

Exodus 3-4
The call of Moses

Preamble-

Easter good Friday invites (Easter is two weeks from today).
Members meeting (after first service)

Prayer for illumination-

Sermon introduction-

My first real job, after college, was working for State Farm Insurance as an auto claims adjuster in North Seattle.

They warned me on day one that it would take at least twelve months to learn the job. In other words, “you will feel totally overwhelmed and undertrained for a while.”

Early on, I had no clue what I was doing. I did not even know how the claims process worked. I was still learning what to say to body shops, Insurance agents, lawyers, angry claimants, police officers, witnesses, and a thousand other people. Furthermore, I had to learn a whole new claims language.

Half of the time I would say to the person on the phone, “Can I put you on hold for a few minutes?” Once the phone was on hold, I said to Levi in the cubicle next to me, “Levi, what in the world am I supposed to say in this situation?” To make things worse we were in a huge open office with cubicles everywhere, which meant that everyone could hear my ignorance.

I felt totally inadequate, unprepared, and unequipped.

This is how many of us feel in the Christian life. We know what God has asked us to do, but we feel totally inadequate and unprepared to do it. We often find ourselves overwhelmed. This is how Moses felt when God called him.

This brings us to the good news of Exodus 3-4. Here is the main point of this story.

Those God calls, he equips, and he forgives.

Three headings...

God calls.

God equips.

God forgives.

First, God calls.

Who specifically called Moses? A holy God.

Exodus 3:1–6 (ESV) — 1 Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. (also known as Mt. Sinai)

Let me provide some context. It is the 15th century BC. Moses was a prince in Egypt for 40 years. After killing an Egyptian, he fled to the dessert. He has spent the last 40 years in the dessert tending his father in law's sheep.

According to Acts 7, he is now 80 years old. In the meantime, back in Egypt, things are getting worse and worse for the Israelites.

2 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

The angel of the Lord is often a reference to God. How do we know? Because in verses 4,5,6, and 7 it is God who speaks.

Throughout the OT, fire is a sign of God's presence, since fire symbolizes power, glory, holiness, light, and purity.

In the book of Hebrews, we read that "our God is a consuming fire."

Fire is wonderful and dangerous therefore it must be taken very seriously. God is wonderful and dangerous; therefore, God must be taken very seriously.

3 And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." **4** When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." **5** Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." **6** And he said, "I am the God of your 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 at God.

Because God is present in this place, this place is holy. Holiness has two components. To be holy means to be set apart and to be holy means absolute moral perfection.

Illustration:

God's holiness is like the sun. The sun is extremely important. It drives weather, purifies, ocean currents, seasons, and climate, and makes plant life possible through photosynthesis, and gives us vitamin D. Without the sun's heat and light, life on planet earth would end very soon. We would all freeze to death.

The sun is wonderful. But the closer you get to the sun the more dangerous the sun becomes. The temperature on the sun's surface is 10,000 degrees. Which means that we would burst into flames within a few thousand miles of the sun.

God holiness is wonderful and extremely dangerous.

When Moses encounters the holiness of God, he is terrified. And he should be.

Application:

Have you ever had an encounter with the holiness of God?
We must encounter the holiness of God to be saved from God.
We must encounter the holiness of God to be used by God.

This was the pattern for Moses, this was the pattern of every great leader in church history, and this is the pattern for us.

Said another way, if God is going to use you, you must first encounter his holiness.

If you have not encountered God's holiness, beg God to reveal his holiness to you.

Who calls Moses? A holy God. Next question...

Why does God call Moses? Israel is in deep trouble.

Exodus 3:7-10 (ESV) — 7 Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, 8 and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 9 And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. 10 Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

Again, we see God's compassion. He is a holy God, but he is also a compassionate God. He is the lion, and he is the lamb. He is love and justice. Thank goodness he is both.

He sees his people in trouble, and he acts. He saw us in trouble, and he acted. He sent his only son to suffer and die in our place to redeem us from slavery.

Transition. God called Moses to rescue his people, but how does Moses respond? This brings us to the next point.

First, God calls.

Second, God equips.

God calls Moses but Moses does not feel called. In fact, Moses is passionately opposed to God's call. How do we know? He raises five objections to God's calling. But God responds to each objection by saying, "Moses, I will equip you." Let's consider each objection.

