

Availability . . . and a Game of Chess

Exodus 3-4:17

Introduction

In our last discussion, we left Moses in the desert of Midian. Turn to the book of Exodus and we will pick the story up where we left off, as we continue our study of his life.

Moses has spent forty years virtually alone. He has abandoned Egypt, where he is a fugitive from justice. Now he is tending his father-in-law's sheep in Midian. Once a very wealthy man with the court of Egypt at his fingertips; now a very poor individual living in a place that is perhaps, attached to his father-in-law's tent. His father-in-law is an unknown, unloved priest, who did not command respect among the people of Midian. There, for forty years, Moses has endured. He has lived, tending sheep in the dusty, dry region of Midian, where no one of importance would live and certainly, no one of importance would come from.

Yet God, as we discovered in our last discussion, had sent Moses to the desert of Midian because Moses had too much of Egypt in him. Moses had announced, in effect, that he would now lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. It was in *his* timing; it was according to *his* plan. "Now is the time," he said, "to announce myself as the leader of the Israelites and lead them out to the promised land."

Instead of seeking the counsel of God, Moses, in the energy of his flesh, pursued what he felt would be best. As a result, he killed an Egyptian, using methods that God did not ordain, and thus, found himself alone and in an obscure place. Forty years have transpired, and what will happen takes place after forty years.

I believe it was D. L. Moody who originated the interesting thought that, "For forty years, Moses thought that he was somebody. For the next forty years, in the desert of Midian, he would discover that he was nobody. And then, in the next forty years, the final forty years of his life, he would learn that God could make somebody out of nobody."

Five Attitudes that Hinder Availability

Now, Moses is about to receive a call. Let us pick up the story at Exodus, chapter 3, verses 1 and 2.

Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.

I kind of chuckle when I hear Moses' response to this burning bush. It leaves out perhaps, how he was feeling and that his eyes were popping and his mouth was dropping open. Look at verses 3 and 4.

So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

Continue to verses 5 through 7, as God speaks.

Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the

place on which you are standing is holy ground.” He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. The Lord said, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings.”

The Israelites did not know this. They thought God had abandoned them. However, God said, “I was watching all the while.”

Continue to verse 8 and 9.

So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them.”

Let me stop at this point as we are about to enter the call of Moses and the excuses that he will give to God in telling God that he is not the one for the job. They are the same excuses, ladies and gentlemen, that you and I use.

I believe the church is filled with people who have heard the call of God – that imperceptible, inaudible voice ministering to their spirit. He is saying, “I want you to do this. I want you to minister here. I want you to serve there. I want you to speak My name in the corporation or in the neighborhood. I want you to become My representative.”

In response, we all give at least one of five reasons for saying, “No,” to God.

Moses becomes a classic illustration of an individual who has received a call from God, but refuses, or tries to refuse.

The attitude of insignificance

1. Let me give the first excuse before we read any further. It is the excuse, or the attitude of insignificance.

Look at verse 10. God is speaking to Moses.

Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.

This is the point at which we would expect Moses to jump, as if he had been waiting for forty years, and say, “I knew forty years ago that I was the man for the job. Now finally, You come to me. I’m ready.”

What does Moses say? Look at verse 11.

But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?”

When you read this passage, I believe you should mark in your mind that God probably spoke under His breath, “That’s exactly what I wanted to hear. That’s wonderful!”

I think, if Moses had responded, “Well Lord, it’s about time You called me. I am the man for this job.” that God would probably have said, “Forty more years in the desert for you.”

Because Moses responded with this thought, I think God was pleased. However, God would not let him be excused.

Moses said, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh . . .?”

In other words, “Now, after forty years, I realize my insignificance; I realize the fact that I am perhaps, not to appoint myself, but I am to be appointed by God for this task.”

Have you ever had the opportunity of having someone come to you and ask you to serve in some way and the first thought that went through your mind was, “I wonder why they asked me?”

Perhaps you have been at work in the corporation and God places you in the hallway of a man who needs Christ. You sense God’s Spirit saying, “I want you to be the one to witness for Me on the job.”

