

A Spokesman for Moses

Exodus 4:10-17

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I'd invite you to take your Bibles in hand and turn with me to Exodus 4. Now we're continuing tonight in our story of Moses' encounter with the living God at Sinai. As we studied Exodus 1, we saw God's sovereignty being emphasized in His dealings with His people. When we studied Exodus 2, we saw Moses, the future deliverer introduced to us. He's introduced in a favorable light, but he was unsuccessful in liberating Israel by his own efforts, and he ends up in exile. At the end of Exodus 2, we saw in verses 23 to the end of the chapter that it was emphasized that the redemption of Israel is rooted in God's prior promises, His covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And when you read Exodus 2, verses 24 and 25 you wonder, 'Okay, what is God going to do to fulfill these promises that He has made to Abraham?' And Exodus 3 is your answer. You get to Exodus 3 and in verses 1 through 12, we saw two or three very important things. First of all God reveals Himself to Moses. He not only reveals Himself through this manifestation as a burning bush, He reveals Himself by His word and by His name. And so God reveals Himself to Moses, tells him that He cares about His people, though they have been through much oppression and that He's going to make Moses to be their deliverer. Secondly, God announces to Moses His concern for the people and tells him that Moses will deliver his people in order that they might worship Him. Moses is told then that the very purpose of the exodus is that the people of God might worship at Sinai. We're saved in order to worship.

Beginning in Exodus, chapter 3, verse 11, Moses starts a series of five questions. The longer the questions go on, the more they become objections. God's already appointed him as deliverer. He's told him that He will be his spokesman to the elders, to Pharaoh, and to the people of Israel, and Moses continues to raise questions about that, even objections about God's appointment of him as deliverer and spokesman. In Exodus 3:11 you get the first question. And the question is, "Who am I." It's a question that's born of humility. You know, what would give me the right, what would make me be the person that you would choose to do this very important task. Then in verse 13, Exodus 3, verse 13, he asked a second question. "Okay, Lord, if I'm Your spokesman, when I go who do I say sent me? Who do I say commissioned me?" In answer to that question God defines Himself giving Moses that covenant name that He is

the LORD, He is Jehovah. He is the Lord God of Israel. He defines Himself, and it's very clear, but it's even clearer after that point. God will be the center of the story. Yes, Moses is the deliverer, but ultimately God is the deliverer of His people.

Then last week, looking at Exodus 4, verses 1 through 9, we came to Moses' next question. It was his third question. Basically he asked this. What do I do if the people won't listen to me? What do I do if the people say, "Well, you haven't had a vision from God." What do I do in that circumstance? And that we said was a real challenge. Moses knew from his own experience that the people of God were prone to reject you. He had already experienced that in Egypt. And so the Lord very patiently answers his question by saying, "Because I'm going to give you three signs, Moses. And by those signs you will convince the people of God." Those signs did turn out to be convincing for Israel. We'll find that out at the end of this chapter in verse 31. But those signs were not convincing for Pharaoh, as we will also find out in chapter 7, verses 13 and 23.

That brings us to our passage tonight. Exodus 4, beginning in verse 10, down to verse 17. This is God's word. Hear it expectantly.

Exodus 4:10-17

Lord, this is your word, You teach us much about Yourself and about Your word and about the role of Your prophets in this. You teach us about how You, Yourself redeem Your people and how You use weak and often doubting servants to accomplish Your purposes. From all this teach us of Yourself. Move us to wonder and love and praise to You. Help us to appreciate the glory of Your plan of redemption. Open our eyes to see this truth that You have for us, in this, Your word. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Moses has been given very positive press so far in the book of Exodus. It's an honest report, we know. Moses gives a full accounting of himself. He's neither bragging on himself, he doesn't underestimate his role, neither does he overestimate his role. So far Moses has seen that he has a unique calling to serve God and to perhaps be a deliverer to his people, but he's been unsuccessful. Now that God, forty years after his time in the wilderness, has come to him again and made him aware that it is indeed his divine call for him to serve as His spokesman and deliverer, Moses is resistant. We've said over and over, Moses finds some other thing to raise about God's plan as God continues to press this commission on him. But even as he does that, God is making something clear to us. And that is, though Moses is indeed his chosen servant, and though Moses is indeed integral to God's plan for bringing about redemption for His people, Moses is not the main actor. God is the deliverer, God is the redeemer, God is the Savior. Moses is not perfect. Moses will not redeem Israel because he's an eloquent speaker. He won't redeem Israel because he never trembles in his faith as he faces great odds. He won't redeem Israel because

he's sinlessly perfected, and he never makes a mistake. He'll redeem Israel because God has ordained it. And God has ordained that he will be used as His instrument. And that in and of itself is an important lesson.