Objection one- Moses says, "I am a nobody!" (3:11-12)

Exodus 3:11 (ESV) — 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 probably thought, “look God, I have been in the dessert for 40 years. I don’t have the creds. I have no authority, no advanced degrees, and no diplomatic experience. Sure, I used to be a prince of Egypt, but now I’m a lowly shepherd, and shepherds are despised by the Egyptians.”

Let’s be clear—God is asking Moses to walk into the court of the most powerful person in the world and say, “You must immediately fire your entire work force, which will ruin your economy and your way of life.”

This would be like a custodian declaring war on Russia. Imagine a guy marching up to the Kremlin, in his coveralls and mop, and demanding that Putin send all his laborers to Australia.

Moses really was a nobody.

How does God respond? He says, “I will equip you with my presence!”

Exodus 3:12 (ESV) — 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’s first six words to Moses are all that matter. He says, “But I will be with you.” This should provide Moses with all the confidence he needs.

Whenever the OT says that God is “with” someone, it stresses God’s power that enables the person to carry out his calling (cf. 4:12; Gen. 26:3).

God says the exact same thing to us.

Matthew 28:19–20 (ESV) — 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

God is with us, which means that we are equipped to do whatever he calls us to do.

Objection two- Moses says, “I don’t even know your name!” (3:13-22)

Exodus 3:13–22 (ESV) — 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?”

Given the ubiquity of polytheism in the surrounding cultures, it was essential for Israel to know the name of the one true God, apparently many had forgotten his name.

How does God respond? He says, “I will equip you with my name!”

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.

In the ANE, names were far more important than they are today. Now days parents chose names because they sound cool or unique. But names back then described the character of a person.

God's name is "I AM WHO I AM."

In Hebrew his name is spelled with four letters YHWH.

In our English Bibles whenever you see the word LORD in all caps, it is the name YHWH.

But what does the name YHWH mean? No one knows for sure, but the meaning is probably related to the verb "to be."

It can be translated...

"I have always been who I have always been." Which means that the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob (v 6) will act in a way which is consistent with his track record. He is utterly reliable.

"I am who I am." Which means that God is the eternal self-existent all sufficient one. He has no needs. He depends on nothing outside of himself.

"I will be who I will be." Which means something like, God will determine the future because he controls all things. Therefore, we can trust him.

There is truth in each translation.

Here is the obvious application— This is a God who can be trusted to equip us to do his will.

Objection three- Moses says, "The people will not believe me!" (4:1-9)

Exodus 4:1–9 (ESV) — 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.' "

How does God respond? He says, "I will equip you with signs!"

In verses 2-5, God says, "Moses, take that staff in your hand and throw it to the ground. When it hit the ground, it became a serpent. Moses was terrified. Then God said, "Grab the serpent by the tail." Moses did, and it turned back into a staff.

In verses 6-8, God says, "Moses put your hand inside your cloak." When Moses put his hand inside his cloak and pulled it out and it was leprous. Then God said, "put it back inside your cloak." He did and when he pulled it back out, it was fully restored.

In verse 9, God says, "If they don't believe because of these two signs, I will give you a third. When you take water from the Nile and pour it on the ground, it will turn into blood."

Why these signs? They were not merely parlor tricks to convince Israel to trust Moses. They were a picture of God's future salvation and judgment. Plus, they prove that God rules over human life, animal life, and nature. In other words, unlike the Egyptian Gods, he is Lord overall.

What sign has God given to Christ, our redeemer, to get us to trust him? He has given him the sign of the empty tomb.

Objection four- Moses says, “I’m not a good speaker” (4:10-12)

Exodus 4:10–12 (ESV) — 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.”

How do we make sense of this in light of **Acts 7:22**, where Peter says that Moses “was mighty in his words and deeds.”

It could be that Moses dramatically improved as a public speaking over the next 40 years. Or it could be that Moses was engaging in some exaggerated false humility.

Here is what we do know. This was a lame excuse.

How does God respond? God says, “I equipped you with a mouth!”

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.”

God says, “since I made your mouth, I can equip you to use it.”

Application: Moses needs to focus less on his abilities on more on God’s power.

Moses has one more objection.

Objection five- Moses says, “I just don’t want to do it!”

Exodus 4:13–15 (ESV) — 13 But he said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.”

After exhausting every excuse, Moses finally says, “I just don’t want to do it. Send someone else.” How many times have we felt this way. We say, “Lord, I don’t have any more excuses, I just don’t want to obey you.”