Have you ever thought, “Me? Who am I?”

God’s response, “I am with you.”

Notice God’s response to Moses. It is basically, “I am with you.” Look at verse 12.

And He said, “Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you; when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.”

God did not say, “Shame on you, Moses. What a poor self-image. I don’t want you to ever say anything like that again. Pull yourself up. You’re somebody.”

We are indeed, significant in Jesus Christ and who He is, but in terms of ministry, our efforts, in our own flesh, are totally insignificant unless God is with us.

God says, “I know who you are and I’m not necessarily looking for a dynamo to go to Egypt. I’m looking for a dependent disciple to approach Pharaoh.”

The attitude of ignorance

2. So Moses, knowing that he cannot get around God’s response to the insignificance excuse, comes back with a second one. We will call this the excuse, or attitude of ignorance.

Perhaps you have used this excuse as well. Look at verse 13.

Then Moses said to God, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?”

In other words, Moses is saying, “I don’t have all the answers. I don’t know what to say. And what, Lord, should I say if they come back and ask me this or that? I haven’t been schooled. I don’t know all that I’m supposed to say. I don’t have all the answers.”

Have you ever, when God impressed you to get involved in something or to say something, had, as the first thought that ran through your mind, “Uh-oh, I could get boxed in not knowing what to say. I’d better just keep quiet.”?

I think Moses thought this one would make sense and perhaps, in effect, get God off his back.

God’s response, “I will teach you.”

Notice, however, God’s response in verse 14. Let me summarize it, “I’ll give you the answers as you learn to know Me.”

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

“I AM,” or the name “Yahweh,” comes from the verb “hayah,” which means “to be”. God is saying, “I am simply the existent God.”

That is a characteristic or an attribute of Himself that He is revealing, in a sense, for the very first time to anyone on planet earth. He is, in effect, telling Moses, “I don’t want you to necessarily know all the answers. I want you to know *Me*.”

Understand that the basis for Moses’ ministry is not knowing all the answers, but knowing God. The basis for any ministry that you or I may have is not based on the fact that we have it all mapped out; that we have all the answers, but that we know God.

So how do I get to know God?

It is interesting that Jesus Christ refers to Himself with exactly the same Greek word that is translated in the Old Testament Septuagint. Turn to John, chapter 8, verses 22 through 24.

So the Jews were saying, “Surely He will not kill Himself, will He, since He says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come?’” And He [Jesus] was saying to them, “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I AM . . .”

Your translation may say, “I am He”. If so, the word “He” should be italicized as it is implied.

Jesus says, “Unless you believe that I AM,” meaning that I AM the existent One. It is the same word that God used and could be translated back into the Old Testament “I AM Yahweh.”

So do you want to know how to get to know God? You get to know God by spending time studying and getting to know the life of Jesus Christ.

Wouldn’t it would be interesting if we had candidates for ministry, if instead of giving them all of the answers and all of the methods and all of the programs, we gave them a plan that would enable them, on a deeper level, to get to know Jesus Christ? Do you know the reason I believe there is so much failure in ministry? Because we know very little about Him and we know so much about what we are about.

God answered Moses, out in the wilderness, when Moses said, “God, I don’t know all the answers.”

God said, “I want to reveal Myself to you because I want you to get to know that I am the existent God; I

am eternal. And, as you get to know Me, I will give you the answers; I will direct your path in ministry.”

Note what God says in verses 15 through 18a.

God, furthermore, said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations. Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The Lord, . . . has appeared to me, saying, ‘I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt. So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and . . . to a land flowing with milk and honey.’ They will pay heed to what you say . . .”

Why will the people listen? Because you come with all authority? No. Because you come with the authority of God’s name. Continue to verses 18b through 20.

“. . . and you will say to him [the king of Egypt], ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So now, please, let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.’ But I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion. So I will stretch out My hand, and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go.”

By this time, I think Moses was getting rather nervous. Sheep had probably never looked better to him. He is probably dancing about on his bare feet as the sand is getting hot, and he is thinking, “Now wait a second, I can’t get out of this. I told Him I’m ignorant; I told Him I’m insignificant, and yet, He has come back with exactly the solution so that I will still be the individual to minister for Him. What can I say next?”

