

Overcoming Our Reluctance

Exodus 3-4

This morning, as we continue our sermon series on the book of Exodus we're going to talk about how to overcome the reluctance we might feel when it comes to sharing our faith with unbelievers.

When I'm uncomfortable with something, I can be reluctant. I have a 4WD pickup and really enjoy it in the winter when the roads are slippery, especially when I'm dropping the kids off at school where there's a lot of starting and stopping and the roads seem to always be icy. It makes a huge difference. But last winter I began to notice that the 4WD wasn't engaging when I turned the switch. It was like I was still in 2WD and when the back tires started spinning, I could hear a grinding noise up front. So I could tell the 4WD had a problem that I needed to dig into.

I'm a DIY kind of guy when it comes to car repairs, but this one felt a bit overwhelming. I didn't know how it worked or what the problem could be. I didn't even know where to start looking. So I was really reluctant and I didn't do anything. I put up with 2WD the rest of the winter and tried to avoid situations where I really needed 4WD.

I don't know if you ever feel that way, but I do when it comes to things I'm not comfortable with, and my reluctance ends up controlling me so I procrastinate or don't do anything.

I have that same problem when it comes to sharing my faith with unbelievers. I love talking to people about the Lord when they're fellow believers, but when they're not, I'm reluctant. It feels uncomfortable and I start to think of excuses for why they won't listen or how they'll feel awkward and start to avoid me if I say something. So I hold back. I often wait to see if there will be a better opportunity, like someone asking me point blank to tell them about Jesus. And that doesn't happen very often!

Christ has called me to be involved in the work of redemption that he's doing here on earth and one of the things that includes is talking to unbelievers about Jesus to see if they're interested. That's the same calling on all our lives as

followers of Christ. God has positioned us to have an influence for him within a unique group of people – people you work with, go to school with, interact with... And if you're like me you probably feel some hindering reluctance. The things we have to share are really, really wonderful, but it's still hard to share them because of our fears, insecurities, awkwardness, and doubt. How are we going to get over the hump and have more confidence to share the good news?

As I read the passage we're going to look at today, I noticed a lot of similarities in the situation with Moses. We're going to see that God called Moses to do something very special – to take some amazing news to the people in slavery in Egypt. But Moses was very reluctant and didn't want to go. He brought up several objections before God. I think it will be helpful for us to see how God responded to Moses because the answers he gives can also help us to overcome the reluctance we might feel.

This is just the second week of our new sermon series on the book of Exodus. Last week we reviewed some important background information so we could understand how the book of Exodus fits into history and God's plan for redeeming and restoring fallen humanity to himself. If you haven't listened to that sermon, I encourage you to do so, so you understand the bigger picture of what's going on.

In a nutshell, God had chosen a man named Abraham and his descendants to be his people and be the ones through whom he would reveal himself to the world and demonstrate his glory. God promised to bless them, to make them fruitful in numbers, and to give them the land of Canaan as an inheritance. But there was a major famine and they ended up moving to Egypt where they became slaves for 400 years.

We saw last week how this was all part of God's plan. He would actually use their time of slavery to bless them, increase their numbers, and acquire great possessions before bringing them back to take possession of Canaan. And Exodus is the story of how God began to do that. In chapters 1 and 2 we saw how bad their situation was and how God raised up a man named Moses who would lead them out of Egypt. That brings us to chapter 3 where we will see how God called him to do that.

Read Exodus 3:1-10.

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. 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. 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.

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."

So this is how God called Moses – a powerful personal encounter with God. This was about 40 years after he fled to Midian and it appears to be the first time this kind of thing had happened to him. Through this encounter, Moses was introduced to many powerful attributes of God. As God spoke to him he would have remembered the suffering of his people and the blessing of his own deliverance from Egypt. He heard the good news that God was going to set them free and bring them to the promised land and that he was going to use Moses to lead them.

