

Text: Exod. 4:1-9

Title: "But they will not believe!"

Time: 3/8/20 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: "But they will not believe!" is a common heartache for the Lord's human instruments of salvation deliverance. We have seen in our study of Exodus, that Moses is one of these, and his fears are focused in this passage on this very important issue.

It is a heartache known to the best of God's human instruments. As God's perfect human instrument of salvation (because He is also divine), Jesus lamented over Jerusalem's unbelief (Matt. 23:37, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!").

Paul experienced constant sorrow and grief for his Jewish kinsmen (Rom. 9:1-3, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh").

This is the heartache felt by many Bible-believing churches today. Our pews are less full than they were in the days of our fathers. It often seems that the people to whom we speak simply will not believe.

Jesus understood that enduring an unbelieving response to the gospel of His kingdom was going to be a part of life in that kingdom for God's human instruments of salvation

deliverance. He prepares His disciple-makers for this with the Parable of the Soils. The parable teaches that three characteristics of the human heart would mean that much of the seed of the Word of God would be poorly received – (1) the heart is open to Satan’s influence, which steals the Word away; (2) it is stony, which prevents the Word from taking root; and (3) it is full of thorns, the idols that people would rather hang on to than obey the Word of God.

The parallels between Jesus’s Parable of the Soils to the three signs the Lord gives Moses for overcoming the disbelief of those to whom he would speak the Word of God are remarkable. Moses faced the same problem of unbelief that Jesus said His disciple-makers would face.

What is the solution to this problem for human instruments of God’s deliverance? What can possibly be done about the soil problem, that fact that so many simply will not believe? These three signs answer that question for Moses and for us.

In the end, Jesus promised that some seed would find good soil, yielding varying levels of productiveness (depending, I believe, on how many birds and stones and thorns were still allowed into the life), and for Moses God had already promised that some would listen and that Moses would have co-laborers (3:18). God kept His promise to Moses (4:29-31), and He will do the same for us today, if we understand the meaning of these signs well enough to obediently, even if somewhat reluctantly, trust and do our Savior’s Great Commission like Moses did.

Notice two preliminary things about these signs as we begin to look at them together. First, every sign is a supernatural miracle. Rods do not naturally turn into snakes and

back again; skin disease does not naturally come and go on the hand instantaneously; water does not naturally turn into blood when poured on the dry ground. The problem, "They will not believe!", must always be solved by a supernatural miracle. It must be a work of the Holy Spirit, not a work of unholy men, not even by a man of the skills and qualities of a Moses.

Second, every sign has a voice (v. 8). God's miracles are always designed to say something, and it is that truth communicated by the sign that is the enduring part of the miracle. We do not need to see a rod turned into a snake and back again this morning to listen to this voice. We can hear its truth from Moses's rod and snake experience through God's Word.

It is my hope that we will be able this morning, with the help of Matthew 13, to hear the voice of these signs as the answer to the cry of our own hearts in difficult disciple-making gospel ministry, "But, behold, they will not believe!" We will take the signs one at a time.

I. The voice of the first sign - "I can use you to stand against the serpent" (Exod. 4:1-5; Matt. 13:19, "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.").

Application: One of the reasons many Israelites would have trouble believing the Word of God from Moses is the direct work of the serpent, the wicked one, the devil. Paul is very clear about the problem of his influence when it comes to the human heart's reception of the truth of God's Word: "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the

minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Cor. 4:4).

Moses would have known about the problem of the serpent, probably from a very young age. In a few short months, he is going to put down in writing the truth of Genesis 3 he had learned from his fathers. It was the serpent who undermined Eve's faith in God's Word. She did not believe.

What does this first sign teach us about the serpent? At first Moses flees from it, but God says, "No. Take its tail" (v. 3). Fleeing is no way to deal with this deadly serpent. In our battles with this enemy, the question is always, "Who is going to flee?" If we flee, we lose. James tells us that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us (Jam. 4:7). Paul tells us that in the armor of God, we have all we need to stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:11). But there is no armor for our backs. It is very important that we not try to face this foe without that armor, but with it we can stand in the evil day. The shield of faithful faith will quench every fiery dart of the wicked one.

So may we as disciple-makers, facing discouraging responses of our best efforts, hear the voice of this first sign. God's miracle to Moses says in the face of unbelief, "I can use you to stand against the serpent."

