

**WHEN GOD CALLS YOU**  
*The Life of Moses: Deliverance through Faith.*  
**Exodus 3:1-4:17**  
 Chadron Berean Church

What if God were to call you to do something great for Him? One day God knocks on your door and says, *“I’ve got a job for you. Follow Me.”* and from that point there was no turning back. No going back to life as you knew it. It would be challenging, but it would also be the most rewarding thing you’ve ever done. How would you respond to His call? My guess is that initially your response might be a lot like Moses’, especially if you’ve experienced a failure like Moses’.

Last week we witnessed how Moses, the adopted grandson of Pharaoh and the one whom everyone used to bow the knee to in Egypt, at **age forty** killed an Egyptian in an attempt to deliver his fellow Hebrew people from slavery. He then ran as a fugitive to **Midian** in northwest Saudi Arabia. For **forty more** years, the New Testament (NT) tells us, Moses lives in this red, barren wasteland as a shepherd, a job that is loathsome to the Egyptians. So he has gone from a somebody to a nobody. From a silver spoon to the backside of the desert, getting a PhD in humility. At this point, Moses has completely abandoned any dreams of delivering Israel but it’s here in chapter 3 at **80 years old** that God finally **calls him to deliver Israel**. Verses 1-2 establish the setting for that call.

**I. THE SURPRISING CALL OF MOSES. (3:1-22)**

*1 “Now Moses was pasturing the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 Then the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush.”*

So one day Moses is shepherding in **Horeb**, a “desolate place” where **Mt. Sinai**, “*the mountain of God*” is. That’s an important detail because later God is going to lead the Israelites out of Egypt to this exact location. But if you pretend like you don’t know the rest of the story, for Moses, Mt. Sinai at this point just another mountain. There’s nothing special about it. It’s just another place. The **bush** God appears in is just another bush. And this is just another ordinary day. Some translations say, *“One day Moses was out shepherding.”* The day started out just like any other day. The sun came up. Moses got out of bed. Picked up his bedding. Probably had a routine breakfast and started tending the sheep. Nothing about this day felt any different. This is what he’s been doing for forty years—day, after day, after day. There was no warning. No angels appearing to him, saying, *“Hey, Moses! Pay attention today! God is going to speak to you!”* He is totally oblivious as to what was going to happen.

I think that’s the way God likes to call us, when we aren’t expecting it. It’s surprising. Think about it: the most momentous experiences in life come at a time when we’re not expecting it. Maybe like the day you met your now spouse. Sure, you might have been thinking about getting married one day but you were wondering if you’ll ever meet someone and then one day there they are! And life’s never the same. Or think about the day you were saved. You probably didn’t

wake up that morning and say to yourself, *“I think I’ll get trust Christ as my Savior today.”* No. Someone came along and shared the good news of Jesus Christ with you, or you heard it on the radio unexpectedly, or you went to just another Sunday at church or another summer Bible camp, not realizing that that day God’s Spirit would finally penetrate your heart reveal your need for Christ. God’s Spirit, like the wind, came, and your life was never the same.

This is the way I tend to see the **call** of God into **vocational ministry** too. God calls people who are faithful where they are, just doing what they’re doing. Like Moses in the desert just faithfully doing his thing and then suddenly God knocks and says, *“you’re next.”* Elishah was just out plowing a field with his oxen when prophet Elijah comes up and throws his cloak on him and says, *“You’re next!”* (1 Kings 19:19-21). Elisha said goodbye to his mom that day and burned the oxen on the plow. Now **verse 3**:

*3 So Moses said, “I must turn aside and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burning up!” 4 When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” 5 Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from 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.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.*

So Moses can’t help but turn aside to get a closer look at this **burning bush** that refuses to burn up. Living in this hot wasteland, he might have seen bushes like this spontaneously combust before. But this one refused to die out because it’s not your average fire. **The angel of the Lord**, God Himself, probably the pre-incarnate Christ, is in it.

And **fire**. **Fire** is a fitting representation for God, by the way. We are drawn to fire. We’re mesmerized by it. But it’s also very powerful. You have to respect it. We tell our kids, *“Don’t play with fire.”* So it is with God. **God is a consuming fire** (Heb. 12:29). He is to be respected and revered. That’s why Moses is told to take off his **sandals**. It’s a sign of **reverence** and **respect** and something still practiced in some cultures today. But this is why God says, *“Do not come near.”* Because God is holy and His fiery presence consumes what is not holy... like us. We are sinful men and don’t deserve to be in the presence of a holy and perfectly righteous God. Only through Christ’s perfect righteousness applied to us through faith in Him can we enjoy His presence and enjoy fellowship with Him. His Holy Spirit works to burn up what is unholy in our lives. But **Verse 7** continues:

*7 And the Lord said, “I have certainly seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their outcry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite. 9 And now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them.*

So at this point, Moses is probably thinking, *“This is awesome. Get after it! I’ve been waiting for a long time for their deliverance!”* But God continues in **verse 10**:

10 And now come, and I will send **you** to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.” [emphasis mine]

And that’s where Moses went, “*Woah, woah, woah...*” or maybe “*No, no, no...*” Moses thought all this “deliverer of Israel” savior complex stuff was over in him. He thought that bridge burned a long time ago and he was going to finish out his days herding sheep. He’s comfortable now!

