Moses: Following God into the Unknown – Part 2

# (Exodus 4:2-20)

Welcome to week number two of our series, “Following God into the Unknown.” Last week we saw God reaching out and calling the most unlikely man, a man who was a criminal, who was running and hiding, a man who was confused and insecure, and yet we saw how God was teaching Moses a very important lesson. If he kept running from everything, he was afraid of he would never be who God created him to be; and so he needed to stop rehearsing the lies he had come to believe. He needed to stop entertaining all the drama in his head.

Like many of us, Moses needed to stop believing what he’d been replaying in his mind, believing what other people had said about him, and giving greater weight to what God said about him. This is so important for us to understand, if we could just treasure, leaning into what God says about us, we would be greatly encouraged. You see, each one of us were created by him and for him with unique gifts to be used at this moment in history; and so, he wants to use us, he wants to use what’s in our hands.

Moses had a limited perception of what God could do through him and so God began showing Moses his potential. He began by encouraging him to believe in himself, but also to believe in the power of God working through him. And last week we read in Exodus chapter 4, where God asked Moses,

*“What is that in your hand?" "A staff," he replied. The Lord said, "Throw it on the ground." Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. The Lord said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." So, Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand” (Exodus 4:2-4).*

This was an important lesson for Moses to learn because he needed to understand the potential of what was in his hands. He needed to know that he has more than he thinks he has, and he can do more than he thinks he can do. And so, God called him to reach out and take hold of that snake by faith and it turned back into a staff in his hand. “This,” the Lord said in verse five,

*“Is so that they (referring to the Israelites) 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” (Exodus 4:5).*

God was preparing Moses to follow him into the unknown, much like what many of us are facing today with the uncertainty of our jobs, our economy, and our future that has been so impacted by COVID-19. All around us there are people who are anxious, they’re uncertain, they’re under pressure, because they’re uneasy about what the future holds for them. It’s kind of like it was after 9/11, when churches were filled because people were heartbroken, worried, and upset.

However, today we find ourselves in a different situation, because everything’s been shut down, there’s this global panic; and so, there’s a hunger for the Word of God, for some sort of stabilizing influence. No longer do we want to be tossed back and forth by the waves, blown here and there by every whim of the media. Instead we need to put our trust in Jesus Christ, our resurrected Living Hope, because he has gone before us, he is leading the charge, and the Bible tells us in Hebrews chapter 6,

*“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure” (Hebrews 6:19).*

This is so important to understand because we’re anchored to heaven and not to earth. We’re anchored not to stand still, but to move ahead, because our spiritual anchor in Christ is different from the anchor on a ship. Our anchor is firm and secure, our anchor cannot slip, and yet many people like Moses are still uncertain, they are cautious about reaching out and taking hold of it.

This is exactly where we find Moses, God was giving him something to hold onto, a tool, a snake which would become a powerful staff in his hand, but it terrified him and he ran from it. God was trying to prepare Moses to follow him into the unknown. God was teaching him, he was taking something natural and doing something supernatural; he was using something ordinary and doing something extraordinary; but Moses wasn’t understanding, he was still having trouble believing, and so God tells him in verse six,

*“Put your hand inside your cloak." So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was leprous, like snow. "Now put it back into your cloak," he said. So Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh” (Exodus 4:6-7).*

God’s like, “Moses, you don’t have to be extraordinary, you’re serving an extraordinary God, and so you can do extraordinary things.” He’s demonstrating to Moses that it’s not by his might or by his power but by the Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:6). And like Moses we need to understand that as servants of Christ we are stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1-2).

You see, God will make you a steward or a manager over something that is going to be amazing. He’s going to put something in your hands which at first glance is natural, but it’s really supernatural because the Bible tells us in first Peter, chapter 4,

*“Each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10, NKJV).*

And so, he has given you something, he’s given you a gift, he’s put it in your hand and it’s a gracious gift of God. In fact, it’s already been released, but you need to receive it, he’s put something in your hand.

