

Not delivered because of Moses

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[0 : 00] So we're reading from chapter 4 to start with, starting at verse 1. So this is just after God's spoken to Moses, and he's responding to him about his call to go to Egypt.

Then Moses answered, But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, The Lord did not appear to you. The Lord said to him, What is that in your hand? He said, A staff. And he said, Throw it on the ground. So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it. But the Lord said to Moses, Put out your hand and catch it by the tail.

So he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand, that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.

Again the Lord said to him, Put your hand inside your cloak. And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. Then God said, Put your hand back inside your cloak.

[1 : 13] So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. If they will not believe you, God said, or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign.

If they will not believe even these two signs, or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.

But Moses said to the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.

Then the Lord said to him, Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.

But he said, O my Lord, please send someone else. Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and he said, Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite?

[2 : 20] I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you both what to do.

He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. And take in your hand this staff, with which you will do the signs. So now we're moving on to chapter 5, starting at verse 15.

This is just after Moses has failed to compel Pharaoh to let the people go the first time, and Pharaoh has taken it out on the Israelites.

5.15 Then the foreman of the people of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, Why do you treat your servants like this? No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, Make bricks, and behold, your servants are beaten, but the fault is in your own people.

But he said, You are idle, you are idle, that is why you say, Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord. Go now and work, no straw will be given to you, but you must still deliver the same number of bricks.

[3 : 35] The foreman of the people of Israel saw that they were in trouble when they said, You shall by no means reduce the number of your bricks, your daily task each day. They met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for them as they came out from Pharaoh.

And they said to them, The Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us. Then Moses turned to the Lord and said, O Lord, why have you done evil to this people?

Why did you ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all. But the Lord said to Moses, Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh, for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.

God spoke to Moses and said to him, I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name, the Lord, I did not make myself known to them.

I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel, whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant.

[4 : 55] Say therefore to the people of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.

I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give to you for a possession. I am the Lord. Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery.

So the Lord said to Moses, Go in, tell Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to let the people of Israel go out of his land. But Moses said to the Lord, Behold, the people of Israel have not listened to me.

How then shall Pharaoh listen to me, for I am of uncircumcised lips? But the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron and gave them a charge about the people of Israel and about Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

[6 : 03] That's the word of the Lord. Well, good morning, everyone.

Will you please pray with me? Well, Father, as you've encouraged our hearts through that song that we have every reason to praise you, I pray that you would convince our hearts through your word now that we have every reason to praise you.

We ask for your help in understanding what you're saying. In Jesus' name, amen. Well, I was once catching up with some missionary friends one time pretty recently, and towards the end of the conversation, I wanted to pray with them.

I cared deeply about them, and I cared about what they were doing, the spread of the gospel. I knew that they would appreciate it. I knew that the Lord would want me not just talking about him, but talk to him.

I knew I had authority to pray. Jesus has opened the way for us to go into his throne room of grace, and yet I kept my mouth shut. God's calling is not unique to those of us who are called to vocational ministry.

[7 : 30] Calling is something you can claim as a believer in Jesus. A phrase the Apostle Paul repeatedly uses to summarise every Christian's life is this.

Ephesians 4 verse 1. I therefore urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. That's all of us.

We're called to speak and make choices that represent Jesus in all of life, in the church, in the world, in private, in public.

We're all called, and what a privilege. What a privilege we have. You notice a visitor here this morning, and you think, I really hope they feel welcome here.

Maybe I'll go say hello after the service, but then your next thought is, what if they just want to be left alone? What if they've been here for months, and I embarrass myself?

[8 : 36] Oh, look, Chez is sitting two rows away from them. Oh, Lord, put it on the heart of Chez to welcome that visitor.

Your child comes home from school, and they're asking why their friends don't believe in Jesus, and you're lost for words.

You're just, you're not quite sure. You're just suddenly in this moment, this teaching moment, and you want to read the Bible and pray with your family, and you just don't know where to start.

It's just chaos in the morning. It's chaos just trying to get them clean and fed. What will my wife think of me when I bumble and fumble my way through this? She's going to see how much little I know about God.

And we just, we want to do it, and we can know God's call to represent him. We can be genuinely concerned for people.

