

Sunday 31st May 2015 AM Excuses! Excuses! - Exodus 3v10-4v17

Title: Excuses! Excuses! - Exodus 3v10-4v17

Purpose: To think through whether we are responsive to the call and claim of God on our lives
OR whether we are simply full of reluctance as was Moses.

INTRODUCTION

Star Trek

(Do a quick fire quiz on Star Trek - finally ask the question - Q. Whenever they get into battle or enter an asteroid field - what does the captain tell them to put up? Answer - the deflector shields.

And today, as we go through Exodus 3 and 4 and have a second visit to the burning bush we are going to see Moses raising his deflector shields numerous times before God.

The burning bush

Two weeks ago we looked at the burning bush and how it was an incredibly "disrupting sight" so much so that Moses chose to turn aside and look.

And we were saying that in order to not just seek God but also to find God you generally need something that is going to come into your life and take the form of some sort of "disrupting vision", something that will start the process of a "paradigm shift" for you - something that will challenge your "framework", your "grid" for thinking about things.

Q. Do you want to find God?

Now if I said to you: Q. Do you want to find God?

I am pretty sure that MANY of us - perhaps even EVERYONE of us - would say YES, "count me in"!

The bible says that when someone is searching it is because **God has first done the calling:**

- Romans 3 verse 11 (speaking of us in our natural state) says there is: "**no one who seeks God.**"
- Ephesians 2 verse 1 says that in our native state we were "**dead in transgressions and sins...**"
- Romans 8 verse 6 tells us that "**The mind of sinful man is death...**" that "**the sinful mind is hostile to God...**"
- Jesus says in John 15 verse 16 "**You did not choose me, but I chose you...**"

The bible also shows us that:

- not only is the SEEKING initiated and organised by Him
- but also the FINDING is similarly shaped and arranged by him

Q. What do I mean?

Well, if TRUE SEARCHING comes about by HEARING GOD'S CALL
then TRUE FINDING comes about by ACCEPTING GOD'S CALLING

To put that more succinctly - there is no true finding or knowing of God:

- without a personal vocation
- without receiving a new agenda for your life
- without ending up as someone who has had more than merely a burning bush, more than merely an experience

Called and immediately sent out

See the order here in this passage - Moses is first called and then he is immediately sent out.

You may say - "Well I'm not sure I really believe that".

A true search for God does not come from us because we are hostile to him and so what happens is that we find ways to get away from God - and the best way to get away from God is:

- to get a different kind of God
- to get a "counterfeit God"
- to get a "controllable God"

2 types of "controllable God"

Generally speaking there tend to be a couple of types or classifications of "controllable god's" that we manufacture in our fleshly seeking of God:

- **THE FIRST** - is to have a god who is all about morals, he is a god of "**ALL LAW**" and the way this works is along the lines that we work hard, live a good, a decent life AND WHEN WE DO - then this god is obligated now to bless us.

It really isn't anything more than a more sophisticated version of what the ancient Greeks and Romans did playing a game of appeasing the various god's in order to get what they wanted.

They were essentially massaging and manipulating the gods into doing what they wanted.

- **THE SECOND** - is to have a god who is all embracing, he is a god of "**ALL LOVE**" - one who will not complain at things, one who will not make demands.

In this situation, he has the title of "GOD" but you have "title on your own life" and you, by necessity, have the title of "LORD".

And you see, the true God who calls out to Moses at the burning bush, he does not fit either of these counterfeit moulds:

- he's a God who says: "Come" and at the same time says "do not come any closer"
- he's a God who both: "Invites" and at the very same time demands saying "take off your shoes" become as any servant would bare-footed.

He says: "Come to the dance" AND "dance to my tune"

Perhaps you are at the burning bush

I suspect that some of us here have a lot in common with Moses.

You are yourself at the burning bush:

- and there is a lot of WRESTLING with God going on - very much perhaps like Jacob of old who was brought by God himself to a point where God made it a place of decision - he had lived his life his own way for a long time and now God was reminding him about an earlier encounter that had happened some 20 years earlier.

