

Broken Beginnings and Kingdom Conclusions: Moses

Exodus 3:11-4:18, Joshua 1:1-5, Matthew 2:13-15

Have you ever found yourself coming up with excuses? Even for little things? “Honey can you take out the garbage”? “Ooh, I would, but I gotta... go to the store...” “while you’re out could you wash the car”? “Did I say “go to the store”? I meant I have to do some work I brought home... I’ll be at my desk”. “Vacuum that office while you’re there please”? “I mean... I’m going to Idaho on a business trip”! “Get potatoes”.

We all fall into the trap of making excuses. Maybe we don’t make up fake business trips to Idaho to avoid taking out the garbage, but we all do it. And it’s not like we just do it for housework, we do it for everyone and everything.

Of course, that means we end up giving God the short end of the stick too, even when we don’t realize it.

These excuses come from every aspect of our lives, whether it’s our insecurities, our lack of self-esteem or identity issues, our history of shortcomings, a chance to avoid responsibility,

or even just a lack of (or at least perceived lack of) ability.

Whatever our reasons, the outcome is the same. “Oh, I can’t, because [INSERT EXCUSE HERE]”.

Like I said, even God gets an earful of our excuses – and quite regularly. “God, I can’t do that, that’s for those “Super-Christians”. God, I can’t do that, I’m not capable. God I can’t go into ministry, I wasn’t made for that, I don’t have those skills”.

Yeah, I used that excuse. Or tried to at least. I tried to tell God that He didn’t make me for the very thing He was calling me to. Now look where I am – exactly where He wanted me. See, God has a solution for every excuse we could ever even hope to dream up. God doesn’t call us without knowing us, or having a plan – He’s always had one, and in His plan, is each of us. Broken, imperfect, with a laundry list of excuses and a million and one reasons why we think God can’t and shouldn’t call us.

God designed each of us for a purpose – His purpose – and calls us each to it. It’s not an easy thing to grasp, and an even more difficult thing to accept, not to mention actually

participate in, but the fact remains – no matter our reasons, no matter our excuses, God will overcome them.

Moses learned that the hard way. Reading through Exodus 3 and 4, we see Moses coming up with a grand total of 4 doubts and excuses, and finally he gives up and just asks God to get someone else to do it instead; but to each of those doubts, to each and every one of those excuses, God gives not one, but two answers to nearly every one of them.

One of the issues I see people facing the most is the matter of their identity – “I’m a nobody, how could I ever do something good, or important?” Or, “How could I do what God is calling me to do?” For many of us, at some point in our lives, we’ve encountered someone who has made us question our ability, or our identity, leaving us feeling alone, or isolated, with little worth at all. So we latch onto that, looking for something, anything really, to fill that void and give ourselves identity, and a sense of belonging.

For Moses, his struggle with his identity goes back to at least when he fled from Egypt, and perhaps spanned his whole life.

After the Pharaoh ordered that all the newborn Hebrew boys were to be thrown into the Nile, Moses’s mother hid him in a basket in the Nile, with mere hopes that he might survive. Then the Pharaoh’s daughter found him, gave him back to his mother to nurse him, and then took him back and adopted him. Now if that wouldn’t confuse you when you’re a child, being raised by Egyptians and Hebrews when tensions are already so high between the two nations, then I don’t know what would.

Now, not only that, but he kills a man, word gets around, and when he witnesses some Hebrew men fighting, they go, “What, you gonna kill us too? Who made you ruler over us? What gives you the right?” at which point Moses goes, “Know what’s good? Running away and farming sheep, that’s good.”

Now that’s a jarring emotional rollercoaster. Spend your life being raised as royalty, murder a man, get found out, and run

away to become a sheep herder. Now God's calling you to fulfill part of His promise and tells you "hey, you're gonna bring my people out of Egypt", all the while you've been questioning your self worth.

