

**Exodus 3:7-4:31 – Knowing God Saves Us from Ourselves**

- I. Introduction:
- A. Have you ever noticed the self-destructive effects of self-obsession?
  - B. Think about all the ways that self-obsession destroys lives:
    - 1. Obsession with looks leads to constant examination in the mirror, constant worry over what you eat, rigorous workout routines, always having to shop for the right clothes, constant examination of the way others look for comparison. This leads to shame and hiding when we don't live up. We get so focused on ourselves that we can't enjoy friendships because we are so insecure.
    - 2. Obsession with grades leads to studying constantly, never enjoying anything because we always feel we need to get back to studying, frequent ups and downs depending on the grades we make, tireless striving that never produces lasting joy, loneliness since we have shunned people, isolation in times of need since we don't have friends to support us.
    - 3. Obsession with having fun leads us to constantly be seeking the next thrill neglecting responsibilities and friendships that have becoming boring or difficult. This leads to shallow friendships that become plastic or fake when crisis comes.
    - 4. Obsession with comfort, relationally, financially, materially, or in terms of our schedule, leads us to a rigid life that lacks joy.
  - C. Our obsession with self leads us to feel isolated, alone, fearful, ashamed, and worried.
  - D. When we are obsessed with ourselves, we miss out on seeing who God is and the great mission he has called us to.
  - E. Our calling as Christians is to God and for a mission.
- II. **Basic Message**: We must be saved from our obsession with self and to a relationship centered on God resulting in a kingdom mission.
- III. **Organizational Sentence**: This morning, we will see Moses ask God 5 questions and then we will see the effect this encounter with God has on Moses. So, our passage breaks down into 6 parts.
- A. Context: Thus far in the book of Exodus, we have seen that God's chosen people, Israel, have been opposed by Pharaoh and the nation of Egypt. The Egyptians have enslaved them and even murdered their children. But, God has seen their troubles, heard their cries for help, remembered his promises to Abraham their father that he would bless them, and has begun the process of deliverance by raising up a leader to deliver them.
    - 1. However, this leader sought to deliver them apart from God's empowerment, and instead, acted unjustly, murdering an Egyptian and losing the respect of Israel.
    - 2. Moses, this future leader, fled to the wilderness to escape punishment from Pharaoh, and in God's providential mercy, found a man of God and a family. However, he laments that he is not with his people who are suffering.

3. But, God is not finished with Moses, but instead calls Moses to a mountain where he reveals his holy presence to Moses so that Moses sees his sinfulness.
4. Our passage today picks up the story where we left off. Moses is on the Mountain of God, Mount Sinai, also known as Horeb.

IV. Question #1: Who am I? (3.7-12)

- A. After revealing his holy presence to Moses, God begins to explain his plans to deliver Israel. God tells Moses that he is going to do just as he promised Abraham he would do: bring Israel into possession of the promise land, a prosperous land, by first delivering them from slavery to Egypt.
- B. God also tells Moses that he is going to send Moses to lead this deliverance.
- C. But immediately, Moses' self obsession stands in the way. Earlier, Moses responded to God who called his name from the bush by saying, 'Here I am,' meaning, 'Here I am, ready to serve you.' However, now that God has clarified the mission he is sending Moses on, Moses is not so sure God picked the right man for the job.
- D. Moses no doubt has been plagued by his failure earlier in his life when he killed the Egyptian. It has been almost 40 years since that day, but he still feels like that failure has disqualified him from carrying out this task.
  1. Moses could have been plagued by self doubt in his ability. Maybe he never feels like he measures up.
  2. Moses could have been plagued by guilt thinking that he is a moral failure incapable of leading.
  3. Whatever went on in his head, Moses is obsessed with himself. He has turned inward and only considered who he is when God explained the mission.
- E. What we see in Exodus with Moses and Israel, and later what we see is true of all Christians, is that God delivers us from sin and slavery and to him and his mission. God saves both *from* and *to*.
- F. It is common for us as Evangelicals to focus only on the *from*. Our understanding of the gospel is often limited to the fact that God saves us from sins. We think that thanks to Jesus, we are now forgiven and we just need to go out and be good from now on. We see the gospel as simply the bridge to eternal life.
- G. The gospel tells us that we are saved from our sins into a relationship with God as part of a community of redeemed sinners whom God has set apart to demonstrate and invite people to the kingdom of God. We are saved *from* our sin for a mission.
- H. However, we get so caught up in ourselves, that we miss out on the tremendous blessing of living in the freedom of the gospel which results in sharing the gospel and serving others.
- I. How does God deal with Moses' self obsession? He doesn't focus on Moses. In fact, he takes the focus off of Moses. He doesn't tell Moses that Moses is really capable or that he is a lot more put together than Moses thinks.
  1. This is what we want God to do. When we fear obeying God by loving others radically, getting out of our comfort zones where we obsess about ourselves, we want God to tell us how great we really are. We want an ego boost. We want self-esteem.
  2. This is what our culture tells us we need. Dr. Phil tells us that we just need confidence. We just need to believe in ourselves.