How does God respond? He says, “I will equip you with a friend!”

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.”

God is angry with Moses for his unwillingness, but he decides to show Moses compassion. Wow! God sends Moses a friend to help him communicate with Israel. God is kind, he equips us with friends at just the right time.

Here is a summary of Moses objections.

Moses says, “God, I can’t do it, I’m inadequate.” God responds by saying, “Moses, you can do it, because I am God, and I will equip you with everything you need.”

We must never forget that our weaknesses can highlight God's strength.

Illustration:

Pastor and author John Stott tells this story.

In 1958, I was privileged to lead an eight-day mission at the University of Sydney, Australia. On the last night, the meeting was . . . to be held in the imposing great hall of the university. But I had caught . . . a (bug), which had deprived me of speech. Shortly before the meeting, some student leaders gathered around me, and one of them read the words of Jesus to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me . . . For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor. 12:9-10) Then the students prayed that these words might be fulfilled in me that night. The hall was packed. But I could only croak my address into the microphone in a monotone, unable to assert my personality or modulate my voice in any way . . . I have been back in Australia ten times since then, and every time somebody has accosted me somewhere, asking, "Do you remember that meeting in the great hall of Sydney university when you had lost your voice? I came to Christ that night." (John Stott, Basic Christian Leadership, p. 51)

Application:

God perfects his power in our weaknesses; therefore, we can boast all the more in our weaknesses, just like Paul and just like Moses.

What does this look like? When we are weak, we are forced to rely on God's strength, and then God gets all the glory.

Where do you currently feel weak?

Do you lack the self-control or discipline required to read the Bible, pray, fast, and exercise?

Do you drink too much or eat too much or spend too much?

Do you lack the boldness and courage to share the gospel with your friends?

Do you feel inadequate as a parent?

Do you get angry with your children?

Do you slack off on the discipline?

Do you feel inadequate as a spouse?

Do you feel inadequate as a D-group or C-group leader?

Do you feel inadequate as a provider for your family?

Do you lack motivation to serve your roommates or siblings?

Do you feel weak around peer pressure?

Maybe you think, God can't use me, I'm not a good speaker, I'm not a great servant, I'm not a leader, I'm just an ordinary person. Even better!

God highlights his power and strength in our weakness. He will equip us to do what he has called us to do, when we admit our weaknesses to him and ask him for strength.

Unfortunately, leaders don't always do what God wants them to do. Which brings us to the last point.

First, God calls.

Second, God equips.

Third, God forgives.

In verses 18-23, Moses goes back to his father-in-law Jethro and tells him that he is heading back to Egypt. Then God encourages Moses by reminding him of what he is going to do through him.

But then, on the way to Egypt, something very strange happens.

Exodus 4:24–26 (ESV) — 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.

What do we make of this bizarre story?

Here are the facts. God is about to put Moses to death because he failed to circumcise his sons. Zipporah, his faithful wife, acts quickly. She understands the problem. She gets it. She is a wonderful wife. She grabs a flint knife and immediately circumcises their sons. When she does, God's anger is averted.

Most scholars agree that no one knows why she touched Moses' feet (probably a euphemism for his private parts) with her sons' foreskins.

But one thing is clear. We can't forget who Moses is dealing with. God is absolutely holy. He is perfect in all his ways, and he can't have any imperfection in his leaders. God made it very clear that Abraham and all his descendants were to circumcise every male child (Gen. 17:9-14). For some reason Moses had refused to obey this command, and it nearly cost him his life.

Application:

What is the point? Christian leaders make mistakes. Christian leaders sin. Moses really screwed up. Is there any hope?

Fortunately, Moses had a mediator—his wife. She was willing to act. She shed the blood of her sons to preserve the life of her husband.

Just like Moses, we too will sin. We too will fail to obey all of God's laws. We will make mistakes as leaders.

Fortunately, we too have a mediator—Jesus Christ. He was willing to act. He shed his own blood to preserve our lives. He shed his blood on the cross in our place so that the guilt and stain of all our sins could be removed.

Conclusion:

Be encouraged this morning.

God calls
God equips
God forgives

Let me leave you with the words of Tony Merida. Commenting on this passage he writes,

This is one of most encouraging passages in Scripture. Look at who God uses! He can use you as well. (Merida)

Lets pray...