

# **Equipped and Empowered by God's Presence**

**(Exodus 4:1-17)**

## **Intro:**

I'm going to begin today by reading some excerpts of an article from The Gospel Coalition website. This was written by Jamal Williams, Timothy Paul Jones, and Jarvis Williams, who serve together as pastors of the same multi-ethnic congregation in Louisville, Kentucky. They write...

**Recent images and reports of the shootings and killings of black bodies in the United States have once again riveted the souls of many. In many black and brown communities, and in the diverse ethnic communities that stand with them, the shootings and deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd confirm the lines in a popular 1980s song, "That's just the way it is. Some things will never change."**

**We long for our fellow pastors and fellow brothers and sisters in our city to remember the hope of the gospel during this time of suffering and sorrow, for the good news of Jesus Christ is still the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes...**

**This gospel also explains that Jesus died to reconcile sinners to God and to each other into one new humanity.**

**We pray our fellow pastors and brothers and sisters in Christ would realize this for ourselves and make known to our cities how the gospel fuels our response to social ills. The gospel compels us to preach, obey, and to think seriously, carefully, wisely, responsibly, and creatively about the many social injustices facing churches, neighborhoods, and communities in our cities.**

**We pray that the gospel will compel all gospel-believing Christians in Louisville and beyond to saturate our preaching, teaching, ministries, and discipleship in God's Word. With the gospel and God's Word as our foundation, in the power of the Spirit, we can give our brothers and sisters in Christ the necessary spiritual resources and skills to advance God's kingdom in a society marred by sin and to push back the darkness of the societal injustices all around us. This gospel tells us that God, through Christ's death and resurrection, promises to restore creation.**

End quote.

Your pastors are sickened and saddened by the death of George Floyd. And we are sickened and saddened by the state of our culture that made this public murder possible. We long for justice to be done, for people to be reconciled to one another, for *all* people to be able to walk their streets free from fear.

And we agree with the brothers who wrote that article- that it is the power of the Gospel, preached from all of Scripture that will affect real change in our own hearts, and in this world. So, I'm going to read our sermon text for today, and then I ask you to pray with me, pleading with the Holy Spirit to work powerfully in our hearts and lives through it.

READ Exodus 4:1-17

This message is kind of a sequel to the message from last week. In that message, Pastor Jason showed us how the revelation of God to us prepares us for the mission for which He requisitioned us. To be requisitioned, as you may recall, means to be authoritatively called to a task or mission. As Moses was requisitioned to lead God's people out of

slavery in Egypt so that they could worship God freely, as Christians *we* too have been requisitioned- requisitioned to lead people out of slavery to sin and into God's glorious presence so that they can freely worship Him.

As Jason said last week, knowing our own weakness, our reluctant fearfulness and, yes, knowing our complete *inability* to make anyone worship God, this seems unbelievable! And yet, when Jesus, in Matthew 28, gave us the command to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”, this is exactly what he was commissioning us to do- to make worshippers for God!

In last week's message, we saw how God's revelation of Himself is the first thing that we must have in order to be on this mission. If you are a true Christian, here's how God has revealed Himself to you... As someone (or maybe a lot of different individuals) taught you the truth of God's Word, God's Spirit convinced you of your utterly helpless condition as a condemned sinner. He led you to see Christ as your only hope of freedom from the penalty and power of your sin, and He has put within you a faith that clings forever to Jesus as your only hope in life and in death. He has enabled you to see, love, treasure, and trust who God is in all of His holiness, sovereignty, grace, and faithfulness.

And, what we see in Exodus 4 is that God doesn't just reveal Himself to us in Christ, and then send us out on our own to rescue people out of their slavery to sin. That *would* be laughable! But, that's not what God does. Instead, we have His promise that *He* will be with us to equip and empower us for all the work that He has called us to. **Sermon Summary: God knows all about your weakness, but His call is persistent, and He promises to be with you to equip and empower you for the work that He assigns to you.**

## God Knows All About Your Weakness

Despite the huge distances of time and culture, Moses is one person in Scripture that we, as Christians, should be able to easily relate to. The way that God revealed Himself to Moses may have been more obviously dramatic than the way He revealed himself to you- I highly doubt any of you have heard God speak audibly out of a un-burning, blazing bush!- but it's in Moses' reluctant, stubborn *responses* to God's command that I think we all, unfortunately recognize ourselves. *Like Moses, in spite of God's revelation of Himself to us, we are often fearful, reluctant, stubborn, and always insufficient, when it comes to obeying His call.* We easily relate to the weakness of Moses!

