

# “Excuses, Excuses”

Exodus 3:1-4-17

2/25/2001 – Maryvale Drive Presbyterian Church, Philip Siddons

---

Moses was supposed to be one of the greatest prophets – the founder and law giver of Judaism. Even by other nation’s religions, he has been respected. He was a spokesperson of God – one who lead his nation out of slavery and into a new land. But what we see, in this rather lengthy conversation, is someone who looks like anything but an outstanding leader.

One day Moses was herding some of his father-in-law’s sheep and goats and with nothing much to do, he happened to look over at the edge of the field and saw it. It was a bush that seemed to be on fire and yet it was not burning up. There were just flames.

It got his attention and he wandered on over to take a closer look – shortly discovering that it was a manifestation of none other than the Almighty.

It is interesting that God choose to appear to Moses in this way but God full-well knew that if Moses saw the *full* image of God standing there, it would have been too much to take and he might have had a heart attack. As it was, Moses was scared enough by the fire and the voice. In the end, I guess, God is always too much for any of us so God has always had to speak to us through angels or people, just so we don’t die of fright. Maybe we are placed here on earth, all these years, just to get ready to live in God’s fully-disclosed presence but I digress.

God makes a self-identification by saying “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” and that’s apparently enough, because Moses falls on the ground trembling. Moses knows Who it is.

We also know the kind of God it is by what God said first. God was aware of the suffering and cries of those in slavery to the Egyptians. God heard their prayers, in that distant land, and cared. God was starting to bring about change and in that very conversation, God was trying to get Moses to do the job but he was full of excuses.

God states the job description: ‘Go to Egypt and talk to the Pharaoh – get him to release his slaves. A straightforward, directly-stated task. But Moses’ first

excuse was that he was a ‘nobody’ without any power.

If I would have been God, I would have said, “Now look; do you think I would have wasted my time doing this burning bush routine and coming to you if I didn’t think you could do it?” But God, being infinitely more patient with him than I would have been, simply said “Don’t worry about it – I’ll be with you. In fact, you *will* get my people out of Egypt and all of you will end up right back here in a worship service on this mountain.” You see, Moses didn’t take physics in high school or see Star Trek and so he missed the part about how God sees the future as well as the past and present.

Moses’ second excuse was, “Yes, . . . but” (he was playing the “Yes . . . But” game<sup>1</sup>), “who do I say sent me with this request? I mean, I’ve got no credentials and what do You suppose they’re going to do with me after they stop laughing after I told them a talking burning bush sent me?”

But God’s voice probably got a little deeper and said, “Stand up to the guy and say, ‘Look buddy, don’t question me because I’m sent directly from the Great I Am – just do it! And you know something else, your temporary magnificence, I’m going to salsa dance right out of here (with all of I Am’s people) and not only are we going to take a permanent vacation in Canaan, we’re taking all of your money, . . . so there!”

Moses was impressed by God’s confident assertiveness but this time, a little more humbly says, “Yea, but no way are they going to believe me on this! They’ll say ‘What’s the deal-le-o with this lunatic-e-o? Here, . . . watch *me* pull a rabbit out of my hat!” Moses maybe said, taunting God.

“Again?” God teased. But this time, the ground, beneath Moses, started to pulsate a little because God’s foot was tapping with some impatience. Yet God had a sense of humor and continued, “What’s that you’re leaning on Mo?”

---

<sup>1</sup> As in Eric Burns’ book *Games People Play : The Psychology of Human Relationships* ISBN: 0345410033

Just then, Moses almost fell over because his favorite walking stick sort of went limp and fell apart in his hand, going down to the ground, only starting to slither around near his feet. “It turned into a snake” he gasped. This made him very nervous and he acted like it was his fault that he dropped it and it had turned into a snake. He stooped over and quickly grabbed it by the tail, as if he had accidentally spilled it or something. In a flash, though, it solidified and was wood again.

“That oughta’ show ‘em” God said with a little laughter. But just as Moses was going to complain about his allergies to snakes, God said, “Put your hand inside your coat pocket.”

Moses, still shaken from the snake thing and thinking his sinuses were already swelling from his allergies to the little slithery beast, he reached into his coat for a handkerchief. As luck would have it, he didn’t have one but just before he sneezed, he saw that his arm was white, covered with leprosy.

Not wanting Mo to have a nervous breakdown, God quickly said, “All right, just put it back in your pocket and pull it out again – and I *didn’t* do this trick with talcum powder.” He did and it was, as God said, back to normal.

“Good tricks,” Moses said, but when it comes down to it, I ain’t no pulpit-pounder. I’m not much of a conversationalist either so how am I supposed to argue, the Pharaoh no less, into letting them go? Don’t you know their whole economy is based on free labor?”

At this point, God started getting peeved and said, “Hey Mo! Who do you think made people’s mouths in the first place – ears and eyes as well? I’ll help you with what to say, so don’t worry about it!”

And even after all this, the next thing Moses said was, “Ya gotta send somebody else, God, because this is not my thing.”

So God finished, saying, “Look. Take your priest brother Aaron and *he’ll* do the public speaking. We’ll let *him* be Your Press Secretary but you’ve got to be there as a player because you were raised in that court and you have an ‘in’ with the Pharaoh.” Apparently there was enough anger and force in God’s voice because Moses didn’t say a single word and set off to do what he was supposed to do.