I may have told you before that one of the most delightful ladies in my life is my grandmother. One of the things that she taught my three brothers and me, as we were growing up in the servicemen’s center where my parents ministered, was how to play the game of chess. We called her “Granny”. I do not know if you have ever called your grandmother “Granny,” but it is a term of affection. However, do not let her name fool you, she was really vicious when it came to the game

of chess. The game would soon turn into a chase. I would be running with my king and she would be chasing me with all of her pieces still in tact. Sooner or later, I would hear her little voice, as she looked over at me through her glasses, say, “Check.”

Now, if there are any chess players here, do you know the move in which you can take your king and exchange it for the castle when the heat is on? You are only supposed to do that once. My brothers and I would bargain for six or seven times; we would keep switching them back and forth. After awhile, we would hear her say again, “Check.” I hated to hear that word and yet, she was the greatest challenger at the servicemen’s center. If we wanted to learn how to play the game of chess, we had to play her.

Finally, after all of the finagling and all of moving that we thought would get us out of checkmate, sooner or later we would see her grin and say, “Checkmate.” I learned to love and hate that woman all at the same time!

As I read and re-read this story of Moses, I could see him playing the part of me. He is dancing about, trying to avoid God saying, “Checkmate.” As God says, “Check,” Moses says, “Well, I’ve got another move up my sleeve. Perhaps He’ll accept this one.”

However, God says, “Check,” again.

The attitude of inability

3. So Moses comes up with a third excuse. Let us call this one the excuse or the attitude of inability. Moses just tells Him downright, “I’m unable. I’m not only unqualified; I’m not only ignorant, I’m unable.”

Look at chapter 4, verse 1.

Then Moses said, “What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, ‘The Lord has not appeared to you.’”

In other words, Moses is saying, “They may deny my leadership. I may go there and tell them that I have met with God and His name for us is Yahweh, the existent One, and what if they look at me and say, ‘Well, so what? We’re still not going to follow you.’? And let’s face it, for forty years I’ve been tending sheep; I haven’t been around people. I’m totally unable to do this job.”

God's response, "I will empower you."

I love God's response. In fact, His response is lengthy.

I really believe, ladies and gentlemen, that like Moses, we frequently come back with, "I am unable. I can't do that. Me? There's no chance; no possibility. It's not in me."

God will come back and instruct Moses in a very profound way. Look at verses 2 and 3.

The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he said, "A staff." Then He said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it.

This was evidently, a poisonous viper. Otherwise Moses, who knew animals well, would not have fled. Moses takes his staff, which is perhaps, six feet in length, throws it down and it becomes a poisonous viper. Then Moses, who is barefoot, takes off across the desert, running.

God says, in effect, "Stop. Come back.."

Continue to verse 4a.

But the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail" . . .

Moses is probably wondering if God knows much about animals. I would imagine, if you grab a snake, you grab it by the head so it cannot bite, not by the tail so it can turn around and strike.

That was part of the act of faith; that was part of God revealing to Moses His power over nature. "Moses, I want you to grab that snake by the tail."

Put yourself in those feet. Some of you do not even like to go to the zoo. That is too close for you.

I read a story that kept me on the edge of my seat. It was the story of Gary Richmond, who works at the Los Angeles Zoo. Gary went into the reptile cage with several other zoo keepers to catch a king cobra. He usually works with other animals, rather than with serpents.

Now you may remember that king cobras have a cape that spreads out, and this one was perhaps, six or seven feet in length. Gary went in the cage with five other men and was told, "Now, when we go into that cage and that cobra senses we're there, two of us will grab the head and a couple of us will grab the tail. Then, you help the surgeon perform surgery on the snake."

So Gary gets inside the cage and that king cobra comes around the corner and immediately rears up. It darts back and forth at the five men, as if choosing a prey. It spread its cape just a few feet away, and hisses. "It had a growl," Gary wrote.