- J. On the contrary, what we need to know is who God is. This is why God tells Moses: “I will be with you.”
  - K. Moses’ success in his mission does not rest with his ability, but with the God who is with him.
  - L. God was with Moses in a unique way. In the Old Testament, God did not dwell with and empower just any believer. We Christians live under the New Covenant where God dwells with us in a special way. Christ purchased gifts for us on the cross and then after he ascended into heaven he gave us the gift of the Spirit who distributes these gifts to us when we believe. We have the God of Moses dwelling in us, empowering us in the same mission!
  - M. The final verse in this section seems odd to us. God offers Moses a sign that he will be with him, but the sign doesn’t come until after Moses completes his task. God tells Moses that after Moses leads Israel out of Egypt, they will serve/worship God on the same mountain. The sign is really the thing promised!
  - N. In many ways, this is true of Jesus as well. God has promised to save his people, and the sign that God has saved Israel is when they see the Messiah. We Christians have been promised salvation on the last day, and the sign that this is true comes when Jesus returns! It is an odd way of assuring us, but this is the nature of faith. Faith is being assured that what we hope for will happen. It is living without seeing the promises fulfilled but trusting that they will be. It is not the strength of the faith that matters but the strength of the object of faith. This is why we can cry out, “I believe, help my unbelief.”
  - O. **Applications:**
    - 1. As you look at what God has called you to do, love others sacrificially, share the gospel, serve the poor, serve the church, etc., are you often prohibited by your personal obsessions? Is your concern for grades and career getting in the way of loving others in a significant way?
    - 2. Is self-esteem a big concern for you? You need to look at who God is and know that he is with you.
- V. Question #2: Who are you? (3.13-22)
- A. Moses begins to get a clue, but he is still obviously feeling insecure. He is worried about this mission even though God says that he will be with Moses.
  - B. Moses asks God, “What shall I tell the elders of Israel when they ask your name?”
    - 1. God has already told Moses who he is, he is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So, is Moses stupid, or is something else going on?
    - 2. Names had tremendous significance back then. A person’s name often implied who they were in character. Most likely, when Moses asked God’s name, he was asking the nature, being, and character of God. Essential, Moses wants to know who this God is.
  - C. There is debate about God’s answer. Is God’s answer found in verse 14 or verse 15? Is God’s answer, ‘I AM WHO I AM,’ or is it, ‘The LORD’ (YHWH), or is it simply, ‘I AM’?
    - 1. The three phrases are all related because what we translate ‘The Lord’ is in Hebrew what we call the *Tetragrammaton*, YHWH. These four letters make up the divine name, which has already been used in Genesis.