11 But Moses said to God, “*Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?*”

This is where we get into the 3 unsurprising objections of Moses.

## II. THE UNSURPRISING OBJECTIONS OF MOSES. (3:11-4:17)

I say *unsurprising* because every one of us (especially on the backside of a failure) will say, “*Who am I that God would choose me to do something great?*” This whole, “*Who am I?*” can be a healthy, humble response—an acknowledge of your human limits and unworthiness before God. But Moses at this point has gone to a self-deprecating extreme of false humility.

And this is his **main excuse** we’ll call **Excuse #1 – “I’m inadequate.”** Which is true! But again, Moses at this point has *talked himself out of serving the Lord* and *will try to talk the Lord out of it too!* But it’s not in any way a unique excuse or unique response God’s call. In fact, I would venture to guess that many Christians today who were once excited to serve the Lord like Moses once was have systematically talked themselves out of it by wrestling with thoughts of failure and inadequacy.

We can all look in the mirror and think of some excuse. We say, “*I’m not qualified. Not gifted enough. I don’t have a lot to offer. I don’t have this education or that one. I’m too young* (that was Jeremiah’s excuse). *Or I’m too old* (remember Moses is 80). He’s set in his ways too. How about this one: “*I have this or that health issue or good at talking.*” I realized that one didn’t work when one of the most powerful sermons I’ve heard came from a man with cerebral palsy, asking the audience, “*What’s your excuse?*” Or to read about some great missionaries like Amy Carmichael who wrestled with her own appearance and health disorders. She wrote this poem:

From prayer that asks that I may be  
Sheltered from winds that beat on Thee,  
From fearing when I should aspire,  
From faltering when I should climb higher,  
From silken self, O Captain, free  
Thy soldier who would follow Thee.  
From subtle love of softening things,  
From easy choices, weakenings,  
Not thus are spirits fortified,  
Not this way went the Crucified;  
From all that dims Thy Calvary,  
O Lamb of God, deliver me.

Give me the love that leads the way,  
The faith that nothing can dismay,  
The hope no disappointments tire,  
The passion that will burn like fire;  
Let me not sink to be a clod;  
Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God.

That's quite the prayer. But the trouble is, many of us are content being clods. We're kind of like Moses. We don't want to burn for God anymore. We just want to reach heaven without Jesus interrupting our lives too much. It's okay for God to use someone else, just not me. That really is how Moses felt (4:13). That's why God says to Moses in **verse 12**,

*“Assuredly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.”*

So God responds to Moses' question with, *“I will be with you.”* Basically, *“Without Me, you're nothing. But with Me, you'll set the people free and you will all worship Me here.”* But Moses isn't convinced. **Verse 13:**

*Moses said to God, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?”*

You know what this is? This a question of worry. *“What if?”* He wants to know everything ahead of time. We'll call it **Excuse #2 – “I'm unknowledgeable.”** But God is still gracious and give him an answer in **verse 14**.

*And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “This is what you shall say to the sons of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” 15 God furthermore said to Moses, “This is what you shall say to the sons 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 this is the name for all generations to use to call upon Me. 16 Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has appeared to me, saying, “I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt.”*

So God reveals His name to Moses. **“I AM WHO I AM.”** Yahweh. The great “I AM.” It's the most important, significant name for God there is. The Jews regard this as the highest name for God. They don't want to right it or speak it it's so holy. It means “to be.” In other words, most think what God means by this is that He is the **self-existent and self-sufficient One**. The eternal One who always has been, always is, and always will be. The One who is dependent upon nobody for His existence and who never runs out of supply, as demonstrated by the fiery bush which never runs out of fuel or burns up. So when Moses says, *“Who am I?”* God says, *“I AM.”* In other words, *“It doesn't matter who you are. You're right. You are inadequate. But I'm the one sending you and I'm adequate. It's not who you are, Moses, but whose you are and who is with you that matters.”* That's our big principle for this morning.

