commands of God.**

God at Work: 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.

- Israelites believe, Pharaoh doesn't. Same circumstances, different responses.
- Moses is on his way to see Aaron, Aaron is on the way to see Moses (God is working even when he doesn't see it).

Conclusion. So What?

(A) Walk in Faith. We are called to walk in faith not fear, to trust God's commands more than our feelings. Walk in confidence of God's character, not doubt in your own. I am not enough, but God is. Don't doubt the future God has called you to simply because you are afraid of what happened in the past.

(B) Walk in Obedience. It's one thing to *hear* the call, it's another to obey. Moses has been called to be the agent of deliverance so now he has to start walking toward Egypt.

- You and I are called to proclaim deliverance. Our mission has slightly different parameters, but is from the same mission giver.
- As Moses was sent to free the Israelites, God is calling you to proclaim the message of salvation. You are not saving anyone, but you are sent from the one who is.⁴
- God is extending a **holy invitation** for you to proclaim his **promised deliverance** to those enslaved by sin; he is sending you with the guarantee of his **personal presence**.
Will you accept his invitation?
- “Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter” (Spurgeon).
- You and I are both the mission (God came to rescue us) and the missionary (he sends us on mission to tell others).
- **What do you need to do to obey?** “If you don’t have a passport, don’t be singing ‘Wherever He Leads I’ll Go’” (Fort). Don’t worry about what you don’t know, obey what you do know.
- “My passions must never be greater than my mission” (Gios). Whatever ever else you like to do, I know for certain that God has put you on this earth to display and proclaim his glory and salvation. A lot of you want to discover something God has not yet revealed to you while refusing to do what he has clearly revealed to you: **Go and make disciples of all nations** (Matt 28:19).

⁴ Jn 20:21