

# NOBODY GRABS A SERPENT BY THE TAIL

## *A Study of Exodus 3:10 - 4:17*

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### INTRODUCTION:

This is the last of the messages that cover the first 80 years of Moses' life, through to his reluctant acceptance of God's call upon him to go to Pharaoh.

So far we have discovered that . . .

*Moses spent his first forty years thinking he was somebody.  
He spent his second forty years learning he was a nobody.  
He spent his third forty years discovering what God can do with a nobody.*  
- D. L. Moody

### READ – Ex. 3:10 - 4:17

Today we are going to look at the five excuses that Moses uses as to why he cannot do what God is calling him to do.

I'm sure we have all come up with excuses as to why we could not do something. I read this about what an excuse is:

*An excuse is nothing but a lie stuffed inside the skin of a reason!*  
- Louis Wesley Foster Achewan Reeder

*As a pastor I have heard just about all the excuses you can think of. Chuck Swindoll has this list of 12 excuses a fella might have for quitting sports from an old Moody Monthly piece. I think you will see the connection right away:*

**(READ – Swindoll – p. 189 – Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations & Quotes, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, Tn.) NF.**

1. According to a UPI news item, the Metropolitan Insurance Company received some unusual excuses for accidents from its automobile policyholders. The following are just few – You may have heard these if you have attended an Alpha course in the past:

- *I had been driving my car for 40 years when I fell asleep at the wheel and had the accident.*
- *I pulled away from the side of the road, glanced at my mother-in-law, and headed over the embankment.*
- *The pedestrian had no idea which direction to go, so I ran over him.*

- *The guy was all over the road. I had to swerve a number of times before I hit him.*

Today we are going to study the five excuses Moses made so we don't allow these excuses to keep us from some of the greatest things that God would do through our lives. We'll pick up the Scripture record right after the Lord says to Moses: ***So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.***

### **FIVE EXCUSES WE STILL USE TODAY:**

Mr. Nobody's first excuse sounds so noble and humble. In reality we shall discover that it is really the excuse of self-sufficiency and arrogance. ***But Moses said to God, "who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"***

#### **Excuse #1:**

**I don't have what it takes - "Who am I" (Exodus 3:11).**

You see, Mr. Nobody got it a little twisted around. He was thinking that **he** was the one who was going to free the Israelites. He thought God was expecting **him** to do it. Whenever God calls us to do spiritual work . . . he never expects **us** to do it. What was God's response to this objection?

***And God said, "I will be with you."*** You see it is always the same . . . **'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty (Zechariah 4:6).**

In fact, there are times when God even takes away our resources in order to teach us that it is **Him**. That's what the Lord did with Moses; he took away everything Mr. Somebody had...now he is Mr. Nobody. He is now an 80 year-old shepherd who was not able to rub two shekles together in order to get a little place of his own. He is 80 years old and still living with the folks: not very impressive.

Sometimes the Lord even takes the resources away that we have so that we will learn unequivocally, that it's - ***Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit' says the Lord Almighty (Zechariah 4:6).***

Never, never, never, never allow your lack of ability or resources to keep you from doing as the Lord directs. It is not about you and your ability and your resources . . . it is His Spirit, it is about the Lord Almighty, it is about ***"I will be with you."*** (Exodus 3:12).

***The question is not who "I am" but who the "I am" is.***

That brings us to Mr. Nobody's second excuse.

***Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is his name?" Then what shall I tell them" (Exodus 3:13)?***

## **Excuse #2:**

### **I don't have the answers - "What shall I tell them" (Exodus 3:13)?**

This excuse – **"I won't know what to say"** – has got to be the oldest one in the book. You know what? You don't have to get everything figured out before you can begin to do God's work. God made a wonderful promise to Moses on this day

**God backs up his promise by putting his name on it.**

*God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14).*

This is one of the greatest verses in all of Scripture and I wish we had more time to take it apart and study it very carefully. There have been untold numbers of books and articles written about his one verse. The great scholar Brevard Childs in his book *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974. p. 61 says: **"Few Verses in the entire Old Testament have evoked such heated controversy and such widely divergent interpretation."**

Walter Kaiser in his book, ("The Expositor's Bible Commentary - Exodus. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990. p. 321) claims what the name I AM means:

### **The meaning of God's name – I AM:**

**"I am truly he who exists and who will be dynamically present then and there in the situation to which I am sending you."**

When Moses said, "Who am I?" God said that it doesn't matter who you are "I AM." Moses said, "I am nothing." God said, "I AM everything." Moses said, "I have nothing to offer." God said, "I AM all you need." Moses said, "I am not someone they will listen to." God said, "I AM, I AM, I AM."

**"That's fine for Moses Pastor, but what does that have to do with my life today???"**

We do not fully appreciate the meaning of I AM until we see Jesus.

*Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: Don't you know me Philip . . . Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:8-9).*

Jesus fully employed the name of God - "I AM". Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I AM" (Jn.8:58).

One of the most remarkable incidents of Jesus use of the name I AM is found in John 18:3-6.

It is the night of Jesus' arrest just before his crucifixion. He has been in the garden praying all night. Pick up at John 18:3 ...