Moses was playing the “Yes, . . . but” game with God. Did you ever find yourself doing that?

This is when you’re in a conversation with someone else and you’re stating your problem. To which they respond with a solution and you, just as quickly, shoot back “Yes, . . . but” and you go on to state one or more reasons why their solution won’t do you any good. *Kind of a defeatist attitude in a way.*

Perhaps you’re approached by a member of the nominating committee of your church and as a committee, they’ve made the assessment that you would do a good job at a certain ministry opportunity. But like Moses, you’re full of excuses.

The most common excuse we give is that “I’ve never done that before.” Imagine saying that to the medical staff after you’ve just birthed your first child. “You know, now that I’m looking at this kid, I’ve never tried to be a parent before – and what’s this about ‘there’s no owner’s manual? Give this to somebody else more qualified!”

If everyone refused to try to do anything based on their inexperience, nothing would ever happen. And if not you, upon whom could God call?

But wait a minute, if you will. Remember who Moses was. When his mother floated him down the creek in a basket in Egypt so that one of the princesses would get him, his childhood landed in the Pharaoh’s palace. He was raised, educated and taught skills only royalty would ever acquire. Court life of Egypt was Moses’ home turf, so God was calling him to do something that was not unrelated to his past experiences.

What was God trying to do?

① First of all, God was so concerned about the pain and suffering of the Israelite people in slavery that God wanted to end their hurt and their despair. Throughout history, God was always involved in trying to get people out from under their oppression and suffering.

② Secondly, God never assigned a task to someone who would be unable to pull it off with God’s help. God knows us completely, . . . every place in which we’ve ever lived. God knows every conversation we’ve ever had with anyone and what we’ve learned. God knows what we’ve learned through our own personal pain and the pain we’ve shared through our relationships with others who have

suffered. As David once put it, “God knows our frame and remembers we are dust (or frail.)”<sup>2</sup>

So if God knows everything about us and if God puts a ministry opportunity before us, our excuses are no good around God. It must get God really ticked off with us when we sit there and toss out excuses for why we aren’t responding to the pain and the hurt in other people’s lives. We might as well just come clean with God and admit that we aren’t going to respond to that pain and hurt because we don’t feel like doing it. We might as well say, “You know, I’m too lazy, so go ask somebody who cares, . . . if You don’t mind, . . . God. That looks like a job for the minister or somebody professional. Why, I’m just a . . .”

It’s been in all the counseling articles and courses for years and years. All family practice physicians know this and all professional counselors know this. All clergy and social workers know this. Whatever the pain and problems we have, whatever the type or extent of the problems individuals are facing, for 90% of us, we only need someone to listen to us and care.

No magic words. No profound bits of advice or religious rhetoric. Only plain and simple listening and caring. If we could only forget about ourselves long enough to be personally and compassionately present with someone in the face of their pain or anguish, it would bring healing. We can face most anything that life throws at us if we know we are on a journey together and God is in our midst.

Perhaps our learning, from this conversation God had with Moses, is this. Whenever we find ourselves resisting involvement with other people and their needs, maybe we need to stop muttering excuses. Perhaps we need to stop and realize that God has put this need before us because God has already determined that everything we’ve been through has brought us to this point in our lives so that we *can* help out in this matter. Maybe we’ve been groomed for this and we are God’s last resort to bring healing or wholeness to someone’s situation.

Remember some of Jesus’ last words to His closest followers. He said, “There’s going to come a

---

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 103

time when you’re hauled before the people with power but don’t worry. God’s Holy Spirit is going to help you say what you must.”

Some of this sense, I think, is captured in this poem that has its origin in the Eastern faiths. It takes the form of a dialogue between a rich person and the aged teacher of wisdom.

“Then,” said a rich person, “speak to us of giving. And the Teacher answered.

“You give but a little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.

For what are your possessions but things you keep and guard in fear that you may need them tomorrow? And tomorrow, what will tomorrow bring to an overzealous dog who buries bones in the trackless sand?

And what *is* fear of need but need itself. Isn’t your dread and fear of thirst (when your well is full) in actuality a thirst that is unquenchable?

There are some who give a little of the much they have. But there are those who have little, yet give it all. These are the believers in life and the bounty of life and their coffer is never empty.

There are those who give with joy and that joy is their reward. There are those who give with pain and that pain is their baptism.

But there are those who give and know not pain in giving. Nor do they seek joy nor give – thinking about virtue. Through the hands of such as these – God speaks and from behind their eyes, God smiles upon the earth.”<sup>3</sup>

Go out, with all of your life’s experiences, thoughts and feelings and free others from their pain and oppression. God is asking you to do this for good reason. ■

**Prayer:**

“Lord, make us instruments of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let *us* sow love. Where there is injury, may *we* pardon. Where there is despair, may *we* hope. Where there is darkness, light. And where there is sadness, may *we* cause joy. O Divine Maker, grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to *be consoling*. *To be*

---

<sup>3</sup> Edited, from Kahlil Gibran ISBN: 1853264857

*understanding* rather than being understood. *To be loving* rather than to loved. For it is in giving that *we* receive. It is in pardoning that *we* are pardoned. And it is in dying that *we* are born to eternal life. Amen.”<sup>4</sup>



---

<sup>4</sup> Edited, for inclusive language, from St. Francis’s popular prayer