

**You Shall Know I AM:
Please Send Someone Else (Exodus 4)**

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on September 9, 2018

Introduction

- ❖ One of the most striking things about Scripture is the way that it paints a brutally honest portrait of its heroes. It doesn't try to hide their failures and flaws. I think this morning's passage is an example of this. It reminds me of the story about a court painter who was drawing a portrait of **Oliver Cromwell** – a man who was known to have warts all over his face. The painter omitted the warts in the portrait assuming that would please him. But when Cromwell saw it, he was disgusted. He said, *“Take it away! And paint me warts and all.”*

- ❖ And that's what I feel like the Bible is doing. It's refusing to whitewash its heroes. **Scripture is not ashamed to paint them with warts and all.** And that, if you think about it, should strengthen your confidence in the Bible's truthfulness.
 - Tradition has maintained that Moses himself was the author of Exodus, so that means the author himself willingly included all of his warts when recounting these events in which he played an integral part. These aren't puff pieces. This is not hagiography. **Books like Exodus are true accounts that record the good and the bad when it comes to the behavior and attitude of God's servants.**

- ❖ So we should be encouraged to read in our passage an honest account of Moses's hesitancy to take up the LORD's call to return to Egypt, to confront the most powerful political figure of his day, and to lead God's people out of slavery. I think if we were asked to do the same thing, we'd be equally hesitant. We'd probably come up with similar excuses.
 - That's what Moses is doing here in chapter 4. He received an unmistakable, undeniable call from the LORD in chapter 3. **Out of the burning bush that didn't burn came a voice – a voice that belongs to God. And God told Moses that I am sending you to Pharaoh, to bring my people out of Egypt (3:10).**
 - Moses's initial objection in chapter 3:11 is to question, “Who am I?” Who am I that I should be tasked with such a great task? God doesn't answer that. He turns the question around. Who are you, Moses? No, God says the question you should be asking is, “Who am I? Who am I who sends you?”

- ❖ And that's the next exchange. Moses asks, “So who are you? What do I say if they ask me your name?” And here is where God famously reveals his divine name. **He is the Great I AM.** He is Yahweh or Jehovah. It all refers to the same name. In most English Bibles, if you see LORD written in all caps, it's a reference to Yahweh or Jehovah or literally I AM.
 - Now what does that tell us about God? **What did Moses learn about God's essence or character through his name?** “You ask who am I? God says, “I just am.” He just is. And for God to say “I AM WHO I AM” (3:14) is to suggest that his essence and character is self-determined. I am who *I am*. I am not measured against anyone or anything. **I am the self-existing, self-sufficient God of all.**
 - That is the One calling Moses and sending him on this mission. And yet he's still unsure about himself, about his readiness, about his worthiness to play such a role in the plans of the Great I AM. So he has three more reasons why God has the wrong guy – why he should send someone else.

- ❖ Again I think if we were in his shoes, we'd react in a similar way. **Actually, in many ways, we already are in his shoes. Just like Moses, God is calling us and sending us on mission.** In similar fashion, he wants us to proclaim his good news of freedom for captives – those in enslaved to sin and its consequences.
 - He calls us to leave the comforts of our Midian and to go to Egypt – to the hard place where people have hard hearts and won't listen to your message unless God moves them in a mighty way. For you, that hard place could be your own family, your campus, your workplace, or some place in our vast city or in a distant land. **The Great I AM is calling you, and you might be unsure about your readiness, your worthiness, your ability to do what he's calling you to do.** Maybe, like Moses, you're hoping he'll eventually send someone else.
 - **Church, I want to show you four ways in which God works through the unexpected – in hopes of encouraging you and strengthening your resolve to heed the call of the Great I AM and to go wherever he sends you.** We're going to see the LORD 1) work through the ordinary, 2) work through the reluctant, 3) work through the obstinate, and 4) work through the disobedient.

God Works Through the Ordinary

- ❖ Let's begin by considering the amazing way in which God works through the ordinary. We see this in chapter 4:1-11. Moses is quick to reply, questioning if anyone will actually believe him when he recounts this story of how the LORD appeared to him and commissioned him through a burning bush. Listen to what he says in v1 again, "*But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.'*"
 - **So God graciously gives him three signs by which Moses can perform and confirm to others that he truly is sent by Yahweh.** The first of the signs involves his shepherd's staff. The LORD tells him to throw it on the ground, and suddenly it became a serpent – so frightening that Moses ran from it.
- ❖ The fact that God chose a serpent is significant. **Serpents, in Egyptian culture, represent royal authority.** Picture those headdresses of Pharaoh that you might see in a museum and how there is typically a cobra imprinted or molded on. So when the LORD tells Moses to grab the serpent by its tail – which is extremely dangerous – **it's signifying God's authority over the most powerful ruler on the planet.**
 - And not only on the planet. God reigns over the entire spiritual realm. The only other mention of a serpent, at this point in the OT, is Genesis 3 and the devil who appears in serpentine form. **So this sign confirms that God *has* appeared to Moses, and it communicates that you can trust this God – he's got your enemies by the tail!**
- ❖ Next, the LORD will use for a sign – not only the staff – but the hand that wields the staff. He tells Moses to place his hand inside his cloak, and when he takes it out, his hand is leprosy like snow. He puts his hand back in again and takes it out and it's whole again. **The sign demonstrates that God has the power to heal or to harm.** And that serves as a comfort to God's people and a warning to his enemies.

