

Text: Exodus 4:1-17

Theme: Here I am, send my brother

Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during Evening Service, 05/06/2011 at 6pm.

After God's revelation to Moses and having restated his commitment to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, Moses was still reluctant to heed God's call. The Lord even predicted that Israel would not depart empty handed as He had told Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:14). He even mentioned the women: the weak would plunder and the children would carry away the treasures from Egypt (Exodus 3:22). This was not to be an act of the defenceless Hebrew slaves but that of the mighty God who is actually going before them.

Then Moses answered and said, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.'" (Exodus 4:1) This passage really chronicles Moses' reluctance to be the one to lead the children of Israel out of bondage.

Let me ask you a personal question. Has there ever been something in your life that you knew God wanted you to do and you put it off? There have probably been lots of things. Witness to X, invite Y to church, apologize to and ask forgiveness of Z, extend forgiveness to A, go to B in love about something he is doing to hurt his testimony, break habit C, start (or stick with) family devotions, volunteer to teach Sunday School, start regularly giving at least a tithe to the Lord's work, etc., etc., etc.? Some of these things are difficult, some merely inconvenient. We've all put some of them off, even when we knew the Lord was calling us to do them NOW. Are you still putting them off? Well, you think you're bad? Moses, in the middle of one of the greatest theophanies (appearances/revelations of God) in all of Scripture, with a clear and immediate verbal command, was still trying to weasel out of his assignment. Maybe God's response to his reluctance will help us also with ours.

I. MOSES' EXCUSES

Just like us, Moses had his excuses. And when you examine them, they turn out, like ours, to be both irrelevant and irreverent, not to the point and showing an insufficient regard to the authority and majesty of God.

A. "They won't listen."

Moses' first excuse was, "They won't listen" (v. 1). In other words, it won't do any good anyway. I am unworthy of such a position. God had earlier defused this argument by reassuring Moses that His help would offset Moses' unworthiness, by promising Moses a future sign (3:12), and by giving Moses His name and its explanation, as well as by telling Moses what would happen until He triumphed over Egypt (3:14-22). But this excuse is really irrelevant. God had not commanded Moses to succeed; He had commanded him to GO. What difference does it make whether we think it will do any good, if God has commanded it? The Church is not responsible for saving a single soul. But it **is** responsible for preaching the Gospel to all souls. In *Gods and Generals*, General Robert E. Lee surveys the plans for an upcoming battle and remarks, "Gentlemen, these deployments are sound. The rest is in God's hands." It always is. Success or failure is not really our concern. Faithfulness is. Our business is obedience. The rest is in God's hands.

But Moses' excuse was not only irrelevant, it was also irreverent. In this case, the Lord had already promised success back in 3:20. So Moses' objection has the nerve to contradict God's own prediction. It was arrant unbelief, an insult to the veracity of God's word.

The Lord now took a different approach. The promise of a future sign was ineffective, the revelation of His plan for the future was not capable of bringing Moses to obedience, and thus the Lord now gave Moses signs then and there, proofs of His power. The first sign was that Moses' staff would turn into a snake. Can you imagine him running away from the snake when he was audacious enough to refuse the Almighty's call? The gracious God instructed him to pick up the object of his fear and it became a harmless staff again. The second sign of turning his hands leprous while inside his cloak and reversing the effect when put there a second time, was still a more impressive sign, and even more suited to bring unbelievers among the Israelites to belief in Moses' claims.

B. "I can't do it."

The second excuse was, "I can't do it" (v. 10). 'I'm not a good public speaker, so you've obviously got the wrong guy!' (Moses was obviously eloquent as a writer, indeed the greatest writer of his generation - but those of us who have met a few writers know that this does not always carry over to public speaking.) 'I'm not worthy, I have no talent.' Sound familiar? But once again, the excuse is simply irrelevant. What difference does it make? If Moses could have done it, he obviously would have done it already and wouldn't have needed God. If God wanted to do it alone, He wouldn't be sending anybody. But when one is the instrument of God, you are looking at a whole new ball game. Once God is involved, a whole new set of abilities have to be factored into the equation. Not able? Of course not, by yourself. Not worthy? Why, my dear fellow, who ever said you were? Irrelevant, immaterial, inadmissible. You've been chosen. Get on with it.

And of course this excuse is also irreverent. It, in effect, impugns the wisdom of God's choice as well as doubting His ability to enable. The objection was like a reproach and the Lord informed Moses that he was responsible for his lack of eloquence, since he gave Moses his mouth, but that He was also the one who had the power to make a person mute or deaf, seeing or blind. We don't think of the implications when we make these excuses, but they are there. It is basically an insult to God. That's what makes it so serious, but God's longsuffering is vividly displayed here. It is worthy of note that Moses addressed God here twice (4:10,13), but in neither case did he use the name God had revealed to him. He addressed God as Adonai, the master or owner, the powerful. But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it" (v.13).