You would think that after such a powerful experience he would jump right on board to go back to his people and tell them the good news. In a lot of ways, it's similar to the good news God has called us to share. But Moses didn't feel like that at all. He was very reluctant, and in the next several verses we will see him raise four objections for why he shouldn't go. I want us to look at these and how God responds.

Read Exodus 3:11-12.

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" 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."

In this first objection I see a lot of insecurity in Moses: "Who am I that I should do this?" Moses had been a shepherd for 40 years, accustomed to long periods of isolation and living in the wilderness. He worked with sheep and goats, not people. He had a quiet, monotonous life, until it was interrupted by a burning bush and God's call to carry out a highly important mission. So Moses was very reluctant. He certainly believed in God, but he was insecure because of his own limitations.

But God told Moses: "I will be with you." He would not face the mission alone. God would be with him. It didn't ultimately depend on Moses and his strength. God wanted to use Moses, but it ultimately depended on God and his strength, and God promised he would go with him.

It reminds me of what Jesus told his disciples after giving them the mission to go and make disciples – the same mission we have today. He said in Matthew 28:20: *"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* That was confirmed a few days later when he poured out the Holy Spirit upon them at Pentecost. When it comes to sharing our faith with unbelievers, we are not alone. Christ is with us. The Holy Spirit is in us and it doesn't ultimately depend on us. It depends on God and his power working through us. He is with us.

Moses had another objection.

Read Exodus 3:13-15.

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?" 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 this objection I see awkwardness of speaking about the unfamiliar. Moses anticipated that if he went back to his people and told them that the God of their fathers had sent him, they wouldn't know who he was talking about. Throughout their lives they were surrounded by hundreds of Egyptian gods and were familiar with them, but not the God of their fathers – who was he? He had largely been forgotten after 400 years of slavery. So the idea of claiming to be sent by an unknown God would have put Moses in an awkward situation. What was he to tell them?

God responds with an awesome declaration of who he was. The name he gives for himself is: "I AM WHO I AM," which he shortens to "I AM," and finally "The LORD, the God of your fathers." In the original Hebrew language, this name appears as YHWH, to which we add vowels and pronounce "Yahweh." In our Bibles, you know when this name is being used when you see the name LORD in all capital letters.

According to the Reformation Study Bible, personal names in the Bible give significant information about the ones who bear them and that's what's happening here. This name "proclaims God's eternal, self-sustaining, self-determining, sovereign reality." God is set apart from everything else that exists and can be known by nothing other than himself, and that's what this name declares. I AM WHO I AM. This was exactly what Moses needed in order to overcome this second objection.

It reminds me of how I can feel reluctant at times to talk about God because of how unfamiliar people are with him. We live in a post-Christian, secular society that has kind of moved beyond God and it can feel awkward to try to start talking about him. Moses was going into a much different cultural context, so knowing the name of God probably isn't going to help us, but what does help is that God has revealed himself by becoming a person. Yahweh became a human being and actually lived here on earth. Colossians 1:19 says, "*For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.*" Jesus is a real-life historical person that most people know about. So when we talk to people about God, we can talk to them about a historical person. We can talk about how we came to believe in him and how he's changed our lives. These are real things that have happened to us and that's a lot less awkward to talk about.

So after God overcame Moses' second objection, he went on in chapter 3 to tell him what he wanted him to do when he got to Egypt, how the people would respond, how Pharaoh would harden his heart, and how God would perform mighty signs so that Pharaoh would release the people and they would plunder the Egyptians. But Moses still wasn't ready, he had two more objections.

Read Exodus 4:1-9.

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.'" ² The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff." ³ And he said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it. ⁴ But the Lord said to Moses, "Put out your hand and catch it by the tail"—so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand— ⁵ "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 Again, the Lord said to him, "Put your hand inside your cloak." And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. ⁷ Then God said, "Put your hand back inside your cloak." So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. ⁸ "If they will not believe you," God said, "or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. ⁹ If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."