2. The four letters, YHWH, are connected to the Hebrew verb 'to be'. There is debate about what YHWH means. It clearly means something like, 'He who is' or 'I am the one who is.'
  3. So in these verses, God clearly answers Moses' question by saying simply that he is the God who is. He is the God who is unchangeable and self-existent. He is the one true God who is not limited by one character trait.
- D. There is also debate about whether or not the Israelites and Moses knew this divine name previously.
1. YHWH is used in Genesis, but that might be because Moses used the name retroactively. It could be that Abraham did not know this name of God.
  2. If the fathers did not know this name, and subsequently the elders of Israel in Egypt did not either, it would seem odd that God told Moses this name in response to Moses' question. Moses clearly was afraid that Israel would not believe that he had met God, and so he wanted to be able to give them something assuring them that his experience is real. If they did not know this name, Moses telling them his name would not help him.
  3. So, we are not sure if they knew the name or not. It could be that this is a new way of revealing himself to his people and thus, "this is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations." Or, it could be that they knew this name, and now Moses is getting acquainted with God and will have his credibility bolstered with this name.
- E. The important point is that God has become the focus. What matters here is who God is, not who Moses is.
- F. Now that the focus is back on God, he restates what he has already said, and adding a command to first go to the elders of Israel before going to Pharaoh. God sends Moses to the elders of Israel to tell them that their God will bring them out of Egypt and into the promise land.
- G. God also reveals the future to Moses, thus proving who he is.
1. God also assures Moses that his mission will be successful in that the elders will listen to him and request that they may leave to worship God in the wilderness, probably at this mountain.
  2. He also tells Moses that Pharaoh will not let them go, showing already his sovereignty even over men's hearts.
  3. Finally, he explains that it will be through his mighty acts of power, with signs and wonders, that God will deliver Israel from the Egyptians.
  4. The result will be a total victory for Israel as their women will plunder Egypt's riches, requesting treasures from the Egyptians who will freely give them.
- H. God reveals himself to Moses, and the picture is awesome.
1. God is who he is.
  2. God is mysterious.
  3. God is unchanging.
  4. God is independent.
  5. God is in total control.
  6. God is powerful.
  7. God is faithful.
- I. **Application:**

1. In his grace, God continues to help Moses overcome his obsession with self by revealing to Moses who he is. When we are trapped in self-examination, we need to be brought into God's presence to look upon his face.
2. We must see that our mission is only possible when we are connected to and focused on who God is rather than on who we are.

VI. Question #3: What if they don't believe me? (4.1-9)

- A. Despite God's assurance that Moses will be successful, he cannot get over himself. He is either afraid of failure and humiliation or he is that insecure.
- B. God provides two signs immediately that show Moses that he is powerful. He also provides these two signs to Moses to use when he goes before the elders of Israel.
- C. If those do not work, God promises to work another sign, the sign of turning the Nile into blood, to finally convince them.
- D. Now, everyone is familiar with the 10 plagues that Moses will later perform against the Egyptians.
  1. However, if we read the text carefully, it is more accurate to describe them as signs. And there are not 10 of them but 11 or even 12 if you count the leprous hand. There are a few cases where certain events are called plagues (Ex. 9.3, 14, 15; 11.1), but more often they are called signs and wonders (7.3; 8.23; 10.1,2; 4.21; 11.9, 10).
  2. There is a significant difference in calling them signs rather than plagues. It is true that God did judge Egypt and thus they are plagues, but more importantly, they are signs. We will find later that Pharaoh did not know the Lord.
  3. The signs were meant to show and prove to Pharaoh and the Egyptians that YHWH is the one true God.
- E. The first sign given to Moses is to turn the staff into a serpent. The serpent was worshipped by the Egyptians as a symbol of wisdom and healing. By turning the staff into a serpent and then back, God shows his power of one of the Egyptian gods.
- F. The second sign given to Moses was the leprous hand. Leprosy was a feared sickness due to its contagious nature. An infectious skin disease like this could be spread easily and was not treatable. For Moses' hand to be sickened and healed again showed God's power over nature and corruption.
- G. These signs authenticated Moses as a true prophet, just like Jesus' later signs and wonders authenticated him as a true prophet.
- H. The third and final sign of this incident is related to the first plague. Moses was to take the Nile River water which flowed with the blood of Hebrews victims and pour it on the ground. In pouring it out, it would turn to blood.
- I. Moses obviously had no part to play in these miracles. God could have used anyone to accomplish these things, and this is just the point. Moses has no reason to be self-absorbed because it is God who is at work.
- J. **Application:**
  1. It is a strange thing that we doubt our ability to work effectively for God's kingdom. When God can perform miracles, how can we doubt his ability to use us?
  2. We must get at the root of why we do not engage in God's mission. It is rarely that we doubt he can do great things. Yet we continue to allow our self-absorption to get in the way of joyful obedience.