I. Moses here begins to reflect the very unwillingness that he fears Israel will show about his leadership.

I'd like to focus on two aspects of the passage that we've just read tonight. The first one you'll see in verses 10 through 12. It's Moses fourth question to the Lord in this dialogue at Sinai. It's really more of an objection than it is a question. And the objection is basically this: Lord, I'm not eloquent. You're appointing me to be a spokesman, and I'm not eloquent. I'm not suited for this. I don't have the right kind of speech patterns. I'm not a very good speaker. Maybe he's saying that he's not very good at Egyptian any more. It's been forty years since he spoke it regularly in court. He knows what he's saying, but what he's asserting is that he's not eloquent, he's not up to the task. And Moses here, I want you to see this. Moses here begins to reflect the very unwillingness that he fears Israel will show about his leadership. You remember he's already said, "Lord, what if they don't listen to me?" But is Moses listening to God? He's worried that Israel won't listen to him. But here the spokesman of God to Israel is continually saying to the Lord, "Well, I'm not sure that I'm really willing to do this." You see the irony. Moses fears that Israel won't be willing. But he himself is not willing, and indeed he will see their unwillingness in coming days. Moses objection, he says, "Lord, I'm not a good speaker, and even my encounter with you hasn't helped." Look at how he says this. I have never been eloquent, neither recently or in time past. In other words, I don't have a track record for eloquent speech, and Lord, even this encounter with You hasn't changed things. It's almost like an accusation. Lord, I've never been an eloquent speaker. And you would think that if You're gonna call me to do this, that at least you'd do a miracle here in Sinai, and I'd be a good speaker. It's almost an accusation. He lays the blame with God. You see the sin of Moses here. This fear of Moses was real. It continued to dog him. If you were to turn forward to Exodus, chapter 6, verse 12 he'll raise the issue again. Moses spoke before the Lord, saying: "Behold, the sons of Israel have not listened to me. How then will Pharaoh listen to me for I am unskilled in speech."

Moses is really bothered by this. Everyone speculates as to what this is. There have been suggestions this is a speech impediment. There have been suggestions that this is a loss of some of his linguistic skills, even though he'd grown up in Egypt. Even though he had grown up speaking their language, perhaps he was fearful that he had lost the pronunciation or the touch in his forty years in the wilderness. I don't know what it is, but the point is, Moses' worry misses the point. God has not chosen him because he's eloquent. Eloquence is not what is needed. A man who simply speaks the truth is that which is needed. And Paul recognized this in his own day. If you turn with me to II Corinthians 10:10, believe it or not Paul himself was accused by the Corinthians of being

fairly unimpressive in his public speech when he was preaching amongst them. They apparently thought Apollos was a lot better preacher than Paul. I've always had a hard time taking that in. But apparently they thought Apollos was a lot better preacher than Paul. They say, II Corinthians 10:10, they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible."

God takes Moses in light of his objection, God takes Moses right back to the doctrine of creation, and He emphasizes His sovereignty. God is the one who gifts as He chooses. If God has called Moses, he can give Moses what Moses needs. God is capable of taking into consideration everything about Moses that needs to be taken into consideration as He calls him into service. And so notice what the Lord says. "Who has made man's mouth. Who makes him mute or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord." Moses, God reassures by reminding him that He is the one who creates, and He is the one who gives these gifts. By the way, in Matthew 11, verses 4 and 5, when John asks, "Lord, are you the One, or do we look for another?" Do you remember what Jesus tells the disciples to go back and say to John? The blind see, the lame walk. Just as God had assured Moses of His sovereignty and His wisdom by reminding him that he was the one that made the blind to see, lame to walk, deaf to hear, dumb to speak. So Jesus assures John that he is indeed divine. That he is the one for whom he was looking, by saying, look at what I'm doing, John. In My ministry, I am doing the deeds of God.