God was giving him now a new name and a new agenda. No longer was Jacob going to be Mr Independent - now he was going to limp as a symbol of his permanent ongoing need for God Himself to be a rod whereby he could make it successfully through life.

- maybe for you - the is that WRESTLING and also a whole shed-load of RELUCTANCE deep down to receiving a calling from God.

In your heart you're saying - "Lord - I'm fine with the CALL - I like being here at the burning bush - it's a great experience - BUT JUST DON'T GIVE ME THE CALLING!!"

Our structure

Well let's look at the CALLING of Moses that went hand-in-hand with the CALL of Moses and we have this in 5 simple sections, as follows:

1. "Lord: Q. Who am I?"
2. "Lord: Q. Who are you?"
3. "Lord: Q. How will they ever believe me?"
4. "Lord: I can't speak very well!"
5. "Please, Lord: I don't want to go!!"

So then, #1:

1. " Lord: Q. Who am I?"

From Verse 7 to 9 we read in summary that it is all about God: "I have seen the misery... I have heard them crying...I am concerned...so I have come down...to bring them up out...".

And quite possibly Moses said to himself - "Well that's great! - That is wonderful news, that has really made my day! I can't wait to tell Zipporah the news over supper tonight!!"

However Verse 10 immediately comes in: "So now, go. I am sending you...".

Wow! I can imagine Moses suddenly stopping in his tracks and saying "Oh, sorry Lord - can you just repeat that last bit again - I don't think I heard it quite right" - to which God probably said "You heard me right, alright!!".

Actually this is "So very NT"!

Actually this is "So very NT" - Q. Do you remember how Matthew's gospel climaxes?

Matthew 28 verse 18-20 Jesus makes this wonderfully victorious statement: "Then Jesus came to them and said, **'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely **I am with you** always, to the very end of the age.'**"

It is exactly the same pattern that we have here in Exodus 3&4 with the BURNING BUSH - the CALL and the CALLING.

Let me read Verses 10 to 12 ***READ***

Who am I...

Putting ourselves in Moses' shoes, the question "Who am I..." doesn't sound too unreasonable, at least on the surface. After all he has been in the wilderness of Midian for the past 40 years and memories of the Egyptian court are a bit of a faded memory and also he probably was losing his fluency in the Egyptian language.

As well as this the task set before him seemed totally huge and impossible. The equivalent in our day might be something like being commissioned to go to Northern Korea and to take the people of that police state and safely transport them all across the border into the freedom that South Korea would represent.

God's answers

So God gives Moses 2 answers to his initial personal reservation:

- FIRST He says that **He will be with Moses**.

As they say "One with God is a majority" - and this is always God's answer whenever He calls someone into service:

- think of Joshua, when he takes up Moses mantle of leadership God says (Joshua 1 verse 5) "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you."

- think of Gideon, this is what we read in Judges 6: "The Lord turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" "But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." The Lord answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."

- one more, think of Jeremiah, when God was commissioning him, he said "I am only a child.." God said "do not be afraid...I am with you"

- SECONDLY - God gives him **a sign**.

*** READ Verse 12 *** "This will be the sign...."

You have to say it is a bit of a strange sign. It would be one thing if God said to Moses - just so that you are sure that everything will be fine and exactly as I have said it will be - when you get to back to Egypt, the first thing I will do it that as soon as you step foot back in the land you will see another bush and guess what it will also be burning and it won't burn up! OK!!

But this one speaks about the future - when everything has been done - then the sign is that this people that you have brought out, will worship me here on this very mountain.

Now I think that this sign is more useful that it might appear on the surface because this mountain Mount Sinai or Mount Horeb - is a place that is *NOT* on any route from Egypt to the promised land.

Moses is being given assurance ahead of time that when the pillar of fire takes them out into the desert and people will start to say - "What on earth are we doing Moses - don't you know that this is the desert and the road to the promised land of milk and honey is the other way!!".