After God patiently addresses Moses' initial concerns and questions (which we saw in chapter 3 last week) He continues calling Moses to this task. And what does Moses do? He offers up some excuses. **(4:1) *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.'"***

I don't think Moses was just being modest here. I think he was truly, intensely aware of the difficulties of the task that God was calling him to. And he was truly, intensely aware of his own inadequacies.

But *God* isn't taken off guard by, or unprepared for, Moses' weakness. When Moses says, in verse 1, that the Israelites won't believe that God actually sent him, God seems to patiently say, "Ok, yes, that's a real possibility. Let me help you with that." We'll look more closely at that in a bit. But for now, just notice that the *inability* of Moses doesn't surprise God. God knows all about his weakness, and it doesn't- at all- change His plan to use Moses to rescue Israel out of Egypt!

I think the particular weakness that Moses brings up in v.10 is one that a lot of us can relate to. He brings up the fact that he don't talk so good.

***(v 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.”***

Now, some people take this to mean that Moses had some kind of speech impediment, maybe a stutter. But this phrase in ancient Hebrew more likely refers to the fact that Moses recognizes that he just has a hard time coming up with the right thing to say on the spur of the moment. He's a slow thinker and slow talker. He's not quick with a comeback when he's challenged.

But God doesn't give Moses a positive thinking pep talk. He doesn't tell him not to be so negative about himself. There's no, “Don't sell yourself short, Moses. I picked you because I know that you're actually really good at talking! There's a charismatic communicator deep inside you. We just have to coax him out!”

No. In fact, God's response to Moses when he brings up his inability to speak well is still patient, but there's a bit of an edge to it. His tolerance for these excuses is nearly over. He says ***(v.11) “Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?”*** He's telling Moses, “I didn't make a mistake. I know exactly who I'm talking to and I know everything about you! I know your limitations perfectly well because *I made you that way on purpose!*”

Moses' problem is that he's fixated on his own inadequacies and weakness, instead of being fixated on the power of the God who had created him and was calling him to obey!

And can't we all relate to that? When we think about making disciples, don't we paralyze ourselves by focusing on our weaknesses? Don't we obsess over our lack of biblical knowledge or theological training? Or maybe it's just that, like Moses, we know we don't think fast on our feet. We're afraid to get into conversations about God because we don't want to

look dumb or, worse, harden someone in their unbelief because we can't answer their questions. Or, maybe we shrink back from the work of making disciples because of the sin with which we constantly struggle. Like Moses, we implicitly, if not explicitly, ask God "Who am I?"

In light of our own inadequacies, what we might expect, or hope to hear, from God is some kind of reassurance of our capability. We want God to give us a sense of self-confidence, for Him to say, "Don't worry! You're good enough, smart enough, and doggone it, people like you!" But God doesn't aim to instill self-confidence in us; He aims to instill God-confidence in us! He doesn't need our "strength." In fact, He wants our weakness, because His power is magnified by our weakness!

So, the first encouraging word from this passage might not seem encouraging at first. It's this- that God didn't call you to this task of making disciples because He knew that you, out of all the billions of people in the world, were somehow uniquely capable of accomplishing it!

In fact, what Paul said of the Corinthians is true of you, and all of us. "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God." 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

Instead of boosting your *self*-confidence in your ability to make disciples, God tells you that your instincts are right. You are weak! You are foolish! You aren't powerful! You aren't smart enough to convince anyone, in your own power, not only that God exists, but that He deserves their wholehearted worship! You certainly don't have the power to bring a spiritually dead person to life! You and I don't even have the wisdom, *on*

*our own*, to encourage a believer to take one single step along the journey of faith!

