

Title: Who do you think you are?
Text: Exodus 3.11-4.17
Theme: Excuses for Disobedience
Series: Exodus #4
Prop Stmt. There are no reasons for disobedience, only excuses.

The Forbidden City is an ancient part of the city of Beijing, built by Zhu Di, 3rd Emperor of the Ming Dynasty. Completed for the Chinese New Year of 1241, the famed city was built directly by one million men, and indirectly by 3.5 million. The inauguration dinner fed 26,000 people a 10-course meal on the finest porcelain. Zhu Di's million man army, large navy, impressive philosophers, astronomers and library made him the military, and cultural leader of his day. His time at the top would be short-lived. Three months after the city was completed, lighting struck the palace and the resulting fire burned out of control until three of the large halls were burnt to the ground including the throne room itself reducing Zhu Di's throne to ashes. In a day, the work of millions was destroyed. What did this mean? In an edict to his people, Zhu Di expressed his shock. He said, "My heart is full of trepidation, I do not know how to handle it." That is an amazing admission on the part of an emperor. He goes on to say that perhaps we have offended the gods somehow and admits that he "cannot find the reason" in the midst of his confusion for all that has happened. The result of this fire that seemed directed by "the gods" against him and his confusion became a crisis of confidence in his leadership and in a matter of months, he was out of power, and dead.

We are not that different, in this sense. When a personal or national catastrophe happens, we try to make sense of it and look for a message. We wonder how are we to understand our world and the events going on, and how are we to understand our own lives and our place in it. The religions of the world are all organized in trying to answer these ultimate type questions. We need for God to speak so we can know how to live. The Word of God is such an incredible treasure chest for us, but the blessing of the revelation brings the expectation of responsibility and obedience. Yes, we have to have God communicating with us, but when He does, are you willing to obey? Do you really want God to speak?

Our excuses for not following God's Word only reveal our failure to really trust Him. This text is more than a case study in excuse making. This text is where God reveals Himself. This is absolutely critical, because whenever you have to carry out a mission there is a question that has to be answered. That question is – Who do you think you are?

In this text, Moses asks that question of himself. Then Moses anticipates the people asking that of him. It is a question that the Pharaoh will ask and the world always asks that question of the people of God, because the world asks that question of God. You ask that question of yourself. You ask that question of me. Your world asks that question of you. It all comes down to a single word; authority. You cannot adequately answer the personal question of: Who do you think you are, without understanding who God is. In this text, God answers the question of Moses' calling and his vicarious authority by revealing His own.

Read Text:

There is a calling that God has on your life. So, what are your excuses? There is a difference between reasons for caution and excuses for disobedience. Initially, Moses responds humbly, but eventually, his humility becomes an excuse to not trust in what God has revealed about Himself – the self-existent One. God has called to Moses from a burning bush and in this encounter God reveals to Moses that he is the one that God has chosen to back to Egypt and lead the people of Israel out of their bondage and into their land. Moses begins to come up with all sorts of reasons why this will probably not work. This text is a dialogue between God and Moses. The fact that a man is having a conversation with God is an astounding event, but in reality it is part of God's original design. We were made for fellowship with God. The dialogue between God and Moses follows an interesting pattern. The words of Moses are short and brusque. The words of God are long and repetitious. There is an argument that is taking place. It starts off reasonable enough, but after God answers the reasonable questions it starts to become apparent that it is not Moses' rational part that is objecting, but his volitional part. Moses raises questions which eventually become objections. The answer of God is characterized by "I know" and "I am with you" followed by a command to take action. The answers that God gives go beyond dealing with the immediate issue to addressing the future in order to give a vision to Moses of what he, by God's power can accomplish.

1. **I don't know if I am ready for this.** (3.11-12)

This is different than what he thought forty years ago. Forty years ago, Moses overestimated his own strength and now we will see that he underestimates God's. But, at this point, his reaction to this call is understandable and to be expected. "Who am I" to do a job like this. It all has to do with authority. Who do I think I am to walk into Egypt and bring 2 million slaves out of bondage and lead them to their own land?

Expected Reaction – Seen in Jeremiah (1.6); Saul (1 Sam. 9.21); Gideon (Judges 6.15)

God answers with a promise and a sign of hope. The promise is, I will be with you. Not only that, but what you are experiencing is what Israel will experience. You will bring the people here to worship me at this mountain. Now, notice this. Every time in this text, God answers Moses, he keeps giving him a little more information about what is going to happen. Here, God lays out in very broad strokes his purpose for their release. Just as God called Moses to come and converse with God and respond in a worshipful obedience, God is calling Israel to be an entire nation that does the same thing. God's original desire in creating this world was to create a people who would fellowship with Him and worship Him and be a people with whom God would live and converse. Now, that goal of God's is about to take a major step forward. God is going to bring the people, not just out of Egypt, but to this mountain where they will learn about God's plan to live right in the middle of them. God has a lot more than just rescue and deliverance in mind. God frees people so they can worship.

