



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for June 14, 2009
Released on Wednesday, June 10, 2009**

“Accepting Responsibility”

**Lesson Text: Exodus 4:10–16, 27–31.
Background Scripture: Exodus 4.
Devotional Reading: Proverbs 1:20–33.**

Exodus 4:10–16, 27–31

10 And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant; but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.

11 And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man’s mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?

12 Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.

13 And he said, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send.

14 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and he said, Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart.

15 And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do.

16 And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God.

.....

27 And the LORD said to Aaron, Go into the wilderness to meet Moses. And he went, and met him in the mount of God, and kissed him.

28 And Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD who had sent him, and all the signs which he had commanded him.

29 And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel:

30 And Aaron spake all the words which the LORD had spoken unto 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 children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

- 1.** Describe Moses’ hesitancy to accept God’s call and tell how God supplied a solution.
- 2.** Be aware that God enables people to carry out His revealed will.

3. Confess one area of hesitancy to accept a responsibility in God's service and express faith in God's power to supply what is needed to carry out that responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

God of the Impossible

A humble woman runs a modest ministry center for homeless children in the Ukraine. Her church recently took possession of a large vacated building that was completely gutted of anything of value. It stands as little more than an enormous concrete shell. It will take hundreds of thousands of dollars to make it functional.

This building is surrounded by a vast stretch of fertile, government-owned land. This woman dreams of transforming this building into a Christian orphanage and acquiring the surrounding land in order to develop it into a work center for these youngsters. They can both live in the building and learn valuable farming skills in order to sustain themselves in their adult years.

When I first heard these ideas, I was tempted to write them off as mere pipe dreams. This woman lacked both the funding and staffing for such a large project. In addition, the center she already operated was hardly thriving. There was no way she could pull this off. But as I listened to her pray, I was deeply convicted. Both her demeanor and her words demonstrated the conviction that her God is Lord of the cosmos. With Him no project is too big. Though well aware of her own limitations, she worships a God of unlimited possibilities. When He is behind it, nothing is impossible.

Moses also faced a seemingly impossible task: God called him to liberate an enslaved people from one of the most powerful empires in the Ancient Near East. Moses did not have to wonder whether God was behind this project. Yet Moses still doubted.

Fortunately, God is not deterred by human doubt. He taught Moses that projects God authorizes are projects God underwrites. We who worship the same God must pay close attention to Moses' story. Inspired stories like his still create and sustain faith in the God of unlimited possibilities.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In Exodus 3, God called Moses to be His messenger. Moses was to proclaim to the Israelites and to Pharaoh that God intended to free the Israelites from bondage (last week's lesson). Moses' initial response was self-doubt: "Who am I?" (3:11). Moses then received the assurance of God's presence. Moses' ability was not the main issue.

Moses then asked what he should call God. After revealing the divine name and nature, God gave Moses specific details about his mission (3:13–21). Moses responded with doubt that the Israelites would believe him (4:1). God answered by empowering Moses to perform three signs (4:2–9). That was about the year 1446 B.C.

Up until this point it seems like Moses is trying to negotiate his way out of a mission that terrifies him. In today's passage, Moses' dialogue with God continues.

The Reluctance of Moses (Exodus 4:10–13)

1. What excuse did Moses give God in Exodus 4:10?

Fear of public speaking is known as *glossophobia*. It is a common fear today. This fear can be so paralyzing that some people may face death with more confidence than they do the task of speaking before a large crowd. Moses apparently is in this camp, although there seems to be more behind Moses' reservations—namely, a lack

of eloquence (v. 10). Since he was being sent to appear before Pharaoh as God's ambassador, Moses felt that being "slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" disqualified him for the assignment.

As part of his response to God, Moses emphasized that he had not suddenly become eloquent during this interview. Forty years of tending sheep had apparently caused Moses to forget that he once "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7:22).

2. How did God respond to Moses' excuse (v. 11)?

God is aware of Moses' speaking ability or lack thereof. Yet God-as-Creator has power over all human abilities and senses.

"While God was not to be blamed for directly creating any defects, his wise providence in allowing these deprivations as well as his goodness in bestowing their ordinary functions mirrors his ability to meet any emergency Moses might have suggested" (Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan).

Shockingly, it is as though Moses has forgotten to whom He is speaking. The bush continues to burn without being consumed (Exodus 3:2), and Moses stands barefoot with shielded face out of reverence for God's awe-inspiring presence (3:5, 6). Yet somehow Moses forgets whom He is dealing with or, more appropriately, who is dealing with him.

Such forgetfulness is all too common in the church today. "We can't pioneer this ministry; it will cost too much." "We can't witness in that part of the city; it's not safe there." "Our kids can't do that in school; what would their teachers and classmates think?" We may be tempted to think that excuses like these stem from a humble assessment of our own (in)abilities and limitations. But is that really the issue?

God teaches us in this verse that such excuses are the result of focusing on self rather than God. To know the God of Moses is to know a power who knows no bounds. Moses has to make a choice, and so do we.

Empowered to Communicate

The vital nature of communication leads society to try to make continual improvements in this area. One creative attempt is called FasTrack Signing, part of a program called FasTrackKids. This involves teaching sign language to babies who are too young to use much spoken language.