So, the encouraging word here is that God doesn't expect you to have that power! He didn't call you to make disciples because you were so smart, eloquent, and clever. In God's kingdom- where the aim is for *God* to get all the glory- those things are more likely to be a hindrance than a help!

God knows all about your weakness... And since, knowing all about them, He has called you anyway, that means that you can't use your weakness as an excuse to not make disciples. God knows all about your weakness, *but His call is persistent*.

### **But His Call is Persistent**

As Moses makes his excuses here in Exodus 4, he goes from, "They won't believe me!" to "I'm not qualified for the job!" to "Ok, I really just don't want to do it. Please don't make me!" In v. 13, Moses pleads to just be let off the hook- ***"But he said, 'Oh, my Lord, please send someone else!'"*** Moses finally reveals that, underneath all of his legitimate concerns and his struggles with his real weaknesses, there's actually a layer of stubborn resistance. He just really doesn't want to do what God is calling him to.

Moses is stubborn, but God is persistent. He intends to rescue His people, He has chosen Moses as His instrument for this task, and He's not about to let Moses off the hook. So, when Moses finally says "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else!" God gets angry. ***(v. 14) Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses...***

See, God isn't disturbed when we bring up legitimate problems. He's not irritated by our weakness. But faithless disobedience *does* stir up the

anger of the LORD. God is patiently persistent, but He *will not* be put off forever. He will not give up on His plan to seek worshippers for Himself, and if you stubbornly refuse the task of making disciples, you risk kindling His anger against you.

Let's talk about God's anger for a minute...

Because our own anger almost always has a *large* scoop of sin added to it, and we know that God is sinless, we have a hard time swallowing the idea that God gets angry with His children. On top of that, we struggle to understand how it is that Christ bore ALL of God's wrath against our sin, and yet God can still get angry when we disobey. So we struggle to understand the anger of God, and what we don't understand, we usually try to simplify because we don't like that feeling of something being beyond our ability to grasp completely.

So, some will try to explain God's anger to the point that it becomes something more like non-anger. On the other hand, some will imagine God's anger to be like their own and so, imagine God to be constantly irritated with them, always on the verge of blowing up and punishing them. But, the truth is that none of God's ways are exactly like our own. That's true whether we're talking about His anger or His compassion. God is infinite, so His thoughts and emotions are not limited by His capacity for them, as ours are. And they are *not* limited by sin, as ours are.

This subject deserves a whole sermon, but we're going to be confronted with the anger of God quite a bit as we go through Exodus, so I want to keep the focus today where it is focused in this passage. And that is this-

For the Christian, God's anger when we stubbornly resist His call to make disciples doesn't result in punishment. It results in loving discipline from our heavenly Father that will lead us to repentant obedience.



But, if you stubbornly refuse that call perpetually, by your very disobedience you will prove that your faith was never genuine, and you *will* face the punishing anger of the Sovereign Judge in Hell forever.

See, Moses is a refreshing character *because* he struggled so much to embrace God's call. But, here's the key thing- though weak and stubbornly resistant, the fact that he *did* obey God is the reason that Moses is an example of true faith.

First, it took faith to grab the serpent by the tail. The best place to grab a snake (if you *have* to grab it), is by the head. Grab it by the tail and it's free to swing around and bite you. Moses believed that God's plan for him to do this dangerous thing would turn out for his good. So he grabbed the snake. For some of you snake-haters out there, that may be the greatest example of faith in all of Scripture! :)

But, even more than that, at the end of all of his squirming and excuse-making, Moses didn't ultimately turn away from God's task. He proved his faith to be genuine *by his actions*. So, yes, his example is a *comfort* to us as we doubt how people will respond to us, as we question God's wisdom in choosing us for the task of making disciples, as we wrestle our own inadequacies. But, it's also a *challenge* to us, because he eventually believed that God *would* be with him, that God *would* equip and empower him as he obeyed, and he showed that belief by stepping out on the path of obedience, as we'll see next week.

Are you demonstrating the genuineness of your faith by obeying God's call for you to make disciples? Or, are you just hoping to be let off the hook. "Send someone else, please! Surely there are other, better qualified, more competent people out there that will do this!" God doesn't give Moses an out, and He doesn't give us one either.