Moses says to God, "Who am I?" "Am I really the one you want to do this?" Now here's what God tells him:

"I will be with you". I – As in the God of the Universe – will be with you. You aren't doing this by yourself, it's not your ability I'm counting on, all I'm asking is that you trust Me.

And that's the thing with how God calls us – He doesn't call us for our ability, for our sense of self-worth. He calls us because He wants us to trust in Him first and foremost, and He calls on us to tell us that ultimately, we are His, we are loved by Him, we are His children. He answers our doubts of "I'm a nobody" with "You are mine, and I am with you always."

Not only that, but He proves it. To Moses, He tells him "Once you've brought my people from Egypt, you will worship me

here on this mountain, and when you do, you'll know it was in fact me who sent you." In other words, "your proof will come after you've been saved from Egypt."

To us, God says "I've already given you all the proof you need, to know that it is Me calling you. Jesus, My Son lived and died for you, fully man and fully God. He showed you the perfect life, and if you follow Him and rest in Him, you will know what it is I'm calling you to."

But there's something more here; yes, God prevails over our loss of identity, assuring us that He is with us. Yes, God proves that He is always with us, He proves He's calling us despite our insecurity, but without our identity, we are still left missing something, are we not?

Ultimately, what God is saying to Moses after the first of his doubts is this: his identity – and indeed that of all of Israel – is that they are God's people, His chosen nation. Whatever their shortcomings, they belong to God ONLY! The identity of the

entire nation of Israel is rooted completely in Him, in worship of Him, fully in LOVE with God.

Should that not be applied to us? We call ourselves Christians, followers of Christ, people who rest in Him, and seek to show the world who He is through our lives, but we still are tripped up by the unfulfillment of our identities! We look to fulfill ourselves through work, recreation, what we wear or eat, the homes we live in, our children, even our positions in the church!

We can seek fulfillment in whatever we please, but unless we go to Jesus, unless we find our identity in Him, we will always be left searching, and always be left questioning His call on our lives.

So now Moses has accepted God's call (at least, to an extent). Perhaps we now are taking our identity in Christ seriously. Sometimes that's all we need. But sometimes, we are left with more fears and questions, some of our own imaginings, some by the enemy, meant to dissuade us from following God's call.

Moses experienced this, of course. His next doubt comes from a place of fear; "What if they don't believe me when I tell them that You sent me, God? What if they say, "Oh yeah? Well what's His name then?"

God has made it very clear by this point; Moses may very well be drastically unqualified for this, but God is the one leading him in this. It is not by Moses' power that this is happening, but by God's power.

Well now the people of Israel will need proof – who is it in fact that has sent Moses to them? Was it really Yahweh, like Moses said?

The Israelites all knew who Moses was, at least to some extent. Remember, he was an authority figure in Egypt, who murdered a man, after all. He was a wanted man, what gives him the right or authority? Under who's power exactly is he there? And to what end?

Clearly, Moses doesn't think himself qualified, and he doesn't think the people of Israel will see him that way either.

The Israelites need proof (and perhaps Moses more so) that it is in fact God sending him. God's answer proves that and so much more: He says first, "I AM who I AM." What does that even mean? He's saying "I AM who I AM, I will be who I will be, I forever have, and forever will."

That's the thing about God – He always was, always is, and always will be. When He promises something, when He calls us, when He puts something in motion, it's because it's always been a part of His plan. He is always faithful, and will always fulfill in us what He has called us to. When we know who He is, His call on us becomes reassurance, and not a complete unknown.

As if to make that clear to Moses, He then tells Moses exactly what to say to the Israelites, reassuring His call on him even further. God says to him, "Say to the Israelites, "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, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation."

Not only that, but He then goes on to provide explicitly clear instruction on who to tell, and He reaffirms His promise to Israel. He promises again that He is who He says He is, and that He has not forgotten the promise that He made.