Finally, the cobra selects its prey and darts at one of the men, who jumps out of the way. Then, two men grab the head and two grab the tail, while Gary is standing there ready to help the surgeon. The surgeon says, "I want you to take some towels, wad them up, and put them in the snake's mouth."

Gary does that and the snake clamps down on them until venom drips from the towels. The surgeon tells Gary that king cobras have enough venom to kill an elephant, so the towels are needed to drain its sacs. The reason for draining its sacs is that the difficult thing is not catching the snake, but letting it go without getting bitten.

Now, let us go back to where Moses is, all alone. "Moses, you take that poisonous viper and grab it by the tail."

I have tried to picture this in my mind. I think Moses spent an hour trying to work his way around that snake. Finally, he lunges for the tail, grabs it, and probably closes his eyes and shrieks with fear. Then, all of the sudden, it feels hard. The text tells us, in verse 4b, that once again,

. . . it became a staff in his hand

Look at verse 5, "You see Moses, this has been done . . ."

“. . . that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.”

This is undeniable! "You throw your rod down, if any of them get wise. I'll let it turn into a viper and you just casually walk over, bend down, and pick it up by the tail. That'll impress them."

Moses still is not convinced. So in verse 6,

The Lord furthermore said to him, "Now put your hand into your bosom [cloak]." So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow.

Now leprosy was an incurable disease. This was death itself. A slow, in a sense, painless death, as the nerve endings died and damaged bodily parts fell off until death came. Moses was probably horrified.

God, not taking too much time lest Moses have a heart attack, in verses 7 and 8,

Then He said, "Put your hand into your bosom again." . . . and when he took it out . . . behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. "If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign."

So, Moses was thinking, "This is wonderful. I've got authority and I have power, but is it really enough?"

I want you to note the third sign – this is significant. Look at verse 9.

"But if they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."

Now this sign is really no more amazing than the first two. When you think about it, I would imagine that it takes about the same amount of power, if we could calibrate the amount of power it takes, to turn a serpent into a rod and a rod into a serpent as it does to turn water into blood. So what is the point? The point is that the chief god of the Egyptians was what? The Nile god. This was the most powerful god in Egypt's pantheon. God was, in effect, showing Moses that, "I have authority over the most powerful god in Egypt. You take water from the Nile god and I'll turn it into blood."

I think there is something else of significance in this sign. The children of Israel had been in Egypt for nearly four hundred years. They had been impressed by the magnificence of Egypt. Perhaps they were beginning to wonder, "Is this god more powerful than the Elohim of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Can God really pull this exodus off?"

I think this sign was not for Moses, but for the people of Israel to recognize that Yahweh was the most powerful God in all the land.

Moses said, "Lord, I'm unable to pull this off."

God says, in effect, "I will empower you."

The attitude of inadequacy

4. Let us take a look at the fourth attitude that hinders availability. We will call this the excuse or attitude of inadequacy.

Look at chapter 4, verse 10. Moses knows that he is hearing "checkmate" rumble in the distance.

Then Moses said to the Lord, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow [heavy] of speech and slow of tongue."

It is a possibility, and some commentators think, that Moses stuttered; that Moses had difficulty getting his words out. So Moses pulls this one out, and this is the big one. Moses is thinking, "God wants me to go and speak to Pharaoh, 'Lord, do You remember that I stutter? Do You recognize the fact that I am slow of speech. I have never been eloquent. Now You'll have to find somebody else.'"

Moses thought this would work.

God's response, "I will overshadow your efforts."

God says, in effect, "I will overshadow your efforts with My presence."

Look at what He says in verses 11 and 12.

The Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now then go, and I even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say."

In other words, He is perhaps saying, "I'm not going to correct this speech problem, but I will overshadow your efforts. I will overshadow that thought of you standing before the Pharaoh and not being able to get those words out. I'll overshadow that. You just go and I'll be glorified in your availability, not your ability."

Ladies and gentlemen, we have the idea that God is looking for people with the impressive spiritual resumé; with all of the qualifications. We have an "A, B, C, D" mentality because we are so used to this in society. We think if God is seeking people to serve Him, He wants a resumé; He wants all of the qualifications listed.