- ❖ Now continuing on in v9, the LORD says to Moses if they don't listen to your voice or believe these two signs, then do this – takes ordinary water from the Nile, pour it on the ground and it will become blood. That's obviously a precursor to the first of the ten plagues to come, but just think about what turning Nile water into blood signifies. **It serves as a witness against Egypt of their guilt when they carried out Pharaoh's wicked policy of throwing Israelites sons into the Nile.** Just as Abel's blood once cried out from the ground (Gen. 4:10), the blood of these baby boys cries out against Egypt and its king.

- ❖ So with these three signs, Moses realizes that God has it covered. His excuse that no one is going to believe him doesn't hold water. So in v10, he appeals to his own limitations. *"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 take that to mean Moses had a stutter, which is possible. But a more likely interpretation is that he's saying he's not eloquent of speech. He's not an orator or a preacher. LORD, you want me to be your spokesman? But I'm not a good speaker.

- ❖ **To that objection, God patiently reminds Moses that you're worried about your slow tongue when it's the God who made that tongue sending you on this mission.** God says in v12, *"Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak."* What a beautiful image of God being with our mouths – shaping our lips, moving our tongue – putting in our mouths the very words he intends for us to speak.
 - The signs were clearly intended for Moses's audience, but they also speak to him and his feelings of inadequacy. A staff. A hand. A pitcher of water. **God is showing Moses that he can work through the merely ordinary to do the extraordinary.** So the LORD is not limited by our limitations. He is not hindered by our ordinariness.

- ❖ According to Scripture, God's power is actually made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). **That means the glory of his power is magnified when displayed through weak and ordinary vessels.** He uses *"jars of clay"* like us *"to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."* (2 Cor. 4:7).
 - If God were to take a golden scepter wielded by Egyptian kings and turn that into a serpent, then some might assume that there must be something special about that golden scepter. That's why the LORD chose to use an ordinary stick. To demonstrate clearly that the surpassing power belongs solely to God.

- ❖ This is amazing! **Moses's staff is merely ordinary, but in the hands of God it can do the extraordinary.** A staff is just a staff but if you place it in God's hands, it becomes the staff of God. If you look at the end of v20, notice how it's now identified that way. It says, *"Moses took the staff of God in his hand."* Once put in God's hands, it becomes something more.
 - **So in the same way, you can say a mouth is just a mouth, but when you give your mouth to the LORD, it becomes the mouth of God.** Some of you, like Moses, don't think you're eloquent enough to share the gospel or teach God's word. You know he's calling you to do it. It's about as obvious as a burning bush.

- ❖ God says it plainly in his Word that you – if you’re a disciple of Jesus – you’re responsible to help make and mature other disciples. He’s placed these people within your spheres of influence. People who don’t know Jesus. People who don’t know his Word very well. He wants you to speak and tell them about Jesus, to teach them his Word.
 - **Now you can try the excuse that you’re not eloquent, that you’re not a natural speaker or teacher, that you’re just an ordinary Christian.** But as you can see from Moses, those excuses won’t hold up. God is saying, “I know you’re ordinary. I know it’s not your strength. But give me your mouth, and I’ll make it the mouth of God. I will be with your mouth and teach you what to speak when the moment comes. And everyone will know that the surpassing power comes from God and not you.”