Moses still wasn’t getting it, and so the Lord said to him in verse eight,

*“If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second. But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground” (Exodus 4:8-9).*

Now, it should have been enough for Moses to know that his staff was God’s staff. It should have been enough to see his hand become leprous and then return to normal. It should have been enough to know that God was going to use him although he was a murderer on the run. And so, God tells him, “If you still don’t believe, pour out some water and it’ll become blood on the ground.” And so, God is talking to Moses for a long time, he’s telling him you’re going to do this and you’re going to do that, but the root of insecurity was deep and Moses kept coming up with excuses. In verse 10 he said,

*“Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue" (Exodus 4:10).*

In other words, I can’t go down there because I stutter, I don’t speak well, I’m just not a good public speaker. He said, “If I get in front of a crowd, I’ll be too nervous, I’ll say the wrong things, my tongue will get twisted, and I’ll stumble over my words.” The Lord replied in verse 11,

*“Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say” (Exodus 4:11-12).*

And so, God is talking to Moses face-to-face, he’s counseling him like a psychiatrist, reasoning with him like a lawyer in a courtroom, and Moses tells him, “The last time I tried to help I messed up.” Moses was scared, but God wasn’t about to let him spend the rest of his life lamenting over the mistakes he’s made in the past.

You see, God knew that Moses stuttered, he knew that he’d made some mistakes, that he’d killed a man, he knew who Moses was, but he still wanted him. God said, “I know your strengths and your weaknesses, but…”

*“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).*

And so, in spite of his weaknesses, his failures, and his secrets, God called Moses to speak to kings because he knew that he would be humble. God knew that Moses would do everything for his glory, but Moses was relentless and continued to make excuses why he couldn’t do what God told him to do. In verse 13 he persisted,

*“Lord, please send someone else to do it” (Exodus 4:13).*

And now we find God getting exasperated, he’s incensed, he’s angered, he says, *“Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and don’t do what I say?” (Luke 6:46)*. Moses continues to call him “Lord” and yet refuses to obey, he’s still making excuses, “I’m not good enough, I don’t know enough, I’m not skilled enough.” Finally, God has had enough and says in verse 14,

*“What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. But take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it” (Exodus 4:14-17).*

In his anger, God appointed Aaron to be the spokesperson, even though Aaron was the priest and Moses was the prophet. You see, Moses got things mixed up and he was insistent, just like when you and I pray persistently, unceasingly, and unrelenting until God finally gives us what we were selfishly praying for, but that gift rarely turns out to be a blessing. The Israelites would discover this the hard way in the wilderness when they grumbled and complained, crying out and wearying God,

*“If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt” (Numbers 11:18).*

You see, one of the most painful judgments God can send is to let us get our own way and in the wilderness the anger of the Lord burned against the people. Moses would soon discover that Aaron wasn’t the help he was hoping for, because it was Aaron who collaborated with the people to make a golden calf, and it was Aaron and his sister who were critical of Moses and caused trouble in the camp of Israel.

Now, Moses suddenly starts moving, he takes the staff, what he calls the staff of God, it was really Moses staff, but it was God’s staff. And suddenly, Moses had a sense of purpose, he had a sense of his destiny, he was still stuttering, but he knew who’s he was and he knew what God was capable of doing. As the future unfolds, he would soon find himself speaking God’s words with power, both to kings as well as to his own people, demonstrating that God knows us better than we know ourselves. Moses now goes back to his father-in-law Jethro and said to him,

*“Let me go back to my own people in Egypt to see if any of them are still alive." Jethro said, "Go, and I wish you well” (Exodus 4:18).*

What I love about this message, is that it’s kind of like I’m telling you my own story, because I feel insecure and underqualified to do what I’m doing. From the very beginning, when I became a follower of Christ at the age of 34, I found myself in leadership positions and teaching Bible studies when I didn’t really know much about the Bible and I was scared to death. In fact, I’ve been teaching the Bible for about 20 years and every time I stand up, I wrestle with being able to focus, to speak clearly, even struggling with feelings of not having what it takes, and yet I believe that’s what makes me even more qualified because God loves to use the unlikely.