In this objection you can see doubt. "They won't believe me or listen to me." He expected they would deny that Yahweh had appeared to him. If he didn't have proof or evidence they wouldn't believe him. So God answered his objection by giving him miraculous signs to perform. They would believe when they saw Moses doing things that only God could do.

Doubt can be another thing that makes us reluctant to share our faith. It's hard to imagine some of the people I know ever believing in Jesus. Why even try to talk with them? It would be handy if I could grab a branch, throw it on the ground and have it turn into a snake in front of them or pour out water on the ground and watch it turn into blood. That would probably help. And sometimes God actually does use signs and wonders to convince people to believe – like we see in the

book of Acts. But those kinds of miracles don't seem to be the norm as people are going about sharing their faith. So how will people believe?

Well there's another miracle that God does today and he does it quite frequently, and every time he does it, it results in a person trusting in Christ. It's a miracle that happened to you when you believed and it's called regeneration or being born again. Jesus talked to Nicodemus about it and said "That's what's got to happen for anyone to enter the kingdom of heaven." Regeneration happens when the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of a person's heart so that they see the truth about Jesus and believe. It has to happen or they won't believe, and God can make it happen in anyone. I just heard the other day about a Satanist becoming a Christian – how does that happen? How does an atheist turn to Jesus? How did you turn to Jesus? It's a miracle that God does when we tell people about Jesus and he's still doing it today through the witness and testimony we share. There's always hope that anyone we talk to will turn to Jesus because of the miracle of regeneration.

So God overcame Moses' third objection, which leaves us with one more.

Read Exodus 4:10-17.

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." 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." ¹³ But he said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else." 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. ¹⁶ He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. ¹⁷ And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs."

So here you can see that Moses was afraid because he didn't think he'd come up with the right words to say. He wasn't a dynamic public speaker. He was a shepherd. I'm sure the idea of speaking for God in front of the people of Israel

and Pharaoh was terrifying for him “Please send someone else!” He didn’t want to go.

But God had an answer for this as well. He told him he would put the words in his mouth. He would tell him exactly what to say. And not only that, he would have his brother, who was a good speaker, go with him. They would do it together.

Being afraid that you won’t know what to say when you try to share your faith can keep you from saying anything. You don’t want to say the wrong thing or screw things up! But God doesn’t need a bunch of gifted public speakers. He just needs a willing heart. And he promises to do the rest. When Jesus sent out his disciples to proclaim the good news in some pretty intense situations he reassured them by saying this in Matthew 10:19-20: *“When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰ For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”*

God has put his Spirit inside us and when he puts us in situations to share our faith he will give us the words to say. That doesn’t mean we’re going to turn into Billy Graham and preach a perfect salvation message. We don’t need to. We just need to say what God puts on our heart and let him do the rest. He’s the one that works in people’s hearts and does the miracle of regeneration and he can use what you have to say.

So Moses’ objections and God’s responses are pretty similar to what we experience today and in the same way God gave Moses everything he needed to do what he called him to do, he will do for us as well. God answered each of Moses’ objections and overcame his reluctance and in the rest of chapter 4 we see that Moses finally agreed to go. He left Midian and made it to Egypt where he spoke to the elders, showed them the signs, and the people believed. God proved himself to be faithful and able to not only overcome Moses’ reluctance, but to do what he said he would do. God responded to Moses’ insecurity by promising to be with him. He responded to his awkward feelings by giving him his name. He responded to his doubts by giving him miraculous signs. And he responded to his fears of speaking by telling him he would give him what to say and a partner to go with him.

I want you to think about the things that make you reluctant to share your faith with unbelievers. Maybe it's your own feelings of insecurity. Jesus has promised to be with you. Maybe it's the awkwardness you feel in talking about God. Jesus has changed your life and given you a story to share. Maybe it's doubts that anyone will believe. God can do the miracle of regeneration. Or maybe it's the fear of knowing what to say. The Holy Spirit will give you the words and brothers and sisters in Christ to be with you.

God has given us everything we need to do what he's called us to do. May he fill us with greater confidence as we let our light shine for him.