Let's take a look at the situation that Israel is in: enslaved to Egypt, forced to work in deplorable conditions, treated as less than human, all the while they still hold out hope that God will fulfill His promise to them. God tells Moses "I know what Israel is going through, and I will uphold my promise to them." God is telling Moses here that He will prevail over all of Egypt – to the point that they will even give Israel all manner of clothing and jewelry, gold and silver, so that they are well off when they leave!

If God calls you to something, will He not prepare you for it? Is He not faithful to fulfill the promises that He's made to us? It

looks different for each of us, God's preparation on us for our call; just because our neighbor's call looks different than ours does not mean that God is not calling us or preparing us too.

For myself, it took years of preparation before I was even ready to accept the call into ministry, and years of developing different skills and becoming accustomed to even the idea. For my wife Amanda (who's speaking next week), it was closer to a sudden revelation with a number of years of developing skills she likely wouldn't have needed otherwise. Our preparation and calling all looks different, but through it all, God is still faithful to ready us.

It's difficult, though, to accept that, when we don't fully recognize the scope of God's power. We may say we do, we may say that we trust God fully, but (I would argue that) for many of us, we still want to maintain control on our own. We'd rather fit God in our back pocket so that He serves us, and not rightfully the other way around, with us serving Him as Almighty and King. And so we worry more, "what if this doesn't work? What if I still can't do it?"

Now, I'm not sure if at this point Moses was in fact still unsure or afraid, or if he was just looking for an excuse to get out of what God has called him to, but he echoes this very same sentiment: "What if they don't believe me or listen to me? What if they say, "Yahweh didn't appear before you!"

I think we should know by now that God has an answer for everything. If you take a moment to recall, Moses spent his life after fleeing Egypt as a shepherd. This required having a staff, likely with a large hook on the top, called a shepherd's crook. This was the bread and butter of the shepherd's arsenal. They could use the hook to manage or catch sheep, they could use the staff as a whole to fend off predators, if they ever lost a sheep they could use it to part underbrush if they were in a particularly overgrown area, if they were on rough terrain, it was a very sturdy walking stick, and ultimately it was the symbol of power and authority and the means of control for the shepherd and the herd.

God says, "Ok Moses, throw it on the ground." "Let go of your own control, and trust me instead." Now, I don't imagine it

was all that difficult to drop the staff, but when it turns into the very symbol of authority of your enemy, things might get a little scary. After dropping the staff, and it turning into a snake, Moses runs from it, as any sane person would do when encountered by a venomous snake. Then God asks him to do the unthinkable: grab it by the tail. As any snake handler will tell you; never, EVER grab a snake by the tail, especially venomous ones. They WILL turn around and bite you. If you're going to pick up a snake, always go for just behind the head, at the base of the skull. But here, God explicitly tells Moses, "take it by the tail."

What God is calling us to do is not easy. He's asking us to give up control. In and of itself, that can be a terrifying beast. Letting go of control and allowing God to work is a daunting task – we do not know what God has planned exactly, and in letting go and essentially becoming blind to control, we may feel as though we are faced with a venomous snake. But then, God tells us to reach out. Moses is told to take the snake by the tail, and it suddenly turns back into his staff – his symbol of control, only this time, it's entirely by God's power. Once

we relinquish control, and are left empty handed, we begin to understand the scope of God's power all the more. In trusting in Him, we find ourselves operating under God's power, under His will, and we are safe from the errors of our own ways.

But for some of us, we find ourselves going back to the same methods, the same habits, trying to operate again under our own power. God gave Moses another sign, making his hand diseased – the hand he used to lead and control – as if to remind Moses that he is operating under God's will now.

As humans, we are fallen, we are inclined to rebel, to act on our own will – it's part of sinful nature. Sin is a disease, one Christ lived and died to remedy, and one He will return to eliminate when He makes all things new. But we cannot try to control what God is calling us to because – this is incredibly important – we would be operating out of a sinful nature. We would only trip up ourselves by doing this and so I urge us to let go of controlling life on our own, and relinquish that control to the Father.