- V. Question #4: How can I possibly accomplish this? (4.10-12)
- A. Finally Moses reveals an insecurity. He fears that he is not eloquent enough to talk to the elders and to Pharaoh.
  - B. Many suggest that he is concerned that his Hebrew and/or Egyptian is rusty after 40 years and he is afraid that he will sound stupid.
  - C. Some suggest that Moses had a speech impediment.
  - D. Either way, the objection is not valid. God responds by rhetorically asking Moses, 'Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?' Obviously it is.
  - E. God's point is clear: I made you and I can make you speak well.
  - F. So, God again commands Moses to go and tells him again that he will be with Moses.
  - G. **Application:**
    1. We can throw up many objections when it comes to obeying God, especially when it comes to evangelism. At the end of the day, God can and give us the resources to be obedient.
    2. Caution: This does not mean that we just go without preparing our minds to understand the gospel and to be prepared to answer intellectual questions. The point is that it is ultimately God's Spirit who changes people. We are to be faithful, trusting God to work.
- VI. Question #5: Won't you please send someone else? (4.13-17)
- A. After all his objections have been dealt with, Moses' self absorption is revealed. He simply doesn't want to go. He would rather remain comfortable with his family in Midian. He would rather not face possible danger and humiliation. He is comfortable, and he doesn't really want to do this.
  - B. This kindles God's anger. Essentially, Moses loves the world and the things of the world. We are guilty of this too. At the end of the day, the reason we don't want to live kingdom lives is because we have more important priorities that deal with making us happy and comfortable.
  - C. God tells Moses that he will provide Aaron, Moses' brother, to speak for him. Moses appears not to want to go because he doesn't really truth that God's mission will bring him more joy. He doesn't trust that God will help him speak.
  - D. God mercifully provides a helper to Moses, but this helper later turns out to be a struggle for Moses.
  - E. Verse 16 is an odd verse, because God tells Moses that Aaron shall speak for Moses, but Moses shall be as God to Aaron. What is going on here?
    1. The idea is, in the same way that Aaron will mediate between Moses and the people, Moses will mediate between God and Aaron.
    2. Moses is still God's man even though Aaron will do much of the work for Moses.
    3. God does not abandon Moses even though he is angry with him for his lack of faith.
  - F. **Application:**
    1. Friendship with the world makes us enemies with God. Good things often become obstacles to the things we are supposed to do. Family can often become such a priority that we neglect serving our neighbors. Grades can become such a priority that we have no non-Christian friends. Saving money to provide for a family becomes such a priority that we do not give generously to those in need.

2. God's mercy is great. Even when our self absorption controls us, God does not forsake us but breaks through to us and saves us from ourselves unto a mission. What we need is repentance.