Moses goes from “Who am I” to “Who are you”? If I just show up and tell these people that the God of your fathers has sent me to you, they are going to want to know what your name is. I don’t know what to tell them.

2. I don't know all the answers. (3.13-22)

From verse 14-22 God answers this question and more. His initial answer is staggering. Keep in mind that Egypt is a world power, perhaps THE world power. Egypt is empowered by their gods. Israel, is not even a nation. They are a tribe of slaves. Their God, does not even merit a mention or a place on the shelf. The culture is used to gods have certain areas of authority such as; the god of war, or thunder, or fertility. Egypt had many gods, some of whom we will meet as we study the plagues, since the plagues were a direct, frontal assault on the Egyptian pantheon of gods. So, the question that Moses asks would be a natural one to ask. Since all of the gods have names, what is your name?

God answers with the ultimate answer and the plan. God’s name is I AM who I AM. His very name carries with it the idea of continuous, unfinished action. I am being that I am being. Or I am the Is-ing One, that is, “the One who always is.” God is an actual being who is more than was and will be, but exists in the eternal present, and has always been and forever will be. God’s name for Himself speaks of God’s immutability; that is His changelessness. Do you know what that means? That means that there was never a time when God wasn’t, and there will never be a time when God isn’t. That means that there is no power that is greater, no problem that is bigger, and no challenge that is deeper. He is, the I AM. You cannot outlive Him, you cannot outlast Him, you cannot outlove Him, you cannot out negotiate Him, you cannot out maneuver Him and you cannot over power Him. You cannot wait til next year when you have a better team. You cannot kill Him, you cannot stop Him, you cannot overcome Him and you cannot change Him. He is the I AM. You cannot starve Him, He is self-existent. No army can march against Him, no navy can sail from Him. No king can rule above Him and nothing in all creation can come between Him and His children. And if you pick on his children, He sees, He hears, He has compassion on them, and He comes down. And when the I AM comes down, there is no running into the future and no hiding in the past for the I AM of the Eternal present is all over the place all of the time for all of eternity. You might as well just bow down and get it over with.

When God says, “I AM who I AM” He is revealing more about Himself to Moses. Previously He was known as the God of your fathers. But, He is more than the God of their fathers (God of yesterday), He is the God who is eternally present and self-existent. He depends on nothing and no one. The answer to all of his questions and objections is ultimately answered in God. God’s call upon your life comes with God Himself who, dependent on no one, will provide you with all that you need to follow Him.

At this point, Moses is given the essential nature of his mission:

- a) Meet w/ the leaders of the Israelites and tell them that you have met with God and God keeps His Word. That is good news for you and really bad news for Pharaoh.
- b) Meet w/ Pharaoh – and make a request (pick a fight) All that we’re asking for is to be able to take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.
- c) Anticipate conflict (19)
- d) Anticipate wonders (20)
- e) Permission, Plunder, Leave
 - God used this as a means to build his tabernacle

3. **I don't know about the “what if's”** (4.1-9)

Again, we can be sympathetic with the enormity of what God is calling Moses to do and as Moses begins to think through the steps that will be required. His last attempt at rescuing Israel was not received well. So, initially we can understand him saying, What if they don't believe me, what if they don't listen, what if they flat out call me a liar? How can I make them believe?

This can be a legitimate question, but too often asking a bunch of “what-ifs” is merely a stall tactic. The first two questions/objections that we have looked at are reasonable and to be expected. However, with each answer that God gives, He also gives more detail of what He is requiring of Moses. So, even though this third objection is itself a natural question under most circumstances, the truth is, God has already answered this (3.18). Now, it is starting to become apparent that Moses is looking for a way out, and probably wishing he had never paid any attention to the bush. God answers Moses three “what-if's” with two signs and a promise.

God's prophets were accredited by “signs and wonders.” (Deut. 13.1-3) The mere presence and performance of a sign or wonder did not all by itself guarantee authenticity that the person doing the sign was indeed a mouthpiece of God, since the prophet's words had to come true and could not contradict what God had already revealed. Moses would be speaking on behalf of God, who, as far as we know had not spoken for about 400 years.

The first sign that God gave involved the ordinary staff that Moses had in his hand. I love the dialogue at this point. “What is that in your hand?” God asks. Moses replies that it is a staff. God tells him to throw it on the ground, at which point it becomes a snake. Moses starts to run, but God tells Moses to pick it up by the tail. Let's give the guy some credit. He throws down his staff as instructed and he picks up the snake by the tail, which obviously took a little more faith to pick it up than to throw it down. This was incredible! It is true that the headpiece worn by the Pharaoh had a cobra on it, and it is true that Satan had first appeared in the form of a snake. But, I think it is reading too much into the event to say that the sign indicated that Moses would be able to have total control over Pharaoh or Satan. I think that God is simply pointing out to Moses, that the presence of God brings with it the power of God. Along with that, since Moses is