I can talk all I want about letting go of control, but truth be told I'm not much of a talkative person. Sure I'll have a few words to say here and there, but it's never much. Believe it or not, that's one of the things that always had me apprehensive about entering vocational ministry. You need to be able to create conversation and connect with people in your church – something I was never very good at. It's a wonder I ever talked my wife into going out with me to begin with! This is where I really identify with Moses personally.

Moses tells God "I've never been a man of many words. I mumble, I stutter, I can't string together a decent sentence. You sure you want me?" This is the major area that Moses feels he falls short. He doesn't feel like he could convince anyone of what God is trying to do here. But of course, God tells him "I'm the one who gave you a mouth. I'll tell you what to say, all you need to do is speak."

Moses' inability to speak or be persuasive doesn't impede God, and neither do any of our shortcomings. God overcomes all of that. Remember how I told God that I didn't have the

skills or ability to be in ministry? Look what He did, where I am now. He overcame my doubts and shortcomings.

Sometimes, though, the truth of the matter is not that we feel inadequate, or don't have our identity solidly rooted, but maybe we just plain old don't wanna. Moses outright refuses to act, even under the Lord's power. He says, "send someone else!" And so God does, but not in his place. He sends Moses' brother to go with him, to be alongside him in this journey. Sometimes that's the final push we need. I know it was for me. It took about 4 years, 2 different pastors from separate churches, and one Wednesday morning chapel service at school that I had to speak at, in order for me to finally accept God's call on my life. I'm stubborn sometimes.

When I was just entering high school, my youth pastor tried to get me to join the church's youth leadership team, which I promptly avoided for the next 4 years, partially by switching youth groups. Then in my grad year, my youth pastor at the new youth group I was attending took me out for lunch and told me that God was calling me into ministry. Now I was

seriously considering it. Then, as a part of my Religious Studies class, I was required to speak for one of the Wednesday morning chapel services. It starts out as a pretty funny story which you can ask me about after the service, but a few days after speaking, I got a note from one of my classmates saying that they had decided to be baptised because of what I said that morning. That was the final nail in the coffin for me. That's when God really made me realize that He was, in fact, calling me into ministry. It just took some people coming along side me and helping guide me that way.

I wasn't sure what the whole process looked like though, but I knew the next step I needed to take. Sometimes, that's all God gives us. To Moses, God tells him to take his staff to perform all these signs. "One step at a time, Moses. Focus on the first task." And so he did. Eventually leading the Israelites out of Egypt, safe and free, God's chosen people.

But Moses and everyone with Him didn't get to see the end result. They were promised the land of Canaan, but they didn't get there. It was up to the next generation of Israelites to be

part of fulfilling God's promise. After Moses died, it was up to Joshua to lead the Israelites. But after Israel settled in the Promised Land, they didn't get to see the complete fulfillment of God's promise even then! They were merely foreshadowing what God was planning to do from the beginning in sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to live and die for us.

Sure, we know now how God fulfilled His promise to the Israelites. But it's not like we don't have a promise to look forward to: Christ will return to make all things new, to fulfill the Father's Kingdom. But we don't get to see that. At least, not yet. We will see that promise fulfilled, but for now, we live and act one step at a time, as God leads us. In the end, God prevails over all.

To close, I'll leave you with a question: what's holding us back from following God's call? What's stopping us from living fully in Him? What will it take for us to fully trust Him in all that we do?

Let's pray.

Father God, thank you for overcoming all of our shortfalls.

Thank you that even though we feel like we need to have it all together, you assure us that we don't need to, that you're great enough, powerful enough to make up for all of that.

Thank you for sending your Son, giving us the identity we need to abide by your will, so long as we rest in Him. Holy Spirit, I ask that you continue to guide us into the Father's will. In Jesus' name, AMEN