More than 20 years of research have shown that children who are 6 months old can learn sign-language skills in 8 weeks. At age 12 months, the typical child in the program is said to be able to use 25 signs and 16 spoken words, compared with 1 to 3 spoken words for children in a control group. Not surprisingly, one mom says the sign that her 18-month-old son uses most is the one for *more*. The child had been empowered to communicate something that the parent does not necessarily look forward to hearing!

God's spoken instructions to Moses were quite clear to him. However, this was not a message Moses wanted to hear, as evidenced by the fact that he immediately tried to maneuver out of his daunting assignment. At times we may feel overwhelmed by the task that Jesus sets before us in Matthew 28:19, 20. When we are tempted to say "Let so-and-so do it; he's more persuasive than I am," may God's words to Moses ring in our ears: "Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?" —Charles R. Boatman

3. How would the Lord compensate for Moses' excuse related to his speech (v. 12)?

If Moses possesses some kind of speech impediment, God makes no promise to heal it. God reveals no intention of "fixing" Moses to make him better. Instead He promises to go with Moses and *teach* him what to *say*. God doesn't need the perfect spokesman who can present His message flawlessly without divine help. God wants humble servants who will allow God to work in their lives despite their imperfections.

Notice also that God does not simply take over Moses' mouth. God rejects the path of divine ventriloquism. To go this route would reduce Moses to the status of puppet. God has respect for His creatures. He has made us in His image and wants us to grow spiritually in that regard. So God promises to teach Moses what to say. God is not merely conveying a message, but is forming a leader through whom He will later form other leaders.

Churches today have much to learn from God's way of working with Moses. Though we may never experience it quite as Moses did, God wants to work with us. God's Spirit does not overpower Christians in ways that eclipse our unique identities. He works in and through us in such ways that we grow up in our salvation (1 Peter 2:2).

Since this is how God works with us, then we ought to do likewise with others. For churches to truly honor the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:4-9; Revelation 1:6), then church leaders must find healthy ways to encourage the formation of every member. This means giving "undeserving" people sufficient power and opportunities both to succeed and to fail. When we relinquish attempts to control absolutely, others may grow as our heavenly Father desires them to.

The Resources of God (Exodus 4:14-16)

4. What do we find out about Moses' previous objections (vs. 13,14)?

We arrive at an important clue for interpreting Moses' previous objections. Having run out of excuses, Moses finally implores God to *send* someone else (v. 13). Moses is not simply being humble, although he is known for humility (Numbers 12:3). At this point, Moses flat out rejects his calling. He is trying his best to weasel out.

Because Moses offered a series of excuses to hide his unwillingness, "the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses." Although God's patience is abundant, it is not endless (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9-10).

"Moses' groundless opposition angered God. Moses could think of no more good objections, for God had met every one point by point. So God's unwilling servant revealed the true nature of his heart" (Gaebelein).

Knowing that Moses would be less than willing to respond to His call, God had already directed Aaron to go to Moses (cf. Exod. 4:27). In what manner God communicated His will to Aaron we are uninformed. It must have been in some unmistakable way, though, since Aaron obeyed.

Whether Aaron and Moses had had any contact over the past forty years is unknown. Since Egypt and Midian were geographically close, it is theoretically possible. The Lord's assertion that Aaron would "be glad in his heart" (Exod. 4:14) to see Moses seems indicative of a long absence, however.

5. How would you respond to someone who asks, "Since God was very capable of engineering the release of the Israelites without using human leadership, why didn't He just do it himself to save a lot of aggravation?"

God seems to have a preference for accomplishing and communicating His work of salvation through human intermediaries. But when He is unable to find a suitable person through whom to work, He is quite capable of bringing about the appropriate result on His own (as in Ezekiel 22:30, 31). When we allow ourselves to be intermediaries for God, we learn something about faith that can be learned in no other way.

We note that in the New Testament era Jesus came in the form of a human in order to accomplish the work of salvation. In the process, He recruited fallible humans to launch and oversee His church. For those who respond to His call, God blesses these individuals as they serve faithfully. It is also true that God receives the honor due Him as He shows His power through the dedication of His servants.

6. What are some ways that people react when an authority figure shows anger toward them? How did God's anger toward Moses demonstrate confidence in that man?

Some may conclude that when an authority figure shows anger toward them that the authority figure has already judged them to be incompetent and worthless. The result can be withdrawal, shame, and a loss of self-confidence.

But everyone, including God, is capable of having more than one reaction at the same time. Parents often become angry with their children while continuing to believe in and support those children. The anger may arise because of the parent's belief that the child is capable of much more than is being exhibited at the moment. We are thankful that God does not become as angry with us as we may deserve. See Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 86:15; 103:8; Jonah 4:2.

7. What role would Aaron take in this mission (vs. 15, 16)?

Aaron's role was not to replace Moses but to assist him. God would inspire both Moses and Aaron with regard to what they were to say to Pharaoh once they arrived in Egypt.