C. "I don't want to."

The third excuse gets down to brass tacks: "I don't want to." That is the basic implication of v. 13, hidden in the vague politeness and veiled circumlocution of 'Send someone else to do it (as long as it's not me).' All of Moses' arguments to back up his refusal had been refuted. And now it turned out that Moses did not want to go. Reverently (as in v.10, 'with your permission') but firmly he said that the Lord had better send someone else, anyone else.

We argue to convince ourselves that at least we're being honest! But we are still being irrelevant, too. No wonder that the Lord finally became angry, now that Moses refused without any reason at all. He made provision for Moses' last objection (even though He had

already answered it) by promising Moses His direct help and instruction. The Lord had already provided Aaron and he was already on his way to meet Moses.

I think of a classic confrontation between parent and child. “I thought I told you to clean up your room.” “I don't wanna.” “I didn't ask you to want to, I asked you to do it!” And here also the irreverence reaches its climax. Moses is flirting with outright rebellion at this point. It's a wonder God did not strike him dead! And that's what all these excuses, and any others Moses might have come up with, really boil down to: rebellion, disobedience and sin. And what about your excuses? Do they fit into any of these categories?

II. GOD'S RESPONSES

Our heavenly Father here doesn't give Moses a lecture on the irrelevance and irreverence of his excuses. He responds to them much more effectively than that, using the same method he would later allow Socrates to perfect among men. He asks three questions, one per excuse, each one of which implies an important spiritual principle.

A. What's that in your hand?

The first question is, “WHAT'S THAT IN YOUR HAND?” (v. 2). It was a simple question leading to a profound realization. The answer was (initially) easy: a staff. It was, in other words, the mundane instrument of Moses' day to day profession, herding sheep. The principle behind the question is this: You already have something God can use! By itself, the staff was just a stick with a crooked end for walking over rough terrain and guiding sheep. But when it became the staff of God, look what it could do. It allowed Moses to catch a serpent by the tail, symbolizing power over Satan. The hand that became leprous and was restored speaks of the power to curse or to heal. The ability to turn the water of the Nile into blood stands, as we shall see in coming weeks, for power over all the gods of Egypt. God would do all of that using something Moses already had in his hand.

O.K., what is in your hand? Think! It has got to be something - something you already have or are already doing that could be transformed by being turned over to God and dedicated to His service, something you have simply neglected to think of in those terms so far. God gave us our natural gifts and inclinations for a reason. There has got to be something. But even if there is really nothing, you still have the hand itself. That's really all God needs.

B. Who made man's mouth?

The next question was, “WHO MADE MAN'S MOUTH?” (v. 11). Well, that's easy. God did, of course. The first principle is that God will use what you've already got. The second principle is that God can give you whatever you lack to accomplish His purposes. Moses' squirming in v. 10 is very interesting. “I've never been eloquent, not then, not even now since you have spoken.” What he is saying is, “I don't feel any more eloquent than I did a minute ago, so obviously you still haven't given me the needed ability yet.” Well, of course not. You don't need it until you are standing in front of Pharaoh! **God's provision comes in response to faith that expresses itself in obedience.**

I've seen this principle at work in my own life. When God wanted us to engage in some “building work” in the church, I said rather safely, “If the Lord provides the money we would do it.” Nine years later there was no money. Why should there be? I wasn't committed to

anything. I became convinced it was something I needed to do and committed myself to the mission, and within a couple of months everything had been provided. Now, this does not mean that the Lord will back you up in any tom-fool venture you decide to attempt. It does mean that when He has called you to something, it is not “If the Lord provides the money, I will go,” but “If I go, the Lord will provide the money.” When it is a matter of His calling, He will use what you've already got, and He will supply whatever you lack.

C. Is there not Aaron?

The third question is a painful one: “IS THERE NOT AARON?” (v. 14). This question is asked in anger because by this time it is clear that Moses is just stalling. God has answered all his objections and he still doesn't want to go! Note carefully what is happening here. In v. 12, God had offered to give Moses the eloquence he needed to speak to the people and to Pharaoh. In v. 13, Moses in essence refuses the offer. So in v. 14, he gets Aaron instead! No doubt Moses would have had his help anyway, for he was already on his way to meet him. But perhaps Aaron ended up with a prominence he was not meant to have - which we discover to be a problem in the regrettable episode of the Golden Calf. At any rate, by balking, Moses loses the opportunity to become eloquent, but he does not get out of the assignment. The third principle is that God is going to accomplish his purposes with or without you, but you will lose a blessing if you are not obedient. It is always better to obey God.

Well, what is it that you need to be doing? Whatever it is, it cannot be nearly as hard as Moses' task. Whatever it is, God is just as sufficient for it. Whatever it is, your excuses are just as flimsy and only heap sin upon sin. Will you covenant with God to take some specific, positive step of obedience this week? You will be blessed and He will be glorified if you do.