It is so important - and I can't stress this too much, that God gives you **HANDHOLDS FOR THE FUTURE** so that when

the going gets tough you will be able to stand your ground and look back to what God said earlier on.

OK - let's move on then #1 "Lord: Who am I?" - now #2:

2. "Lord: Q. Who are you?"

Moses anticipates a question that the Israelites are likely to ask and that is "What is his name" and we get that very enigmatic sounding response:

Verse 14 "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

A person's name is very much linked in with that person's story and so in effect they are asking for some revelation of God that would authenticate Moses' claim to be speaking on his behalf.

I AM WHO I AM

The name is one which speaks of God's eternity, that He is a God who has no beginning and who has no ending. The title is made up from the Hebrew verb "to be". It speaks of the "IS-ness" of God that if you like, He is the one and only true CONSTANT which IS and always HAS BEEN and always WILL BE at the centre of everything.

It reminds us that God sees the end of things as well as the beginning because He is one who alone transcends time - with Him a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years a day.

2 speeches & 2 results

So as to demonstrate this reality - God then goes on immediately to give Moses a couple of sets of things:

- FIRST - He gives him a pair of takeaway ready-made speeches.

The first one is to deliver to the Israelites and then the second is for the King of Egypt.

- NEXT - He gives him a pair of responses.

He tells Moses that the Israelites will listen to him and that the King of Egypt will not and, as a result, will have to be compelled to respond by God's mighty hand.

He also learns that the Israelites will not go out of the land empty-handed in fact they are going to plunder the Egyptians.

If you think about that it is very fitting - 1) One because they have been subjected to slave labour and now God is redressing the balance and giving them their long-overdue wages. 2) Second, because God had centuries ago promised that this would happen to Abraham there in Genesis 15 verse 14 where he is told that "they will come out with great possessions." - So God is simply coming good on His earlier promise.

So it was a very significant revelation that God gave to Moses - to be told that I AM the alpha and the omega, that I AM the first and the last, the eternal God - and God then demonstrates the reality of this name by way of future provision and future prediction.

Well so far so good - God is meeting Moses questions and concerns with ample response and provision.

#3 then Moses continues:

3. "Lord: Q. How will they ever believe me?"

Moses objection here, once again, has got a level of reasonableness to it.

What he is saying is: "I am bound to meet people amongst the Israelites who are going to smell a rat and say: 'Well this all sounds too good to be true'"

Moses, just like us, is pretty risk averse here - he wants to be able to dot every i and cross every t before he begins.

God is very gracious to once again respond both POSITIVELY and also PATIENTLY. God gives him not one but three miraculous signs that he can do:

- a rod into a snake and back again
- a hand into one leprous and back again
- and finally if neither of these are striking enough - there's the fall back of Nile water into blood

And, if you remember, Jesus was willing to operate at the same level telling people that if his words did not seem to be enough proof then they had the miracles as well as additional evidence so that they need not be sceptical.

You do wonder, however, whether this is really the scepticism of the Israelites or Moses own unbelief that is really at issue here because Moses is *not* taking on board what God had just told him:

Verse 18 "The elders of Israel will listen to you..."

So very likely what is behind this question is Moses' own crisis faith and belief.

Well - 3 obstacles put in the way AND 3 obstacles firmly taken out of the way.

#4, the penultimate objection:

4. "Lord: I can't speak very well!"

Chapter 4 verse 10-12 *READ*****

It has been speculated as to whether Moses actually had a speech impediment since the Greek translation of the Hebrew text (what is called the **LXX**) translates "slow of speech and tongue" as "**with a stuttering voice and a slow tongue**".

- It could be that Moses is just saying - he's a bit slow witted and not very good at making quick responses to things.
- It could be he's expressing the fact that he is not really very fluent anymore in either **Hebrew OR Egyptian**.