Let's talk about discipleship for a minute because I don't want you to think about this too narrowly. At PRC, **Our mission is to glorify God by making disciples of Jesus Christ in our city and throughout the world.** And, in our beliefs, we explain that **Making disciples is helping others (both Christians and non-Christians) trust in, love, joyfully obey, and worship Jesus in every area of their lives.**

The way we go about this will look different for each of us, and the specific focus will change depending on the season of life we're in. But, if your faith is genuine, it *will* be evident by your obedience to the call to make disciples.

Has God put a specific person in your life that you know needs to hear the Gospel? He's not letting you off the hook for that. He expects *you* to do it.

Has God given you children to disciple? He expects *you* to be doing it, and not looking for pastors or other people in the Church to do it for you.

Do you know of a brother or sister that you could make time to meet with regularly to encourage and admonish? God doesn't give you a pass on that. He has called you to be making disciples and He expects you to be doing it.

Church, I fear that some of us are kindling the anger of the Lord towards us by stubbornly resisting His call to make disciples. If you are covering up your disobedience with a veneer of practical obstacles and self-doubts, then God, through His Word in Exodus 4, is calling you right now, to repent of your stubborn disobedience.

For those of you who *are* striving to obey that call but, like Moses, you are keenly aware of your own weakness, so you're squirming under the weight of the call... then I want to encourage you with this last section- God promises to be with you to equip and empower you for all the work that He assigns to you.

**God promises to be with you to equip and empower you for the work that He assigns to you.**

In response to his concern that the people of Israel won't listen to him, God empowers Moses with three miraculous signs to convince them.

They may seem kind of random to us, but for the Israelites, these signs would be full of significant symbolism. They demonstrate God's ability to render the Pharaoh powerless, they demonstrate that Moses was wielding a power greater than that of all the Egyptian gods, and that God would subdue the power of Egypt by turning their greatest blessings into curses. Moses is to do these miraculous signs for the Israelites to show them that God is truly on their side and that He is fully capable of overthrowing Egypt.

So God *empowers* Moses to accomplish the task that He's given him.

But, God does more than that. ***12 Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.*** So, He promises to be *with* Moses, specifically with his mouth. He's not depending on Moses to come up with the words to say. He will equip Moses to be able speak when the time comes. And he's way ahead of Moses on this! He's even provided for Moses' shortcomings *before* Moses brought them up! Aaron is coming to help!

***(v14) "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. 5 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.***

Child of God, your Father knows your weaknesses better than you do! He made you, and He didn't make a mistake when He called you. Before you even recognize what you need, He already has plans in place to equip you and empower you! So, when you do recognize your need, pray a simple prayer, asking God to show Himself strong in your weakness.

And recognize how He has already empowered you! You might think that a few miracles would come in handy, but God only gives you what you need. If you need to work miracles, God will give you the ability to work miracles! But, what He has given to all of us is better than what Moses had.

What was in Moses' hand? Just a stick! In our hands we have the very Word of God, which is sharper than any two-edged sword! We have the Gospel of Jesus Christ! ***Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is THE POWER of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.***

If we could only have a deep conviction of that truth, how it would transform our disciple-making!

So God has empowered you, and God is *with* you! This is even more deeply true than it was with Moses! Remember what Jesus said in John 14 & 16 about the Holy Spirit?

***And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be WITH YOU forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells WITH YOU and will be IN YOU! (John 14:16-17)***

God is not just *with* us, as He was with Moses. By His Spirit He actually dwells *in* us! And listen to how Jesus describes the work of the Spirit.

***And when he comes, HE will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment...***

***13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:8, 13-14)***

So, we don't have to obsess over what to say. As we humbly speak the Truth of God, the Spirit does the work that we don't have the power to do!

Brothers and sisters, remember this- **God knows all about your weakness, but His call is persistent, and He promises to be with you to equip and empower you for the work that He assigns to you.**

PRAYER

**Benediction from Isaiah 41:10-**

***Children of God, Your Father says to you,  
Fear not, for I am WITH you  
be not dismayed, for I am your God;  
I WILL strengthen you, I WILL help you,  
I WILL uphold you with my righteous right hand.***