

Text: Exodus 4:10-17

Title: When our "I can't" is louder than God's "I can."

Time: 3/29/2020 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: I think the trouble Moses is having in our passage this morning is a difficulty many of us can identify with very easily. I can remember the first sermon I ever preached before a congregation of listeners. I was a junior in high school, and I was encouraged by my speech teacher, Mrs. Wack, to enter a high school preaching contest.

The whole idea of preaching to win a contest seemed a bit profane to me, even way back then as a high school junior. I can appreciate better now that the idea behind such a contest is to help each individual participant improve in this important area of ministry, even with the hope that the Lord would call young men to faithfully preach His Word to the best of the abilities God gives them.

That purpose was loss on me as a junior in high school, I am afraid, but honestly the trouble I had with the whole idea had little to do with my theological objections regarding a preaching contest and a lot to do with my terror at the thought of actually trying to preach a message in front of other people. Few things have scared me in my life like that opportunity scared me.

Because of Mrs. Wack's encouragement, I can look back now and thank the Lord that I preached my first sermon as a junior in high school. I went to a Christian School that held chapel regularly, and I preached my message in one of those chapels. I do not remember anything I said that morning. I do remember that it was required that the mes-

sage was at least 10 minutes long, and that this requirement was one of the hardest to fulfill.

Moses is no high school junior, but I do not think we have to be so for us to appreciate the fear factor that he must have been dealing with in this passage. Simply put, Moses does not believe that he can do what God has asked him to do. Earlier in the chapter, his reasons had to do with the shortcomings of others. He worries in verse 1, "They will not believe me." God addresses that concern with three signs that miraculously spoke of the way God can use his human instruments of deliverance to stand against the serpent, to cure the leprosy of the human heart, and to dethrone the idols of the world's supremacy.

So now Moses shifts strategies, still controlled by his fear, and so still in search of a reason to disobey God's call in his life. This time it has to do with himself, not others. He simply tells the Lord politely but clearly, "I can't." I have titled our time in the Word this morning, "When our 'I can't' is louder than God's 'I can'." We will notice three simple ways God deals with Moses's "I can't."

I. God reminds Moses that He has designed Moses's ability (vv. 10-11).

Illustration: There is an Aesop fable called "The Wolf and the Lion" that counsels against overestimating one's abilities. In the story, just before sunset, a wolf sees how long his shadow is and mistakenly concludes that he is bigger than a lion. He soon finds out in a fight with the lion for "King of the Wild" status that he was not as big as he had thought.

Application: Moses is trying to be very humble in this objection to God's will for his life. That is clear from the Hebrew grammar he uses, which can be difficult to bring out with the same obvious force in English. Though he had been a mighty and popular Egyptian prince, likely trained in rhetoric and leadership skills, he tells the Lord that he cannot do what God is asking him to do because he is not a man of words. He literally says his tongue and mouth are too heavy to speak well.

Now while this appears to be an admirable expression of humility, the real problem here is that Moses is looking at the size of his shadow and overestimating its importance. In his case, it is not a long shadow, but one that might be cast when the sun is at its peak - a very small shadow. But though the shadow is a different size, Moses is looking at it with the same focus that Aesop's wolf looked at his. That is the real problem.

And that is the problem the Lord corrects in verse 11. Note that God does not deny that Moses has a puny shadow. What he is telling Moses is that he is forgetting that the One who is calling him is also the One who designed his shadow. God is not saying really that Moses's mouth will work well because He made it. He is saying that the way Moses's mouth is designed to work was designed by God and so is exactly what is needed for the job.

It may be a stammering tongue that God wants to use. It may be someone who cannot speak at all or who cannot hear at all or who sees perfectly or who cannot see at all. The word translated *make* in verse 11 is not the word for God's work of creation. It is rather a word that means *to put* or *to put in place* or *to appoint*. What the Lord is telling Moses is that He has designed whatever difference Moses's

mouth had from other people individually for Moses so that he would be equipped perfectly for the individual task God had planned for him.

As those called of God to be His human instruments, we must understand that God has put in place all of our individual characteristics to be used to reach people in a way that others would not be able to. God makes no mistakes.

Yes, your shadow and mine have their deficiencies when viewed with merely human eyes, but God is the Deliverer who uses the weak things of the world in His work of salvation (1 Cor. 1:26-28, "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are.")

When a false humility has us paralyzed and convinced that we can't, we need to see that we are committing the sin of denying that God can. The only solution for the sin of this denial is to confess it before the Lord and ask for His forgiveness and cleansing. God designed our abilities; He has made it so that we can do His will. God reminds Moses of this essential truth.

He goes on to deal with Moses's "I can't" in two other ways.