That’s what we see in Moses and in the same way our weaknesses are our greatest asset in God’s hand. It’s through our weaknesses and insecurities that his strength is made perfect in us. There is more room for him to work when we have to rely upon him rather than ourselves. Today, if you are feeling underqualified and insignificant, doubting that God could use you in a big way, I want to encourage you with this passage in Ephesians chapter 2, at verse 10, where the apostle Paul reminds us that,

*“We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).*

In fact, the New Living Translation says it this way, “We are God’s masterpiece” and this word translated workmanship or masterpiece is the Greek word (poy’-ay-mah) poiema; which means a product or a creation with the designated purpose. In other words, you have a designated purpose and you were created by God for God. You were specifically created by God to serve and do good using the gifts that he has given you. That’s important to understand because long before you were even born you were God’s workmanship as he planned, created, and prepared to use you to glorify his name and make a difference in the world.

The problem is the moment you start to step in that direction you’ll begin to have doubts in your mind, because your spiritual enemy will begin telling you that you’re not good enough, you don’t know enough, and you’re just going to mess things up. That’s what we see so marvelously illustrated in the life of Moses, but the Lord wasn’t finished with him yet and he’s not finished with you or I either. As Moses left his father-in-law Jethro, God came to him again and said in verse 19,

*“Go back to Egypt, for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead” (Exodus 4:19).*

In other words, your enemy is gone, all of them that remember your mistakes are gone, there’s a new Pharaoh in town, the slate is clean, the door is open, and the way is clear.

I wish I knew who I was talking to, but God said all your enemies are dead, I rendered them powerless, they are disabled, distracted, and helpless. And the Bible says,

*“No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn…” (Isaiah 54:17).*

In fact, you will silence every voice of accusation, because these are the benefits of the children of God. Your vindication will come from God, your enemies are his enemies, he’s going to drive them out and no one will be able to withstand you. And so, God said, “Moses, I’ve already dealt with your enemies.”

God is speaking to some of you today, he’s breaking through all of your excuses, he’s tearing down every monument you have built of I can’t or I didn’t or I won’t. And he’s encouraging you not to settle on a life that is less than what he created you to be. In fact, regardless of what you think your voice sounds like, what you don’t have, what you can’t do, or what you’ve been through, and he still wants to use you. That’s what’s so exciting about following God into the unknown, it’s not about you and I, but it’s all about him and his power and his glory.

The question for Moses and you and I today, is will you trust him, will you believe him, even though you know how little he has to work with using you? You see, the question is not will God show up, because he has always shown up, but will you be faithful, will you live on purpose, and will you have the courage to stay on task when it gets scary. That’s when the real test begins, and so we need to ask ourselves, searching within, discovering what we’ve learned while we were locked down and isolated.

Moses rises up to his calling, he goes to confront the thing that he’s been scared of all of his life and he confronts his fears. He took his wife and the sons in verse 20,

*“Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt…” (Exodus 4:20).*

He set out at the age of 80 to fulfill his purpose for the next 40 years because God had given him a second chance, a fresh opportunity, and a new perspective. Moses had lost some stuff, but he had all that he needed, because verse 20 says,

*“…he took the staff of God in his hand” (Exodus 4:20).*

I want to encourage every single one of you, because God wants to use you, he may have something big in mind, but he doesn’t want you to start there, he just wants to ask you, “What is that in your hand?” And so, I want to encourage you to start with what you’ve got, start with what’s in your hand, because when you’re faithful in the little things, that’s when he will promote you to big things. There are those of you who God will put something on your heart, you will do something little and it will make a big difference, but you’re going to have to step out in faith to find out what it is.

Moses packed up his family, he started out, and he took the staff of God in his hand. I’m believing that there are many of you today that God is challenging you to follow him into the unknown. He is going to stretch you out of your comfort zone and into a place of faith where you can’t succeed without him. All of a sudden, you’re going to see things that you didn’t see yesterday, things that you were blind to just moments before. You’re going to hear things that haven’t been spoken, things that others were to ashamed to admit, but you will hear them in your spirit and your heart will be broken by the very things that break the heart of God.

I’m believing that there are some of you who are going to be awakened in the middle of the night by tears for those who are less fortunate, you will have a burden for the poor, and you will be disturbed by the selfishness of our world. All of a sudden you will see those who are in need and you will connect those resources that God has given you to do something about it. And when you are about to step out, you’re going to feel unworthy and unable, but you will know that God is confirming you are the exact kind of person that he wants to use. You’ve got eyes to see things you didn’t see before, ears to hear things that aren’t being said, and a heart that is broken by the things that break the heart of God, because you are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which he prepared in advance for you to do.

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