God Works Through the Reluctant

- ❖ That's the encouragement that the ordinary can draw from our text. Now there's another group of people who should be equally encouraged. It's the reluctant. This leads to our second point: God works through the reluctant.
 - The point comes across in Moses's response in vv12-17. He's run out of excuses and flat out tells God that he simply doesn't want to do it. Look at v13, "*But he said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else."*"
 - Moses is reluctant, and it's likely because he still doesn't understand what God expects of him. **He thinks God wants him to be a savior when all God wants is for Moses to be a staff in his hand.** He thinks he's being called to be the Man when God just wants him to be his mouth. At this point, it might sound like he has low self-esteem, but I'd argue that he's too full of himself, thinking God needs him to perform a mighty deed.
- ❖ But the truth is God doesn't need him. **God and his plans to deliver his people from Egypt are not riding on Moses. It doesn't depend on him.** Just as Queen Esther was reminded, if you choose to keep silent, "*relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place.*" (Est. 4:14) God can raise up another. You're not indispensable.
 - **And yet, in his mercy, God didn't replace Moses. He gave him a teammate.** He sent him his brother Aaron who apparently can speak well. And in v15, God explains how Aaron is going to function in relation to Moses. "*¹⁵You 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. ¹⁶He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him.*"
- ❖ **God is giving Moses an illustration of how he plans to work through him.** Aaron is going to be your spokesman, your mouthpiece. He'll be your mouth, and you'll be like God to him. That's God saying, “That’s how I’m going to work through you. Just as Aaron’s job is to be faithful to say whatever you say – Moses, your job is to be faithful to say what I say.”

- ❖ That's how God addresses his reluctance. **First, he reminds Moses that he's not indispensable.** He could just replace him with Aaron who seems to be a much better speaker. But God still mercifully chooses to work through Moses. **Not expecting him to do the impossible – only expecting him to be that instrument in God's hands when God does the impossible.**
- ❖ Church, that's how God's going to address our reluctance. **He's going to remind us that we're not indispensable. His plans don't depend on us.** He's self-existing. He's self-sufficient. Everyone else is dependent on someone or something else. Not the Great I AM.
 - I know that makes God seem out-of-touch and distant. **But the amazing thing about this passage – and about our own lives – is how the God who doesn't need us still wants us.** He wants us to participate in his plans. He wants to work the impossible in the lives of others – through us! Mercifully forgiving our reluctance rather than holding it against us.

God Works Through the Obstinate

- ❖ So both the ordinary and the reluctant can draw encouragement here. Now there's another group that God works through. This is our third point: He works through the obstinate. The Great I AM is not limited by our limitations, by our reluctance – and he's not even limited by hardened hearts that refuse to listen.
 - Pharaoh is a perfect example of that. **God accomplishes his will through the king of Egypt even though his heart is hardened and he refuses to listen.** Now I realize in v21, the text is confusing because it sounds like God is the one who's doing the hardening. *“And the LORD said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.”*
- ❖ This is a sticky theological issue that we'll address in more detail when we get to the chapters on the ten plagues. But let me make a few observations here. **First, remember how God already predicted Pharaoh's refusal back in chapter 3:19,** *“But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand.”*
 - There in that verse Pharaoh's refusal is portrayed as his own decision. God is the one who has to compel him otherwise. **But in chapter 4:21, his refusal is attributed to the will of God.** *“I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.”*
 - Some are going to say that's not fair. Why is God going to punish Pharaoh for not letting his people go when he's the one who harden his heart so that he won't let them go? That's a legitimate question.
- ❖ There are ten verses in total where it says God hardened Pharaoh's heart (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17). So there's no doubt that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. But then, at the same time, there are ten verses in the same chapters that suggest Pharaoh hardened his own heart (7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34, 35; 13:15).

- ❖ We can speak of God hardening Pharaoh's heart and of Pharaoh hardening his own heart because both are equally true and compatible statements. **God sovereignly ordained Pharaoh's hard heart, and yet Pharaoh is morally responsible for his hard heart.**
 - That's consistent with the Bible's teaching that God is sovereign over all things (even our disobedience), and yet humans are accountable for our actions (including our disobedience). **These are definitely paradoxical truths, but they're not irrational truths.** To grasp how God is sovereign over your actions and yet how you're still responsible for your actions – is certainly mysterious but not irrational.

- ❖ It would've been a very different situation if Pharaoh's heart was inclined to listen and to let the people go, but then a sovereign God comes along and changes his heart, keeping him from listening. If that were the case, then Pharaoh would have a legitimate gripe. God would be violating the freedom of his will.
 - **But the whole point of having ten verses saying Pharaoh hardened his own heart is to make clear that Pharaoh never wanted to listen to Moses in the first place.** Yes, God hardened his heart but not by forcing him to do something he didn't already want to do. **God sovereignly willed for Pharaoh to not listen, and at the same time Pharaoh did not want to listen in accordance to his own will.** We should hold to both truths but both are taught as true in Scripture.

- ❖ But the real emphasis here is on the sovereignty of God even over the hardened, obstinate heart of Pharaoh. **The point is meant to assure God's people that nothing can thwart God's will – not even the stubbornness of man.** I love what it says in Proverbs 21:1, "*The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.*"
 - That's how God worked through Pharaoh. **And if he can work through the stubbornness of the most powerful ruler on the planet, then there's nothing God cannot do.** There is nothing and no one to thwart his plans.