[9 : 48] We love them. We're genuinely concerned for Jesus to be known and loved. We know his promises. We have his guidance in his word, and yet we can keep our mouths shut.

I don't know if you can resonate with me. Maybe I'm the only one. I take lots of comfort and courage from Moses, well, not really from Moses, but from what we see of Moses' encounter with the Lord in chapter 4.

It's one of the things God used me to push me into pastoral ministry. I think we're too prone to think of Moses as this.

Well, he is, sorry, let me rephrase that. He is a giant of a man of faith. Moses. That goes without saying. But do we consider how?

How did he become a giant of a man of faith? We might just think he was born that way. We might think it was his Egyptian education. He had every privilege.

[10 : 59] But look at him here in these early chapters. He sounds as pathetic as I do. He seems to be deeply traumatized by his failure when his people rejected him that first time.

Chapter 3, verse 11, he says, Who am I? I'm a nobody. I'm a nobody now. I was a somebody. I thought I was. I'm a nobody. I thought I was. Chapter 3, verse 13, what shall I say to them?

I don't have enough knowledge of you, God. Chapter 4, verse 1, the Israelites, they won't believe me. He's terrified of their rejection again.

They won't follow me. I'm not a persuasive person. Chapter 4, verse 10, I speak not good. And then chapter 4, verse 13.

Oh, Lord, just please send someone else. There's a book on true biblical spiritual manhood that I found really helpful.

[12 : 13] And one of the authors tells his story. And as a kid when he grew up, he's American, so he was learning baseball as a kid. And he kept striking out.

He wasn't very good with the bat. And he learnt something. If he doesn't swing, sometimes he can just walk to first base. And he was reflecting as an adult.

He learnt that when it comes to important things in life, like being a spiritual leader in the home and in the church, he learnt that it was safer not to take a swing than to be exposed as a failure.

And it struck a chord with me. I think it describes Moses here. He is called to enormous privilege.

He's going to be the lead man in God delivering his people, but he doesn't want to take a swing. So before we get to Yahweh powerfully working through Moses, we've got chapters 4 to 6.

[13 : 19] We need these chapters to see something really, really important. Moses wasn't great in himself. Israel was not delivered because of Moses.

Moses did become great. Now what's the key to that? And I think we're all afraid. I think some people show it by shrinking back.

Well, I think other people show it by you just need, we need to be seen as someone great. I reckon that's an expression, it's fear as well. We all need this.

What's the key to Yahweh powerfully working through Moses? I want to point out two things we see. In chapter 4, he patiently lifts Moses' eyes to Yahweh's sufficiency.

And then we're going to see in chapter 5 and 6, Moses went deeper in knowing Yahweh's covenant love. So I hope you have chapter 4 open in front of you to follow along.

[14 : 40] So Yahweh has revealed his self-sufficient power at the burning bush. He's given Moses a sketch of what's going to happen. Often he calls people going, just trust me, I'm not going to tell you what's going to happen, just obey.

But he tells him how it's going to work out. And he promises, the Israelite elders will listen to your voice. And then chapter 4, verse 1, look, God, they won't listen to me.

The Israelites, they won't believe you've sent me. Now how does Yahweh react? Are you calling me a liar, Moses? I just told you, they will listen to you.

For each of Moses' fears and objections, notice how patient Yahweh is. He won't let Moses off the hook. He's calling him to obedience, but he is so patient.

In verses 2 to 10, he gives Moses three powerful signs to show the Israelite elders that God is indeed present through Moses.

[15 : 49] And he gives those first two right then and there to reassure Moses himself. Who else can turn an inanimate piece of wood, a staff, into a living serpent and then back again?

Again. The snake Pharaoh wears on his crown. You think you're a powerful Pharaoh? Look what Yahweh can do. The diseases Pharaoh had no control over, Yahweh can afflict them and cure the incurable.

The Nile, which is the life spring of Egypt, Yahweh can turn to death at his choosing. He's the source of the Nile.

I think Yahweh isn't disagreeing with Moses' lack of confidence. You're worried that people won't respect you or listen to you because you're not impressive. I'm someone impressive.

Yep. Yep. Yep. Correct. Good analysis. But I am someone impressive. I'm someone worth listening to. And I will work signs through to demonstrate that I'm present.

[17:04] You've got that weak staff, your weak hand. I'm going to show my power. But then he's still reluctant, verse 10.