What is interesting to note is the way that Moses says he has never been eloquent in the past OR since you have spoken to your servant:

- perhaps he is saying that this is a long-standing problem and it still prevails today
- perhaps this is a subtle way of saying that since you have called me to go you haven't done anything about this

Of course this is an easy excuse that you and I might make:

- don't ask me to get up and speak because it's not my thing
- don't ask me to read a passage in front of people because I'm not good that way
- don't ask me to pray out loud etc.

The point is that we only find out what we can do when we allow ourselves to take a first step forward. The reality is that gifts need to be developed.

A repeater NOT an orator

The fact was that God did not ask Moses to be an ORATOR - He asked him to be a REPEATER. God had already given him his first two speeches ahead of time.

God's patience

It is amazing how patient God is with Moses. Thus far he has come up with 4 objections and each time God has graciously answered them and given him extra support and extra help.

This time, and for the 4th time God says GO - but also He says "He will help him and teach him what to say".

By now Moses ought to be finished but he is getting onto thin ice with God - #5:

5. "Please, Lord: I don't want to go!"

He quickly knew he'd gone over the line

Well Moses didn't have to wait too long to know he'd crossed the line.

Verse 14 "The LORD's anger burned against Moses..."

This was a righteous anger against a persistent unbelief despite everything that God had done to reassure him and to provide for him above and beyond what he might need.

But realise this is ***NOT*** some sort of **DESTRUCTIVE** anger ***BUT*** it is a **DISCIPLINARY** anger.

Q. What do I mean? Well - Moses will now have to learn the hard way that **"UNBELIEF NEVER PAYS"**.

It is, generally speaking, *not* a good thing when God let's us have our own way.

Aaron will now be part of the picture and he will prove to be both an asset AND a definite liability. The honour that might have been Moses alone with now be shared and in time to come Moses will rue the day when he would stand behind Aaron and get him to do the talking.

One time when Aaron did all the talking a golden calf was the result!!

How much a smoke screen

Seeing Moses incredible reluctance does make you wonder how much of a smoke screen it all was.

Q. Behind all the questions and the objections was Moses basically unwilling to serve?

The only good to come out of this - Nature of prophesy

About the only good that comes out of this final objection is that we get a good insight into the nature of prophecy. Aaron was going to function as a prophet and Moses was going to function like God.

What we learn is that all the prophets, through whom we have gained that which is written down on the pages of scripture, stand in the counsel of God and they simply transmit what they hear from God and pass it on unchanged to the people.

Now this is not a new truth because this is stated in [2 Peter 1 verse 20&21](#) where we read:

" Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

Well let me conclude:

CONCLUSION

Time and again - Moses moves quickly to ACTIVATE his deflector shields:

- 1st time - the excuses revolves around ME "Q. Who am I?"

And God knocks it down and says: "I'll be there!"

- 2nd time - the excuses revolves around YOU "Q. Who are you (O God)?" "Q. What are your credentials?"

And God simply says I AM - I'm the Alpha and the Omega and I can see the future and the past right here in the present!

- 3rd time - the excuse is now THEM "Q. They will never believe me - surely it is too good to be true?"

So this time again God gives Moses what he needs - a whole bunch of tricks that he can perform.

- 4th time - from this point the excuses have to become a little more nuanced and sophisticated the excuse now is THE FIT "This doesn't fit because I can't speak well, I have an impairment"

And God says - did you forget that I made you mouth - and by the way I've already given you 2 ready to go speeches.

- 5th time - Moses is now at the bottom of the barrel and is rather desperate and it is THE DESIRE - "Lord you see I just don't feel like it - I don't seem to have the desire to be able to do this!"

I wonder whether Jesus felt like it in the Garden of Gethsemane?

I wonder whether he felt like it in the palace of Pilate?

I wonder if he felt like it on the Calvary's hillock?

Yet Jesus said: "Here I am - I delight to do your will!"

Let us pray that the Lord will help us to receive not just his call to salvation but his calling to service. AMEN