II. The voice of the second sign - "I can use you to cure the leprosy" (Exod. 4:6-8; Matt. 13:20-21, "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is of-fended.").

Application: The word *leprosy* in the Bible refers to a range of skin diseases that are different from what we know leprosy to be today. It is similar to the word *dance* or *wine* in that regard. This particular skin disease immediately turned Moses's skin white like snow. One lexicon called it *leukoderma*.

What we do know for sure is that whatever disease it was that afflicted Moses's hand in this sign, it is the same affliction that would later be the symbol of sin in the law he wrote down from God in Leviticus 13-14. Not only is the influence of Satan a problem when it comes to the response of people to God's Word, but also the sinful leprous condition of the human heart is a problem.

Jeremiah wrote: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). Newer translations recognize that the Hebrew of the verse translated *desperately wicked* refers to a negative health condition or a disease. Jeremiah is saying that the human heart of unbelief is incurably sick, like leprosy.

Jesus described the same heart condition as stony soil. It is a heart that can respond emotionally to God's truth, but when God's truth stops making them happy and starts causing persecution and distress, disbelief and a lack of faith surfaces.

What does Moses's sign teach us about this leprosy in the bosom of sinners like us? Its voice tells us that God has the power to instantaneously change the leprous heart into a heart that has been cleansed. We need this even as believers. The apostle John says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). We need to hear that voice. We need to believe that God's word is living and

powerful and heart changing (Heb. 4:12). We need to believe that in Christ there is a cure for what is incurably sick.

III. The voice of the third sign - "I can use you to dethrone the idolatry" (Exod. 4:9; Matt. 13:22, "He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.").

Application: In order for us to understand what this sign is saying the way Moses must have, we need to understand something about the importance that the River of this sign, the Nile, had to the people of Egypt. Keil and Delitzsch explain, "The Nile received divine honours as the source of every good and all prosperity in the natural life of Egypt, and was even identified with Osiris . . . . If Moses therefore had power to turn the life-distributing water of the Nile into blood, he must also have received power to destroy Pharaoh and his gods."

To pull water out of the Nile, pour it on dry ground, and watch it turn to blood was to demonstrate that your God was more powerful than the idols of the land. God intends to demonstrate that in each of our lives through His mighty work of redemption.

Paul understood that our salvation is a turning away from idols: "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). That is amazing power. It is one thing for a person to get a new religion that lets him keep all the idols that he had before. But what power can change a man's loves and habits and even addictions, which have kept him from serving the true and living God? What power can dethrone an idol? The voice of

God's sign to Moses assures us, "God has that power." He says to Moses and us through it, "I can dethrone idols."

Conclusion: Perhaps this morning you are fearful and discouraged by unbelieving responses to your gospel ministry, as I often am. Perhaps you tremble, as I do, to think of the opposition of Satanic influence, the diseased human heart, and the power of the idols of this world.

In the face of that discouragement and fear, we need to hear the voice of Moses's signs. They say: "I can use you to stand against the serpent"; "I can use you to cure the leprosy"; and "I can use you to dethrone the idolatry." "Just go, speak, and watch what I can do."

I grew up under a godly pastor who served Bible Community Church for over 40 years. God mightily used Pastor Ashbrook in my life as a young boy and in the lives of many others young and old. Pastor Ashbrook was asked once whether he ever felt like quitting the ministry, and his response was "only on Mondays." I think that the reason my Pastor felt that way on a given Monday probably had something to do with Moses's cry in this passage, "But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, the Lord hath not appeared unto thee." But 40+ years of those Mondays are a testament that Pastor Ashbrook could hear the voices of Moses's signs and find the encouragement he needed there. He was a wonderful human instrument of God's gospel deliverance.

Perhaps we have failed to hear the voice of these signs at times. Perhaps we have allowed fear and discouragement to make us weary in well-doing. Perhaps we are tempted to say that our labor is in vain in the Lord, so I am going to stop being steadfast and unmovable and always abounding

in the work of the Lord. Maybe we have concluded it is time to flee. If that is us this morning, let's repent of our sin, listen again to the voice of Moses's signs, go, speak, and see what God will do to use us as human instruments of deliverance in a world of bondage and sin.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*