Oh, my Lord, I'm not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I'm slow of speech and of tongue. I don't have the gifting. I don't have the necessary gifts for this task. Imagine if you were invited on Q&A; and you knew the topics was very controversial Christian stuff and you knew that it's televised and maybe people around the world are watching.

I would be pretty scared. Moses is being asked to go talk to Pharaoh. It's fair enough that he's scared.

And I don't think he's falsely humble. He's an 80-year-old man. He knows himself. He knows his strengths and weaknesses. And even since this encounter has happened, it's not like this revelation of God has suddenly zapped him with abilities.

[18:16] Even since you've spoken to your servant, I can't speak well. I don't have the gifts. Have you read my CV? Didn't you read it?

But again, Yahweh's patience in taking Moses' eyes off himself and his natural abilities to Yahweh's capabilities. He doesn't disagree with his assessment. I wonder if we should learn from how the Lord responds here.

When someone, a brother or sister, is really afraid of some task, they need to have some difficult conversation or something, act of service, and they're like, I can't do this.

Isn't your gut response to go, yes, you can? I've seen you do things like this before. Maybe we should go, yep, no, you can't. But look at the Lord. Who has made man's mouth?

Is it not I, Yahweh? Look at what I can do, Moses. I make things from nothing.

[19:29] And then he gives this reassuring promise. I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak. What a gentle, reassuring promise.

As you struggle to speak to your children's hearts as a parent, I will teach you, mum and dad. I'll teach you. Now, Moses' phrasing in verse 13 sounds respectful.

Apparently, I think ASV has probably interpreted it a bit. Apparently, it's more like, Lord, you can choose anyone you want. Really, he's saying in context, choose someone else.

It doesn't even make sense. You can choose whoever you want. He's chosen you. Please choose someone else. And that kindles, there's some sparks of the Lord's anger.

Think of the privilege Moses had. You're going to be the star role in me delivering my people out of slavery. I've told you you will succeed.

[20:46] I've shown you my powerful signs. I have lifted your eyes to who I am as creator of this world. I'm active in this world. I've promised I'm going to teach you every step of the way.

And in light of all this, Moses isn't believing enough to obey. His disobedience comes from unbelief. He's just flat out refusing. Can't you resonate with Moses?

There's many words I regret coming out of his mouth, but there's so many regrets of not speaking when I knew I should. Aaron's on his way.

Aaron's on his way. He doesn't remove the responsibility from Moses, but he does bring assistance. It's interesting to note as the story goes on that Aaron's support role seems to just fade out of view.

[21:58] I think we get a glimpse of Moses growing in his faith, in his obedience. Moses believed there were too many barriers to being powerfully used by Yahweh.

I'm a nobody. I'm not someone people listen to. I'm not gifted. I don't want to fail again. I'm not gifted. I think there's a strange part in the story that suggests that Moses didn't recognize the deepest barrier, the deepest problem to being used by God.

Let me read it to you. We didn't read it this morning. Chapter 4, verse 24 to 26. At a lodging place on the way, the Lord met him and sought to put him to death.

Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it and said, Surely you are bridegroom of blood to me. So he let him alone. It was then that she said, a bridegroom of blood because of the circumcision. Strange. I don't really have time to go into all the detail.

[23 : 12] I think what's going on is this. He's on the way to Egypt. And Moses' life is in critical danger. Maybe he's severely ill.

Something's going on. And his wife, Zipporah, somehow recognizes the spiritual cause. Not saying that all illness is spiritual cause, but sometimes.

Now their son, Gershon, wasn't circumcised. Zipporah recognizes that that's the problem, circumcises him and touches Moses' feet, probably because he's incapacitated.

Moses should have done the circumcision. So it's probably identifying Moses with the yak in the blood. It's strange. It is strange. But just don't miss the forest for the trees.

Circumcision. The Lord says in Genesis, You will be cut off from my people if you do not circumcise your sons.

[24 : 19] It is the mark of belonging to God. Moses hasn't circumcised his son. Talk about disobedience. You think your capacity is the biggest problem.

I think this story is here to show, Moses, your persistent, conscious disobedience, that's the biggest problem.