Back to Moses. God is gracious with Moses, even after these questions. We're on the fourth one now. God graciously and patiently promises emphatically to Moses to be his mouthpiece, to be his teacher, to be his supplier of words. Look at verse 12. Look how strongly he says it. "Go and I, even I, will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to say." God is promising to be Moses teleprompter. He doesn't have to think of anything. God is going to supply the words that he needs. And it's not the eloquence of Moses that He's after. There are two things that stand out to me about this first section. The first one is this. Simply, that God uses sinful and weak vessels to accomplish His purposes. Moses displays the same kind of weakness, the same kind of unwillingness that Israel has displayed and will display. The story of God's servants in the Bible is not the story of sinlessly perfected servants. You can look at Abraham, you can look at Isaac, you can look at Jacob, you can look at Joseph, you can look at Moses, you can look at David, all of them, save one, are filled with faults, and foibles and flaws. God is the Savior. He's the true Savior. Moses is His instrument. But it's not through Moses' courage, it's not through Moses' eloquence, it's not through Moses' native abilities that the people of God are going to be saved. So even in this instance of Moses failure of faith God is just reminding us again that in the final analysis it's He who saves us.

Secondly, God is showing to us here that His message is powerful apart from the way that it is delivered. We live in a culture where the method is the message.

We care more about the way you deliver the information, than the information itself. We want it snappy. We want it easy. We want it accessible. We'd like it with a tune, and maybe with a video as well. God, however, gives us words which in and of themselves are powerful. They are His words. They are creative. They never return void. And usually He deliberately delivers them to us without any flashiness, without any eloquence. You know, it's interesting, we are told that Egyptian magicians were usually thought to be very eloquent in their speech, and it seems here that God has deliberately chosen an ineloquent spokesman so that the message stands out more than the messenger. And so that the message itself is not lost in eloquence, but stands out more starkly. Paul, himself, having been thought of by the Corinthians as not much of a preacher, understood this very point. Turn with me to I Corinthians, chapter 1. Paul says this: "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech that the cross of Christ should not be made void."

Notice there that Paul suggests that cleverness of speech can actually make void the cross of Christ, can drown it out, can garble the message. It's not to be delivered in cleverness of speech, for the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. And so he goes on to say, "We preach Christ crucified," verse 23, "to the Jews, a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

This plain-spoken man, this ineloquent man, because he speaks the truth, in the very simplicity of that speaking will exalt God's sovereignty, he will rebuke man's vanity, he will make the truth less palatable to those who are wise in their own eyes, and he will make the truth more easily graspable by the humble. And all by choosing an ineloquent messenger. Listen to what the Jewish commentator on this passage says: Whatever the circumstances of Moses in eloquence, whatever caused it, whatever Moses was referring to, whatever the circumstances, it is certain that the underlying idea is that prophetic eloquence is not a native talent, but an endowment granted for a special purpose. The message originates with God, not the prophet.

I often tell seminarians that the ones who are most natively gifted in their speaking abilities are the ones who will have to work hardest not to get out in front of the word. It is not the messenger. It is not the method. It is the message. Moses, in and of himself, reflects the weakness of God's servants, and so the sovereignty of God in salvation, and he reminds us that God's message is powerful in and of itself.

II. In choosing an unwilling and doubting deliverer, God shows Himself to be the true Savior of His people.

Secondly, if you look with me at verses 13 through 17. This is Moses fifth and final question, and this one really is an objection. It's politely stated, but it's an objection. Here it is, verse 13: "Please send the message by somebody else." I mean that's what Moses is saying. Now he says it more nicely than that. He does say *please*. That is usually a key word to indicate Lord, I and I alone, am guilty of what I'm about to say. So, your condemnation fall upon me, the speaker. He knows that what he is saying is out of order, and he says it fairly nicely. And it sounds like he's being spiritual. "Lord, send whoever you will." Switch to the Isaiah scene in Isaiah 6. "Here I am, Lord, send me." Well, Moses is saying, after God has already told him over and over 'you're My man,' Moses is saying this: "So be it Lord, please send whoever you will." Well Moses, He's told you four times 'you're him.' So send whoever you will is not a spiritual acquiescence to the providence of God, it's Moses begging again, "Lord, send somebody else." But in choosing an unwilling and doubting deliverer, God is showing Himself to be the true Savior of His people.

Against the backdrop of this kind patience of God, God continues to give reasonable and helpful and encouraging answers to Moses; even though you or I would be tiring of this a long time ago, he continues to give reasonable and helpful answers to Moses. And Moses has the audacity to say, "Please send somebody else."