**God is completely adequate where we are inadequate.**

In **verses 17-22** God talks about how He will bring the Israelites into the promised land. Not only that, they are going to plunder the Egyptians. It should comfort us with how well God effortlessly predicts the future. God never panics. He is never surprised. For the sake of time, I'll have you fast forward to chapter 4:1 where the excuses continue. **Verses 1-9.**

*Then Moses said, "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you.'" 2 The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he said, "A staff." 3 Then He said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it turned into a serpent; and Moses fled from it. 4 But the Lord said to Moses, "Reach out with your hand and grasp it by its tail"—so he reached out with his hand and caught it, and it turned into a staff in his hand— 5 "so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."*

*6 The Lord furthermore said to him, "Now put your hand inside the fold of your robe." So he put his hand inside the fold, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. 7 Then He said, "Put your hand inside the fold of your robe again." So he put his hand into the fold again, and when he took it out of the fold, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. 8 "So if they will not believe you nor pay attention to the evidence of the first sign, they may believe the evidence of the last sign. 9 But if they will not believe even these two signs nor pay attention to what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will turn into blood on the dry ground."*

So the Lord does **signs** for Moses. These signs will be done in Pharaoh's presence and used to convince the Israelites. The first sign is turning his staff into a **snake**, probably a cobra. It was one of the Egyptian gods. To take a cobra by the tail was to say that Moses would have God's authority over Egypt and the Satanic evil there. His **staff** will be called "**the staff of God**" and God will use it to do wonders (v. 20). The second sign is **leprosy**, demonstrating God's power over sickness and death. The third sign is **turning the Nile into blood** – an indication of the plagues to come. God will demonstrate His control over Egypt, Egypt's gods, and over all creation. But even after this, Moses still objects! You can't make this stuff up.

*10 Then Moses said to the Lord, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."*

So Moses now comes up with **Excuse #3 – "I'm incapable."** He claims he can't talk well. Some speculate Moses' had a fear of public speaking or speech impediment. But even in this conversation Moses is saying he doesn't speak well and asks God to notice it. I think he is just saying that he is not eloquent or persuasive (6:12). Whatever the case, it's not a good excuse because **God's power is perfected in our weaknesses (2 Cor. 12:9-10)**. God doesn't need perfect orators. Not even Paul was eloquent. When we are weak, the apostle Paul says, He is strong. Weaknesses are something to boast about. So our weaknesses are *all the more reason* for God to choose us so that He gets the glory. And that's what the Exodus is all about—God

glorifying Himself through His judgment on Pharaoh and rescuing the Israelites (7:3-4; 9:16; 10:1-2). So Moses' excuse is entirely irrelevant and God is extremely blunt in **verse 11**.

*11 But the Lord said to him, "Who has made the human mouth? Or who makes anyone unable to speak or deaf, or able to see or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 Now then go, and I Myself will be with your mouth, and instruct you in what you are to say."*

Really, what are you going to say to that? How do you respond to that? God says He's sovereign over these things and uses them for His glory and purposes (John 9:2-3). Moses can't argue with that and his real reason finally comes out in **verse 13**:

*13 But he said, "Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will."*

Basically, "*Send someone else. I don't want to go. I don't want a second chance.*" This is getting painfully irreverent. But this is the real Moses. Not some story book Bible, the great, perfect, hero Moses. He's relatable but not a perfect model. And at this point, the Lord gets **angry**.

*14 Then the anger of the Lord burned against Moses, and He said, "Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be overjoyed. 15 So you are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I Myself will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will instruct you in what you are to do. 16 He shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you and you will be as God to him. 17 And you shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs."*

So even though the Lord is angry with Moses and even though Moses doesn't need the help, God, in His grace, allows his older brother **Aaron** to help. But this *lack of faith* will ultimately prove to be a mistake because Aaron will be a thorn in Moses' side. As soon as Israel comes to Mt. Sinai, Aaron will take the plunder of the Egyptians and shape it into a golden calf to be worshiped. His lack of faith will prove harmful.

In summary, let's ask the question again, "*What if God were to call you to do something great?*"

Well, what if I told you that every believer in Jesus Christ has already been called to something great. No matter who you are, no matter what weaknesses you have, no matter what messes you've made in the past, as a believer **you have a heavenly calling** (Eph. 4:1; Heb. 3:1). Just to cite one verse, **2 Timothy 1:9** says God "*has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*" In other words, God has chosen you. He has knocked on your door and said, "*Come... believe.*" But also, "*Go... live for Me and make disciples. Let others know about eternal life available through the gospel. God calls through the gospel*" He sends us to be part of an even greater Exodus—calling people out of slavery to sin and into the freedom of worship.

The truth is that no matter what you do—whether you’re a rancher, janitor, health practitioner, trucker, construction worker, teacher, parent, or child—you are to use that as a platform for carrying out your heavenly calling. I find it interesting that the regular, old staff of Moses became known as “*the staff of God*” (4:20). Maybe you have a wrench in your hand. Or a steering wheel. Or a stethoscope. Or a baby bottle. Or pencil or keyboard. Whatever it is, it’s a tool God can use in the heavenly call. But as you are faithful in that, be available too because God might just call you into vocational ministry. If that’s the case, be willing, but be patient as you wait for God to open that door of service to you.