But again, see his patience and his provision. Through blood, he cleanses Moses. And I think this life-threatening encounter, I think it changes Moses because we get to chapter 6, chapter 6 verse 12.

He's not talking about his capacity anymore. He's saying, I am of uncircumcised lips. I'm unclean. He says it twice.

Chapter 6 verse 30. I am of uncircumcised lips. I think this is a teaching moment. He realises his disobedience is the biggest barrier to Yahweh working through him.

[25 : 35] But even here, Yahweh provides for him. He knew his disobedience before he called him. He knows our disobedience before he called us.

And we've got much better blood today to cleanse us. So I think we've been shown the first key to Yahweh powerfully working through Moses.

Lift your eyes from your fitness, your suitability for the task, Moses. Lift your eyes to my sufficiency, my provision, who I am. Yahweh is so patient.

He doesn't let us off the hook. He's calling us to obedience. But he's so patient. His provision.

He is sufficient. He doesn't promise his presence to adequate people. If you feel inadequate, great, because he promises his presence to you.

[26 : 44] Yahweh is sufficient. Lift your eyes onto him, even in your disobedience. He can provide for that too. Now, I think we see the second key to Yahweh powerfully working through Moses in chapters 5 and 6.

He returns to Egypt. He gathers the elders. He performs the signs. And as the Lord said, they believe him. They bow down and worship. And then what?

Success. No, failure. It's a bit of a surprise, isn't it? He fails again. Moses and Aaron, they burst into Pharaoh's courts.

They demand that the Pharaoh let them go. And Pharaoh suspects that their real motive is to give all these slaves a holiday because they're lazy. He removes the straw from making bricks but demands the same number of bricks.

And the Israelite foremen get beaten. They appeal to Pharaoh. And they realize their lives are in danger. And then they call Yahweh to judge Moses and Aaron for putting them in this position.

[28 : 03] Moses fails again. Pharaoh and Israel reject him. The insecure, incompetent Moses we saw before, he's not suddenly infused with courage and resolve.

He's the same guy. But I think he does something worthy of imitation. He doesn't flee to Midian again. He flees to Yahweh in prayer.

At the end of chapter 5. I think it's easy in failure.

I don't know if you like this. But I find it easy to just go into self-pity mode. And I'm just licking my wounds. I've tried my best. And it still failed. And part of failure is you feel like you've let God down. You feel guilty. Because you feel like you let God down. You let people down. So the easy thing is to avoid God. Moses does the hard thing in going to God.

[29 : 15] It's a pretty bold prayer. He says, Lord, you made it worse. He just pours out his discouragement. Lord, you made it worse.

Lord, you haven't delivered them at all. I think it's interesting to note that the Lord didn't solve Moses' problems by inwardly changing Moses' feelings or courage.

He didn't change Moses by changing this outward situation, suddenly making him effective. So we see here the second key to Moses becoming a great man and Yahweh using him.

It's in chapter 6, 2 to 8. Why the second revelation of Yahweh? It feels like a repetition, right? It is repetition. What's the point of it?

Don't you just want to skip chapter 6? We've got chapter 3. We've got the burning bush. Why a second revelation of Yahweh? Moses has hit rock bottom.

[30 : 30] God didn't say to him, I've shown you who I am. I've promised you. That's enough. Go. He doesn't. He goes, come. Come have another look at who I am.

Come let me tell you who I am. Let me reassure you all over again. I think this is the key.

Go deeper in knowing who I am. I keep my word. I'm the same as when I made promises to Abraham and you're about to see me even more clearly because I'm about to act on those promises and deliver my people.

You're going to know me more clearly now. We know him even more clearly now through Jesus. All his promises are yes in Jesus. I keep my word.

I see you. I feel your affliction. I know you. I will redeem my people. You do not belong to Pharaoh. You belong to me.

[31 : 39] I will redeem you. I will pay the price to set you free. I will bring you to myself. I will take you to be my people and I will be your God and you shall know that I am Yahweh, your God, and I will lead you home to the promised land.

And just dwell in who I am and my promises. Linger in my presence, Moses. I think the fruit of Moses lingering in Yahweh's presence, going deeper in knowing the Lord, is seen in the start of chapter 7, verse 6.

It's a very small verse, but it summarizes what we see of Moses from here on in the story. Moses and Aaron did so. They did just as the Lord commanded them.