And we're told in verse 14 that God's response is a combination of anger and wise, gracious patience. The Lord burns, but he does give definite answers to Moses' fears. And I'd like you to see two aspects to the Lord's answer, looking at verse 14. First of all, notice what we're told. "The anger of the Lord burned against Moses." Now let me just stop right there. *The anger of the Lord*. That's very interesting. What does that mean? Does God sort of have sudden bursts of fits and rage like we do? Can we sort of tweak Him and push Him a little too far and, and then He blows up? Does He have an emotional life like ours that's actually to a certain extent controlled and is a response to things outside Himself? If so, how can He be sovereign?

Let me introduce a few terms to you. In the Bible, in the Old Testament especially, there are figures of speech called *anthropomorphisms*. In those figures of speech we often refer to God, or to some activity of God, using figures of speech as if God had a body like we do. Sometimes we'll speak of the ear of God, or the arm of God, or the hand of God, or the face of God, or the back of God. It's very clear that those are metaphors. That's symbolic speech, because the Old Testament as well is very clear that God is a spirit. He doesn't have a body like we do. He is totally different. He is in an entirely different category from us. He doesn't have a body. And so those are figures of speech in order to describe things which are really beyond the capacity of human language to describe.

Then there's a category of things in the Old Testament which we call *anthropopathisms*. That's a nice little word. It simply means not only are anthropomorphisms, like the body of the human, but there are anthropopathisms, like the emotions of a human, where human emotions are ascribed to God. What do we do with those? Is his emotional life, just like our emotional life? And again the Old Testament and the New give the answer no, His emotional life is not like our emotional life. God is a God who is deeply concerned for His people, He loves His people, but His love and what we would call His emotional life or His affective life is different from ours in that it is not vacillating, and it's not controlled from the outside.

So what do you do with a passage like this, where it says, the anger of the Lord burned. And you can almost see the picture, you've told the child for the fourteenth time not to swing his elbows at the table and off goes the milk again, and the father goes, "I told you not to do that." The anger of the Lord burns. And it seems like that anger is produced by the circumstances in which the Lord found Himself. But again, I want you to see here what we have is actually an anthropopathism using human words to describe God's activity and action, and how do I know that? Well, the Hebrew doesn't say *the Lord burned* here.. Here is what the passage says. The passage literally says, "The nose of the Lord heated up." That's literally what the passage – if you want to be literal about it, it's the nose of the Lord heated up. He burned with anger. My ears usually turn red. That's what gives me away. "The nose of the Lord heated up." Notice that's an anthropomorphic symbol. It's a term which uses human body figures to describe God. That's a clear tip off that this is an anthropopathism. It's an ascription of human emotional activity to God to express what? His displeasure with Moses. It doesn't indicate that God is vacillating in his emotional life like we are, inconsistently controlled from the outside. But it does it does indicate that God is not an unmoved, unfeeling being. He is a God that deeply cares about right and wrong and obedience. And so His divine displeasure is described in that he burned.

But look not only at God's displeasure, look at the graciousness and patience with which He deals with Moses. Look again at verse 14. God gives him a wise, gracious, patient response. Three things that he does to help Moses. First, he says, "Moses, there is Aaron, your brother. He's a Levite." The Levites were amongst the educated elite in Israel already at this time, by the reckoning of many. They were already teachers amongst Israel. And so He says, "Well, there's your brother. He's a Levite, he's a teacher, he's an educator." Secondly, He says, "And he speaks well. Moses, there's your brother. He's an educator, he's a teacher, he's respected amongst the community of Israel, and he's a good speaker. He speaks well. And let me tell you something else that you don't know, Moses. He's coming to you right now, and he's going to be glad to see you when he sees you." God encourages Moses, even though Moses tests his patience.

And then after those encouragements, look at verse 15, God gives Moses some

commands. Two things. "Speak to Aaron." Secondly, "Tell him My words. You speak to Aaron about what we've been talking about and you tell him exactly what I told you."

And then in verses 15 and 16 after those commands, he immediately follows those commands with a series of four encouragements. He says again, "I will be with you. I'll be with your mouth, I'll be with his mouth." Secondly, he says, "I will personally teach you what to do and say." Thirdly, he says, "He, Aaron, will be your spokesman to the people." He'll speak for you to the people. And fourthly, he says, "You will tell him My words and only then will he speak to the people." Now if you're looking at the passage, you're saying, well, where did you get that from? Oh, I got it from right here. Look at what he says. "He'll be a mouth for you," end of verse 16. "And you will be as God to him."