I honestly believe that God does not need eloquence, God needs emptiness. In Acts, chapter 6, the little church that had just exploded into existence had a problem. It had all kinds of money because they were selling land, as need be. They were to give that money to widows, but some of the widows were being overlooked. So the Holy Spirit impressed the

apostles, “Let’s choose men to make sure the widows get the money.”

Who would you choose? Well, where are the accountants in the church? Where are the financiers? Where are the people who work with money? No. Verse 3 of Acts, chapter 6, says,

. . . select from among you . . . men . . . full of the Spirit . . .

The implication is to select men who are empty of themselves and filled with the presence of the Spirit of God.

Jesus Christ comes and He is to choose twelve people to introduce His kingdom program to planet earth. Where would you go? I would go to the rabbinical school and choose twelve of the most brilliant graduates. However, Jesus overlooks the rabbinical school; He bypasses that and chooses twelve unlearned men. Why? He does not need eloquence; He does not need the impressive qualifications, He needs men and women who are dependent; who are available; who are filled with the Spirit of God’s control.

So God says, in effect, “Moses, did you forget I made your mouth that way? Did you forget that I created that particular impediment? Did you forget that in My design, you were wired that way? So, what will you say now, Moses?”

I hear “checkmate” coming.

The attitude of irreverence

5. There is one more attitude that I will call an attitude of irreverence.

Look at verse 13.

But he [Moses] said, “Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will.”

We could translate this, “Please, Lord, send the message by someone else.”

In other words, Moses is saying, “I’m through playing. I don’t want to hear ‘checkmate.’ I’m going to knock the pieces over and I’m going to get up and leave. And God, I want You to choose somebody else because I’m simply saying to You, ‘No.’ I’m not going to play the game.”

God’s response, “I didn’t call anyone else.”

God encouraged Moses with the presence of Aaron, who would turn out to be a problem later.

And God basically said, “Moses, I didn’t call anyone else. I didn’t ask someone else, I asked you.”

Ladies and gentlemen, the truth of the matter is, when you hear the Spirit of God witnessing to your spirit that you are to be involved; you are to serve; you are to speak, then *you* are the one He is calling, and no one else. In that particular residence, or occupation, or ministry in which you have been placed, you are His plan.

You might ask, “Have I really been issued a call?”

Please turn to Matthew, chapter 28. I want to show the way in which this call fits perfectly with all of the excuses that Moses used in trying to deny the ministry God wanted him to fulfill. Look at verse 18. You might say, “I’m insignificant, Lord.” He says,

. . . All authority has been given to Me . . .

Then, in Acts, chapter 1, He will say, “I give you that authority; I transfer the authority of Myself to you. Insignificant? Of yourself, yes. But I have given you a dose, all you need of My authority for ministry.”

You might say, “I don’t have the credentials.”

You are right, you do not. Jesus says, in verse 19 of Matthew, chapter 28,

Go . . . in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit

You might say, “I don’t know what to say.”

All you need to do, according to verse 20a, is,

teaching them to observe all that I commanded you . . .

You might say, “Lord, would you send someone else?”

He says, in verse 20b,

. . . lo, I am with you always . . .

Application

Let me apply this in two ways. From the life of Moses, we can discern at least two wonderful things about the call of God.

Your past does not handicap God’s power

1. Number one, your past does not handicap God’s power.

Moses perhaps, could have made reference to the fact that he was a fugitive. That did not handicap the power of God in his life.

No matter what kind of past you have, in the body of Christ and by the cleansing of His blood, you can be an ambassador.

Your inadequacy does not hinder God's performance

2. Number two, your inadequacy does not hinder God's performance.

I really believe, in fact, that God wants people who are conscious of their inadequacy. We have far too much charisma in the church today; we have far too much personality; we have far too much energy in the flesh – impressive things; impressive people.

I wonder if God is searching today, for those who will understand, "Apart from Him, I am nothing. The abilities? Well, they're not all there, but I will be available."

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 8/20/1989 by Stephen Davey.

© Copyright 1989 Stephen Davey

All rights reserved.