VII. The final result of the encounter: Moses returns to Egypt. (4.18-31)

- A. Moses stops asking God questions, and finally agrees to his mission. He first returns to his father-in-law Reuel/Jethro in order to request leave. He honors his father-in-law even though he knows he must go.
  1. Some point out that Moses does not exactly clarify to Jethro what he is going to do, but rather gives an incomplete picture of his mission.
  2. However, it is possible that the phrase 'to see whether they are still alive' is another way of saying 'to check on their welfare.'
- B. God also tells Moses another reason that he is not to fear. The men who sought his life for the murder are dead. He will not be punished for this crime.
- C. Moses finally sets out. He takes his family, which has now grown to at least two sons, and he takes the staff that God commanded him to take.
- D. After setting out, God again tells Moses to work the signs that he was given.
- E. God also says something in verse 21 that again affirms God's absolute sovereignty in all things. He tell Moses that he will harden Pharaoh's heart. God will turn Pharaoh's heart against Moses so that he will not let Israel go. We find out later that God does this to show his power and glory.
- F. Verse 22 is a significant verse because we see Israel being called God's firstborn son. Israel collectively is called the son of God. The idea here is that it has a special relationship to God in which God richly blesses the nation, but also, God disciplines his son.
  1. We will see this metaphor carried out throughout Scripture. A number of different implications are drawn from this relationship. But what we see here is that God loves his son. The Exodus is about God delivering his beloved son for his glory.
  2. However, Jesus Christ, the true son of God is shown to be in continuity with Israel on this point. Jesus is the true son of God, the true Israel. Only Jesus lives up to the covenant God made with Israel. Only Jesus could perfectly represent God to the world and live as a royal son with the inheritance of God. Only Jesus could bring others into the family of God by his death and resurrection.
- G. We also see in verse 23 that God tells Moses to warn Pharaoh that if he does not let Israel, God's son, go, then he will take Pharaoh's firstborn. This is just. Pharaoh has enslaved and killed a number of God's sons, and so God will take Pharaoh's son.
- H. Verses 24-26 are some of the most confusing and difficult verses in the whole Pentateuch. No one is exactly sure what is going on here, but most everyone is convinced that the point is the importance of the rite of circumcision. After discussing God's firstborn son and Pharaoh's firstborn son, now we see Moses' son, possibly his firstborn.
  1. Moses is traveling to Egypt.
  2. God comes in some way to kill him, possibly as the angel of the Lord.
    - a. Moses is made deathly ill.
    - b. Moses is attacked in someone and incapacitated.
    - c. Zipporah must act since Moses cannot or will not.

3. Zipporah circumcises one of Moses' sons.
  4. She touches someone's feet with the foreskin:
    - a. Moses' feet as a rebuke on Moses, or
    - b. Moses' son's feet as part of a circumcision ritual.
  5. Zipporah expresses anger at Moses for not circumcising the son himself, either in the past or in the present. Clearly, the expression 'bridegroom of blood' implies that she is disgusted by this rite and blames her marriage to Moses as the reason she must be a part of this.
  6. God relents and does not kill Moses.
- I. One obvious implication of this story is the importance of the covenant sign. God cared that Moses had not given the covenant sign God assigned to Abraham to Moses' son.
  - J. **Application:**
    1. Christians must be baptized as believers.
    2. Christians must join the community of God's people, the church. God is not pleased with individual Christians who don't associate with a local church.
  - K. The end of this section comes with Aaron hearing from God and obediently coming out to the wilderness to meet Moses. Moses had left Midian and was heading to Egypt. He was on his way at Horeb when Aaron reached him. Moses relates what had happened as well as the mission he has been sent on. They return to Egypt together, and Aaron tells the elders what Moses had told him to tell them. They performed the signs to the elders, and the people believed and worshipped God.
  - L. **Application:**
    1. Remember that God's mission will be carried out.
    2. God will be successful.

#### VIII. Conclusion:

- A. It is in the gospel that we are saved from self absorption. God has saved us in Christ not because of how great we are, but because of how great he is. The gospel tells us that we are valuable to God and that he is with us through the Holy Spirit.
- B. The gospel calls us to faith in Christ. It calls us out of independence, worldliness, shame, guilt, fear, worry, and isolation and into a relationship with God by the blood of Jesus.
- C. The gospel turns us into witnesses empowered by the Spirit of God.
- D. The gospel brings us the joy of salvation.
- E. We cannot get caught up in our selfish distractions and miss the joyful mission of God. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. Our mission is to invite the world to worship God. Don't miss the greatest joy that can be found. When we give up comforts and vanities, empty goals and heavy burdens, we can find abundant life.