From this point on, Moses doesn't speak unless Yahweh tells him to. Moses doesn't act unless Yahweh tells him to. He embraces rejection.

He embraces failure. And just knowing who Yahweh is, moment by moment, he obeys in faith. I think going deeper in knowing the Lord is the second key to that.

[33 : 08] Moses looks at himself and goes, I can't. Therefore, I won't. He looks at Yahweh and dwells in him and goes, I can't. He can. He says he will.

And so I will. It's the obedience of faith. And what creates that faith is knowing him more, knowing Yahweh more.

I once heard someone say that all our talk in evangelical circles about gifting, sometimes we talk of it as this instantaneous endowment of supernatural ability.

And this person suggested that we want that because it bypasses the spiritual maturity it takes to actually grow in character, knowing God.

We just want to be zapped with capabilities rather than know God and be changed inside first. I think he's on to something. I can't remember who said it.

[34 : 16] I think he's on to something. If you really want to make a difference in the world, just pause. Pause and get to know God.

We're in such a hurry. Linger in my presence. Someone else suggested that Satan might want us to go, the needs of my family, the needs of the world, the needs of the church, they're too great.

I've got to keep going. I've got to keep going. Maybe he's just keeping us from lingering in God. And God's just saying, I'm not in your sort of hurry.

Get to know me. Linger in my presence. In who I've revealed myself to be in my word.

I was speaking to Matt overseas on the phone this week. He shared something that in his struggle that challenged me.

[35 : 26] He's trying to pray to God more, not just when he needs help with something, but just to seek to be in his presence. I think it's a comment along the lines of, be still and know that I am God.

I think that's the second key to Yahweh using Moses. Get to know me. It's what we see in Ephesians.

What comes before Ephesians 4, 1 that I quoted at the beginning. We're all called to a heavenly calling. What comes before that? Ephesians 3, believe it or not. I bow my knees before the Father. That according to the riches of his glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit. In your inner being.

That you may have strength to comprehend. With all the saints. What is the breadth and length and height and depth.

[36 : 43] We need strength to know the love of Christ. That surpasses knowledge. That you may be filled with all the fullness of God. We need to know his covenant love in Jesus.

And then. He calls us to walk according to his calling. Not zapped with ability.

But lingering in his covenant love. Well, a greater Moses was sent to set us free.

I think one fruit of our slavery to sin is that despite knowing the privilege of God's call to represent him. In all we do.

In public, in private. With eyes focused on ourselves in fear or in arrogance. We so often resist or disobey in unbelief.

[37 : 53] Jesus came to set us free from that. To obey when we fail. I think Jesus is unusual.

Moses is a pattern so that we might understand Jesus. But in these early chapters, Jesus is so unlike Moses. Despite the fear of every human being.

Either expressed in shrinking back or in needing to prove ourselves. There's just not. There's not a hint. Of Jesus ever resisting God's call.

He's so unusual. Now I'm hoping your mind goes to Gethsemane. That's where my mind went.

Think of what he did there. The night before the cross. He's given some experiential foretaste of the hell he is about to go through.

[39 : 02] He says, and I assume he's not exaggerating, my soul is very sorrowful even to death. He had opportunity to run away.

He had opportunity to not go through with it. When Moses was told, go deliver my people.

He resists God's call despite being promised power and victory in the end. Jesus is told, go deliver my people. And he's promised, you'll be crushed. You'll be consumed.

You'll be a failure. And he goes. He's so unusual. He obeys and trusts his father's call.

He's so unusual. But when we don't. It's in our risen and enthroned Lord, Yahweh.

[40 : 04] It's his spirit who is powerfully present in us. He is the one who doesn't resist God's call. And he says, dwell in me and I will give you power to follow God's call.

Lift your eyes from who you are. Look at who I am. Don't go into battle before you dwell in my presence.

Know the length and height and breadth of my love. Will you pray with me?

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your patience with us. Thank you that you are the God who not only delivers us from sin and failure to obey you, but you also train us.

You patiently draw us deeper into yourself and reassure our hearts again and again with your promises so that we might become the children who follow your call and obey in faith.

[41 : 33] Lord, make us a community of people who dwell in you so that we might walk by faith. In Jesus' name I pray.

Amen.