- ❖ **Perhaps some of you have a boss or professor or someone like that – making it difficult for you to live out your calling as a Christian at work or in school.** Because of their hardened heart towards God, they're discouraging you or disallowing you from being open with your faith. You should be praying for them and for their salvation, but this text should particularly encourage you to trust that God can make a way. That hard heart obstructing you is still just a stream of water in the hand of Yahweh; he turns it wherever he will.

God Works Through the Disobedient

- ❖ So we've seen how God works through the ordinary, through the reluctant, through the obstinate, and now in our fourth point, we see how he works through the disobedient. Let's turn our attention to v24. This has got to be the most confusing few verses in all of Exodus. There has been so much ink split trying to untie some of these interpretive knots.
 - Listen again to vv24-26, "²⁴*At a lodging place on the way the LORD met him and sought to put him to death.* ²⁵*Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it and said, "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to*

me!” ²⁶So he let him alone. It was then that she said, “A bridegroom of blood,” because of the circumcision.”

- ❖ So there are a few interpretations here, which I don’t have time to cover, so let me offer what I think is the majority view. That view says that, on the way back to Egypt, the LORD sought to put to death Moses (versus some who think it was one of his uncircumcised sons). So he was probably struck with a fatal sickness, and the reason was because of his failure to circumcise his son, likely Gershom.
 - I’m sure you’re wondering why his son’s circumcision would be a matter of life and death. It feels like an overreaction. But we have to remember what circumcision meant in the OT. **In Genesis 17, God established circumcision as the visible sign of the covenant that he was making with Abraham and his offspring.** Genesis 17:14 says, “*Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.*”
 - So when Israelites were circumcised, what they were saying is, “LORD, we’ll obey you. We’ll be faithful to your covenant. And if not, may we be cut off.” And that circumcision – that literal cutting off – dramatizes the curse of the covenant, the curse of sin.

- ❖ So by failing to circumcise his son, Moses had broken covenant and incurred the curse. He was about to be cut off. **But thankfully his wife takes a flint, circumcises her son, and touches (some translations say she throws) the bloody foreskin at her husband’s feet, calling him a bridegroom of blood.** God relents. Moses recovers and reunites with Aaron and returns to Egypt to show the elders all the signs and to speak all the words of the LORD.

- ❖ These strange few verses make one point very clear. **Breaking covenant with God is a serious matter.** Disobedience to God’s Word is no small thing. It was clear to Moses that day that the wages of sin is death. **And as he looked down at the blood and foreskin laying at his feet, he knew without a doubt that without the shedding of blood there truly is no forgiveness** (Heb. 9:22).
 - He also understood that God’s anger (curse) was justly directed at him, and it took the blood of another to satisfy that anger, to break that curse. **In fact, it was the blood of his son, shed in his place, that saved him.** Moses understood the Gospel that day.

- ❖ And that’s what we need to understand. We have all broken covenant. We have not been faithful to the LORD. We are disobedient. **And yet, this story reminds us that God is mercifully willing to work through the disobedient.** We can be forgiven. We can still be used by God to accomplish great things for God.
 - But only because the blood of another was shed. **Only because a substitute was cut off so that we could be grafted into a relationship with God and into his plans.** There’s this verse in Colossians where it says that, in Christ, Christians have been “*circumcised with a circumcision made without hands . . . by the circumcision of Christ.*” (Col. 2:11)

- ❖ **It's a strange verse because you're wondering how our salvation could be tied to Jesus's circumcision.** But now with this even stranger story of Moses and his son's circumcision, the dots are starting to connect. When Paul says our salvation is "*by the circumcision of Christ*", he's not referring to the cutting off that happened to Jesus when he was an eight-day old baby.
 - He was referring to what happened to him on the cross. **On the cross, Christ experienced a cosmic cutting off. He was being cut off (forsaken) by the Father.** He was bearing our curse, getting what we deserved. He became a Bridegroom of blood to us – to the Church, to his Bride.

- ❖ Do you understand what this means? **It means your disobedience does not have to lead to a cutting off from God and from being used by God to do great things for God.** If you're discouraged by your sinfulness, by your unfaithfulness, then go to Christ. Your Bridegroom of blood. And let his blood cover you and cleanse you.
 - Christian, what is the Great I AM calling you to do? Who is he sending you to with a message of deliverance? Which injustices does he want you to address? What authorities does he want you to confront? **I'm thankful that God actually did send someone else – to do what we could not – so that now, in Christ, we have all we need to do whatever it is that God calls us to do.**