II. God promises to instruct Moses about what to say (v. 12).

Illustration: Having to speak in front of government officials can be a difficult thing to do. I have not had to do that

much, but not too long ago I had to speak to the New Hampshire Executive Council in the statehouse in Concord. A friend of mine was being considered for a post in the state government that reports to the governor, and a hearing was convened by the Executive Council about the suitability of my friend for the post. I was one of a few that he asked to speak at the hearing in his behalf. He was eminently qualified and got the job, but I must admit that I was not quite sure what I could say in my friend's behalf that would help him that morning. The Lord brought something to mind while I was listening to others take their turn, and I was honored to be of service in that way.

Application: Moses is going to need something to say with his God-designed mouth and tongue when he stands before Pharaoh. The assurance that God has for him in this verse is a simple one: "I am going to be with your mouth and instruct you what to say." When it comes to the task of God's human instrument of deliverance to speak for Him, God always promises to be with our mouth and to teach us what to say. The Great Commission tells us to teach the nations the commands that Jesus has taught us ("whatsoever I have commanded you"). So we need not come up with something to say on our own. What we need to do is understand what the Bible says and say that.

What this means for us, of course, is that we as God's human instruments of deliverance must be willing to be instructed ourselves in God's Word. This word *instruct* is in many of the prayers of Scripture, and the desire to be instructed behind these prayers must be the condition of our hearts before the Lord (Ps. 27:11, 86:11, 119:33, 119:102).

God answers these prayers for instruction in two ways.

First, He gives us the opportunity to read the Scriptures ourselves or to hear the Scriptures read to us. We can do this with the promised help of God's Holy Spirit to understand God's Word. In Prov. 1:23 wisdom cries out, "Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you."

Second, Jesus answers our prayer for instruction by blessing our church with members who have the gift of teaching and a leader whose assignment it is to be a pastor-teacher by precept and example. These gifts are empowered by God's Spirit to the end that we might be instructed in what God's Word says, what we must believe and what we must say. My life has been richly blessed with many, many such teachers and pastor-teachers. I endeavor to be that blessing to our local church. My thanks to the Lord for the blessing of teaching available in the local church extends to many of you for the way He has used you to teach me so very much about what His Word says and means. Thank you.

Moses need not say, "I can't," because God would be with his mouth and instruct him in what to say. Note a final help the Lord provides for Moses.

III. God compensates for Moses's lack of faith (vv. 13-17).

Illustration: Have you ever had to make a deal with someone and meet them halfway? I saw a news headline that spoke about how the governor of Georgia asked for a \$2000 raise for teachers in his state, and the Georgia House of Representatives agreed to meet him halfway and approve \$1000. That kind of compromise is often a good outcome for two sinners trying to solve an impasse.

Application: In these verses God agrees to meet Moses halfway. Moses's lack of faith, which is keeping him stuck with his "I can't", must be compensated for. God agrees to allow Aaron to be a co-laborer who would be Moses's spokesman. Aaron was Moses's older brother, did not have Moses's training, but did have at least a willingness to serve (v. 14). The Lord recognizes Aaron's enthusiasm as a blessing and a help in this situation, and He makes note of it for Moses because Moses's attitude was in stark contrast to it. Whatever our hands find to do for the Lord, we should do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men.

But whenever God must meet us halfway because of our own lack of faith, it is never a good outcome. We read about how God is angry that He must do this for Moses. Why the anger? I think there must have been at least two things that angered the Lord in this regard:

1. God could see that Aaron's presence would do something for Moses that God's presence alone should have but did not. God had already said He would be with Moses, but Moses still said, "I can't." But now that Aaron is going to be with Moses, he now can say finally, "Ok. Now I can." We are often like that, aren't we? We look around and we say "I can't" because there are no Aarons, and all the while we are failing to see the One who has promised to never leave us or forsake us. We always can with Him.
2. God could see that meeting halfway meant forfeiting half the blessings. C.H. MacIntosh: "It is not a little remarkable that Aaron, whose companionship seemed to satisfy Moses, was the man who afterwards made the golden calf" (2.68; Exod. 32:21). God's will is always the path of full blessing. Modifications made by meeting God halfway are always very costly in terms of that blessing.

Conclusion: After those terrifying ten minutes of my first sermon, Mrs. Wack brought me into a side room and said to me, “You looked like a Zombie up there!” She said that, not because she wanted me to believe that I can’t serve the Lord, but to know that I can do better with the Lord’s help. I think for a similar reason the Lord refers again to the rod in v. 17. Moses could do better because of the rod of God’s supernatural power. Which is bigger for us – our “I can’t” or God’s “I can”?

“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*