Whatever God said to Moses, Moses would say to Aaron, who in turn would speak to the people. God in essence said, "Moses, you will go! But I will instruct your brother Aaron to speak for you" (c.f. Exodus 7:1-2). Apparently, however, Moses eventually gained confidence and actually did speak before Pharaoh numerous times (Exodus 8:9, 25, 29; 9:29).

Prior to their appearance before the Egyptian monarch, however, Moses and Aaron would have to convince the people of Israel that God was now coming to their rescue.

Rendezvous with Aaron (Exodus 4:27-31)

After Moses accepts God's plan, he returns to Jethro's household to announce his departure and gather his family (Exodus 4:18-23). Moses then survives a mysterious and dangerous encounter with God en route to Egypt (4:24-26). Afterward, Moses meets Aaron in the Sinai region.

8. What specifics did "the Lord" give Moses to relay to Aaron concerning their assignment (vs. 27, 28)?

The fact that God commissions *Aaron to meet Moses* clarifies the meaning of verse 14, where God tells Moses that Aaron is on the way. Aaron is not simply visiting his brother; rather, he is obeying a specific calling from God.

By the time Moses returns from gathering his family, Aaron has traveled as far as Sinai. So the brothers meet on the mountain where God called Moses. They greet each other with a customary kiss among close relatives (Genesis 27:26; 31:28).

Apparently, God has given *Aaron* only sparse details about what has happened, so *Moses* fills him in on the rest. Moses also explains about *the signs* God has given to validate the message. These signs include turning a staff into a snake and inflicting leprosy.

9. Why was it important for Moses to meet with Israel's elders (vs. 29, 30)?

Journeying back to Egypt, Moses and Aaron gather Israel's leaders to inform them of God's plan for their deliverance (Exodus 3:16,17). They also performed *the signs* God has specified.

"Evidently God wished to see duly constituted authority respected; therefore an appeal needed to be made to Israel's existing leadership and their consent obtained before initiating any requests of Pharaoh" (Gaebelin).

The elders were the leaders of families and clans. Garnering their support would be critical if a successful rescue was to occur. Too often those who think they have a good plan for their church or class fail to get the support of church leaders. There may be nothing wrong with a plan or program, but bypassing the leaders is unwise. Moses sought support from the people's leaders; and so should we!

10. What convinced the people to believe Moses and Aaron (v. 31)?

To convince the Israelites that Moses and Aaron were God's representatives, the miraculous signs were performed in the sight of the people (v. 30). As in the New Testament, the primary purpose of miracles was to validate the message and the messenger. Hence, apostolic miracles were to confirm that the message preached by the disciples was true. "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following" (Mark 16:20). Like-wise, Paul's apostolic ministry was confirmed with visible signs.

Note also that the people believed what they heard about God's concern for them (Exod. 4:31). This is the way it has always been, for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

11. What was the immediate response of the people once they believed?

The people respond by bowing to God with gratitude and worship. Moses had feared that the people would focus on him and find him to be lacking. Instead, they focus on God and find Him to be more than sufficient. God is again teaching Moses that this mission is not about Moses. Rather, it is about God.

Leaders today must learn from Moses. It's not about us either. It never is and never will be. One might object that in real life experience it is often very much about the human leader. There are some churches in which members hang on the preacher's every word; the preacher responds by striving to cultivate an impressive public persona and seeking to deliver dazzling sermons that keep people returning. Godly leaders, however, will direct attention away from themselves and toward God. They will exhort the people to adore God, not His messengers (see 1 Corinthians 1:12, 13; 3:21-23).

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** God, who gives all abilities, can overcome any of our inabilities (Exod. 4:10-11).
- 2.** We can run out of excuses and still try to avoid doing God's will (vs. 12).
- 3.** Two men working as a team can accomplish a task that may be too much for one man alone (Exod. 4:13-15; cf. Eccles. 4:9-10).
- 4.** In a team effort, it is important that each one's role be clearly defined (Exod. 4:16).
- 5.** God can accomplish anything on His own, but His preferred way is to work through obedient servants (vs. 27-31).

CONCLUSION

Not About Our Limitations

It must have been extremely liberating for Moses to discover that God's mission was not about Moses. The God who resolved to free Israel took full responsibility for convicting Israel to leave, for forcing Pharaoh to release them, and for empowering Israel to march out. Moses was God's instrument. It is interesting to watch how the rest of the narrative unfolds. At first, Moses leans heavily on Aaron. But as the story progresses, Aaron recedes to the background, and Moses begins fulfilling the role God originally intended for him.

Likewise, God's mission for the church is not about our limitations. Though God uniquely equips each believer to play an integral part in His mission (1 Corinthians 12), we do so only by God's power. Ephesians 1:18-23 teaches us that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at the Father's right hand, far above all earthly powers, is at work in those who believe. Jesus reminds His disciples that all things are possible for God (Mark 10:27).

PRAYER

Powerful God, please increase our faith. Teach us to esteem You so highly that we do not underestimate what You can do with us. Give us such big dreams for Your kingdom that we are not paralyzed by the smallness of our own abilities. In Jesus' name. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Worship and obey the God of the impossible.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Next week's lesson is "**Recognizing True Authority.**" Study Exodus 5:1-9, 22-6:1.

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