struggling with the fact that God is calling an ordinary man to do an extraordinary job, that it is legitimate to point out that in this sign we see that God can do extraordinary things through ordinary objects. The staff of Moses would be used in very explicitly in the first plague, the second plague, the third plague, the seventh plague, the eighth plague perhaps the ninth plague, at the Red Sea and in bringing water of a rock. Moses had no idea what he had in his hand. And of course, the power was not in the staff itself, but from God who loves to take ordinary things and ordinary people and make them awesome weapons for his glory. But, in order for that first sign to happen, Moses had to throw it down! He had to obey. He had to give it up, even for a minute. God understood the dilemma that Moses would be in. Go and tell people (people whom you have not been around for about 80 years) that God just spoke to you and you are supposed to be their leader. Not only that, but you are going to lead them out of their bondage, when you have no army! You had better come with a few miracles!

The second sign that God performs also declares a powerful truth. Moses is instructed to put his hand inside his garment and when he took it out, it had death all over it. Leprosy, like our word cancer, was a general word that covered a number of skin diseases. Moses was then instructed to put it back in his garment and when he brought it out again, it was restored. The point is clear. God has the power to take away health and to restore to life.

God then gives Moses a final sign, sort of like a deal clincher. In verses 8-9, God repeats the words that Moses uses almost verbatim. What if, they do not believe me or listen to me, Moses asked. God uses those same words in these two verses. He is dealing with every objection that Moses raises. The Hebrew language here uses the word for voice when speaking of the signs. These signs would be speaking to the people. If they don't believe either of these first two, then take some water from the Nile, pour it on the ground and it will become blood on the ground. As you may know, this becomes the essence of the first plague on Egypt. The symbolism is incredibly powerful.

The opening chapter of the book of Exodus concludes with the command to throw every Hebrew boy into the Nile river. Every Hebrew mother and father would in their anguish want to know where God was at this time. God, why don't you do something about this? God, don't you care? God, what about those promises you made to our fathers? Have you forgotten your Word? How dare we ever accuse God of neglect! Do you see it now? Do you what is going on with this sign? When the Egyptians looked at the Nile, they saw water, God saw blood. God saw the blood of all those boys who were drowned in that river. Like the blood of Abel that cried out from the ground for justice and God heard and God came down to answer, so now, the blood of all these children murdered was bringing God down. And God told Moses, "I have seen, I have heard, I am concerned and I have come down." (3.7-8) This text ought to cause every despot, and every ruler who ever used murder as a political ploy, every abortionist and every criminal who has yet to die, to scream in terror, realizing that one day, he must face the God of life who hears the cry of the blood of those killed and responds with calculated and overwhelming power. We serve a God who hears and a God who answers. Moses, is summoned to a front row seat, but now, his hesitation is more and more obvious.

4. I don't know if I have the talent. (4.10-12)

Alright, let's all take a deep breath. Are you getting a little frustrated with this guy? Stephen said in his speech before the Sanhedrin that Moses was mighty in speech (Acts 7.22). Moses objection should not be understood that he stammered when he spoke, but he was now clearly just trying to make excuses, such as: I don't think real well on my feet. I have never been able to win debates. And yet, he is clearly thinking well enough on his feet to argue with God!

God answers with four questions and a command. Again the big idea is, you may not think you have the talent, but you have ME. And, I am the self-existent One. I AM the one who is the ultimate source of the power. The ability to speak is given or not given by me. The power to see and hear is given or not given by me. "Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

Every person here questions your own talent. Are you ever talented enough? Not really. Do you have what it takes to do all that God has called you to do? No, but again, that is the point. You are not self-existent, God is. When God calls you to obey Him, He provides you with the resources that you need in order to pull it off. But, He provides them in a way so that He receives the credit for it. Time has run out and so have the excuses. God has drawn a line in the sand and commands Moses to cross it.

5. I don't want to do it. (4.13-17)

God uses, even the failing response of his servant to reveal his plan, his purpose and His person. This is no way minimizes the failure of Moses, but it does show off the unstoppable nature of God's plan. He has already provided Aaron as an able assistant for Moses. He has already provided his staff as a means to show authority. Now, all that is left is for Moses to obey.

What does this have to do with Christ? Moses was a reluctant savior. He was full of excuses and was led back to Egypt, kicking and screaming. But, he did it. And in the end, even as he was writing down this account, he was able to see how God had done so many incredible things. But the truth remains, our saviors are flawed. Even Moses could not take them all the way into the land, but died before the Jordan. Christ is a perfect Savior. He did not argue, nor object to the Father's will. While Moses was an example of how God can do extraordinary things through ordinary people, we need more than an ordinary savior to rescue us, we need Christ. Christ came all the way to the earth, went all the way to the cross and came all the way out of the grave. He went all the way back to heaven, and will come all the way back to lead us all the way into the kingdom that He prepares. He saves all the way.

What does this have to do with you?

- What has God called you to do?
- What has God provided for you?
- What are you doing about the call?