Now that's a very strange thing to say, isn't it? "You will be as God to him." What in the world is God talking about. How does God deal with his prophets? God speaks, His prophets listen, and they improvise. No. God speaks, His prophets listen, and they say exactly what God said. God literally puts the words in their mouths. Now listen to what He says. "You will be as God to him." God, you see, is teaching Moses about what a prophet is here. He's teaching us about what a prophet is here, and he's saying, "Moses, you're going to put my words into Aaron's mouth, and then he is going to speak exactly what I have told you to tell him to say."

And so even in giving him Aaron, God is explaining how prophecy works. Prophecy is not according to the opinion of the prophet. Peter tells us this. The inspiration of the prophet is not born of his own creativity. The prophet speaks God's word. He's carried along by the Holy Spirit. He speaks only that which God has given him to speak. God has, in fact, given us a window on the doctrine of inspiration here. The Bible is revelation. It's God's revelation of Himself to us in written form. The words of the prophets are not their reflections upon an encounter with God. They are God's words given to them to describe the encounter that they have had with Him and His word for His people.

And then in verse 17, one last encouragement. God reminds Moses about the staff. And He bids him to take it in hand and to do the appointed attesting signs. What do we learn from this passage? What do we learn from this section? Again, two things. Again, we learn that God is ultimately the only helper and Savior of His people. He uses unwilling, doubting, flawed servants to do His bidding. God is ultimately always our one and only helper and Savior. And secondly, we learn that His prophets are His spokesmen, and their job is merely to speak His word, to add nothing to it, to take away nothing from it, to speak His word.

You know, there are a lot of people that would like to think that evangelicals invented the doctrine of biblical infallibility and inerrancy. We didn't. God did. This is one example in His word in which He explains it. When prophets speak, they

don't speak their own thoughts, they don't even speak their own words, they speak the words that God has given to them to speak. Jeremiah had the same experience. He was given a message to preach to the people that he didn't want to preach. If you've read through the book of Jeremiah, you'll know why he didn't want to preach that message. If the Lord called you into ministry and gave Jeremiah to you for your text, you would know you were in for a rough ride. You are going to be in a lot of different churches during the course of your ministry, because you're going to last about three months in each of them. And Jeremiah says, "Lord, no, don't give this for me to say to Israel." He knew how Israel was going to respond to it. Derek tells me that the only book that he started to preach through and stopped in the middle of was Jeremiah. I think he got to Jeremiah 16 one Wednesday night in Northern Ireland one night, and he got up and said, "Friends, I just can't do this any more." You know what Jeremiah says in Jeremiah 20, verses 7 through 9. He says this: "Oh Lord, you have enticed me, and I was enticed. You have overcome me and prevailed. I have become a laughing stock all day long. Everyone mocks me, for each time I speak, I cry aloud. I proclaim violence and destruction because for me the word of the Lord has resulted in reproach and derision all day long. But if I say 'I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name,' then in my heart it becomes like burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary of holding it, and I cannot endure it." God had spoken the word into his heart. He couldn't but speak it, even though it meant derision. That's the word of a prophet. It's God's word for His people. It doesn't matter they like it, it doesn't matter whether they think it's true, doesn't matter what the immediate effect of it is. It's God's word. His prophet speaks. And God's teaching us about that here.

That tells us something about how we are to respond to the read word, to the preached word. We're to love it. We're to see that it's God's word. It's not the opinion of man, it's God's word. It's for us. It teaches us how to live. It teaches us about God. It teaches us about His way of salvation. It teaches us about the Lord Jesus Christ. The response, you see, is to bow the knee. God's here. He is here. He is here by His word. His word's been read. He's spoken to us. His word has been explained. He's spoken to us. His word has been proclaimed. He's spoken to us. What's our response? Lord, this is Your word. Help me to believe it. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for these servants that You called, servants who were men like we are, servants who were trembling, doubting sometimes. Because in calling those trembling, doubting men, you showed us that You are our Savior. That You also showed us how You work in the world, giving Your word, even in the hands of sinful men, yet spoken perfectly and without error for Your people. We pray, oh God, that by the grace of the Holy Spirit we would respond to it, as we ought, and to receive it not as the words of men, but for what it really is, the word of God. This we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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