*So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.*

*Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"*

*"Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.*

*"I am he," Jesus said. (and Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.*

Jesus said: "I am the bread of life" (Jn.6:35); "I am the light of the world" (Jn.8:12); "I am the door" (Jn.10:9); "I am the good shepherd" (Jn.10:11); "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn.11:25); "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

***I AM. I AM! I AM!!***

Jesus makes a wonderful promise to us today in Matthew 10:19, "***do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you***" (Matthew 10:19-20).

Friends, you have His name on it. You don't have to worry about having all the answers. You don't have to worry about appearing foolish. You have the promise: **I AM** with you!

### **Excuse #3:**

**What if they don't trust me – "What if they do not believe me or listen to me" (Exodus 4:1).**

We live in a cynical age. People don't trust people. It is no wonder that we don't trust each other . . . spinning has become the acceptable form of communication . . . **JOKE**

A store manager overheard a clerk saying to a customer, "No, ma'am, we haven't had any for some weeks now, and it doesn't look as if we'll be getting any soon."

Alarmed by what was being said, the manager rushed over to the customer who was walking out the door and said, "That isn't true, ma'am. Of course, we'll have some soon. In fact, we placed an order for it a couple of weeks ago."

Then the manager drew the clerk aside and growled, "Never, never, never, never say we don't have something. If we don't have it, say we ordered it and it's on its way. Now, what was it she wanted?" **"Some Rain."**

We live in a cynical age where trust is earned, not given. Guess what...it has always been that way. Moses certainly struggled with the trust issue. He knew people wouldn't believe him. And if people didn't trust him. . . he knew that there was absolutely no sense in even attempting to carry out God's commission.

God gave Moses signs to prove that he had been sent by God. He threw his staff on the ground and it became a serpent, then he grabbed the serpent by the tail and it turned back into his staff (Exodus 4:3 –4). Why the miracle? Verse 5 tells us: ***So that they may believe that the Lord . . . has appeared to you.***

Then God gave him another sign in his hand - becoming leprous when he put it in his cloak. Why a second sign? ***If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second (Exodus 3:8).***

What is the solution today to lack of trust? ... When people just do not trust you? Jesus gives us the answer to this in Matthew 7:15, ***Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them . . . . A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them (Matthew 7:15-16, 18-20).***

It takes time to earn trust. Watch your life that you consistently bear good fruit. In time, the people around you will begin to trust you as you consistently bear fruit.

#### **Excuse #4:**

**I'm not slick enough - "O Lord, I have never been eloquent" (Exodus 4:10).**

You know what? God doesn't use the slick and the slippery who can give the spin. The apostle Paul made this disclaimer in 1 Corinthians 2:1-3 - Paul's words could have basically been paraphrased:

*As you know, brothers and sisters, I didn't walk in the door with a swagger. I didn't come on with the suave, scintillating style you Greeks love to celebrate. You've heard plenty of eloquent speakers and orators, but I wasn't like that among you. You know that. Here is the way it was . . . . I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.*

Verse 5 summarizes why God doesn't use the slick spin-masters of our day: ***so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.***

**Personal Testimony:** ... **Just be yourself.** God can use you. You don't have to be eloquent. The truth of the matter is ... it is better if you are not because then people get a chance to see Jesus and not how great and slick and capable you are!

***Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say (Exodus 4:12).***

#### **Excuse #5:**

**I can't do it! - "O Lord, pleaaaassee send someone else to do it" (Exodus 4:13).**

This is the biggest cop-out of all. It is the one that I have used more often than any other. It appears so humble and self-effacing. "**God can send** somebody else that is more talented, smarter, better, than I am and they'll be able to succeed where I have failed. I'll just drop out and go somewhere else so I don't have to face this struggle any more."

Wow . . . surely you have done that too!

It's interesting that God was so patient with Moses in excuses 1-4 but look at how God responds to this one; Exodus 4:14 records his response, ***The Lord's anger burned against Moses.***

I know about me and I think I know about you . . . if there is one thing I don't want is to have God's anger burn against me. I don't like it when anybody gets mad at me. I get really nervous thinking about God getting mad. We could walk through scripture and see many examples of what happens when God's anger burns. It is not a pretty sight.

**JOKE:** A pastor had the privilege of an important bishop staying in his home. His young boy was very excited and asked if he would get a chance to meet the distinguished bishop. The father thought about it and decided that it would not hurt to have his young son bring the bishop his morning tea. The boy was instructed to tap on the bishop's door and say "It's the boy, my Lord, and it is time to get up." Got mixed up and said: "It's the Lord, my boy, and your time is up."

#### **APPLICATION:**

Brothers, and sisters, if he is speaking to you about a ministry; if he is calling you to a vocation of pastoring or missionary work; if you sense his call upon your life . . . he is calling YOU. Not somebody who is more capable, or believable, or slicker, or smarter, or better in any way . . . he is calling YOU. And YOU had better stop saying "who am I" and "what if" and "I can't" and just say as Isaiah did: ***Here I am, send me! (Isaiah 6:8)***

Will you say that today?