

Text: Exod. 6:9-27

Title: "These are those weak instruments – this Moses and Aaron"

Time: 5/17/20 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: There is a certain glory in the unlikely victory of an underdog. On April 17 CNN reported the following headline: "Iranian teen shocks chess grandmaster Magnus Carlsen to win \$14,000 prize." Any time you have to compete against the grandmaster champion of anything, you know you are the underdog. I do not know how to pronounce the teenager's name, but I do know that he was only 16 years old. I also know that had the grandmaster stomped on the 16-year-old, CNN probably would not have carried the story. There is a certain newsworthy glory in the victory of an underdog.

It would seem clear from Scripture that the victory of the human underdog is glorious in the Lord's eyes as well. Paul is very explicit about the nature of the Lord's preferred human instrument in His mighty work of saving deliverance: "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 nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence" (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

The portion of Exodus 6 we have come to this morning seems to make the same truth clear. The passage ends in verse 26-27 with what to Moses and Aaron must have been

an astonishing statement: “These are they which spake to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring out the children of Israel from Egypt: these are that Moses and Aaron.”

It is as though the Lord wants us to take a minute, just before the shooting starts, to think again about the kind of soldier the He sends into spiritual battle. The passage does not tell us about their mighty strengths and achievements. It reminds us of their weaknesses and failures. I have titled our study, “These are those weak instruments – this Moses and Aaron,” and I want us to see three things about their weakness this morning.

I. Moses and Aaron were weaker than the discouragement of God’s people (vv. 9-11).

Illustration: I can remember as a basketball coach doing my best at times to lead an underdog team to victory. For some of those times, we were the underdog not because of a lack of talent, but rather because we were undermanned.

In 2011, shortly after my son Brandon’s 15th birthday, our high school recreation team entered to represent New Boston in a St. Paul’s invitational tournament hosted during the winter break. A lot of our teammates went skiing that week, so we were down to only a few players. If I remember correctly, we had 5 who had to play the whole game. No one had to worry about their lack of playing time.

Perhaps it was because St. Paul’s was our Merrimack League rivals that year that we were bracketed to play Winisquam High School in the first game. Their team was huge. Our biggest guy was my freshman son who was a lot smaller back then. I can remember getting down early by a lot and hearing a lot of trash talking from the other team.

But then we came back in the second half, and the game came down to some free-throws that we unfortunately missed, and so we lost.

But that was a top-10 memorable game to me because of how tired our team was in the second half as they were making their comeback. We had no substitutes, we were playing one of the best teams we would ever face, and we made a double-digit comeback happen. Our guys were panting heavily as I called my timeouts in the 4th quarter.

Application: That idea of panting heavily is captured in the description of the Israelites in this passage. The word translated *anguish* is related to the Hebrew word for *shortness*. One commentator (Keil and Delitzsch) describes the Israelites that Moses was trying to lead as people who suffered from *shortness of breath*. They were exhausted; they were discouraged; and they were suffering, all in spite of the wonderful message Moses had delivered to them (vv. 6-8).

On the one hand, it is an encouraging thing to recognize that God understood why they would not listen to Moses. I am not sure Moses understood why, however. He thought the problem was with himself. But God understood that these people were having trouble hearing and obeying God's promise right now because they were simply out of breath. External circumstances – their cruel bondage – had been worsened by internal stress – their anguish of spirit.

One of the wonderful things about being a child of God is the fact that no matter how cruel our unchangeable circumstances become, we always have a resource that not only understands the nature of our predicament, but also can deliver us from internal stress, the anguish of our spirit.

That resource is or prayer-hearing Father, the mediation of His Son, and the intercessory help of the Holy Spirit.

One third of Psalms are prayers that include anguish of spirit (psalms of lament). When prayed, they follow a pattern we see in Psalm 13 (vv. 1-2, the complaint of "How long?"; vv. 3-4, the casting of care; vv. 5-6, the conclusion of faith). And so the Paul encourages us in Philippians 4, "Be careful (short of breath; anguished in spirit) for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your heart and your mind through Christ Jesus" (vv. 6-7).

You and I may not be able always to change our circumstances, but we do have access to a power that can change without fail the effect our circumstances have on our spirit. We must be a people of faithful prayer.

II. Moses and Aaron were weaker than the requirements of the task (vv. 12-13).

Illustration: Even though we lost that basketball game that evening in Franklin, I returned home a happy, fulfilled, and confident basketball coach. It was great to see the kind of team we had that year, and it was very fulfilling to see them give 110% in response to the leadership I was trying to provide for them.

Application: Moses, of course, has no such feeling in this passage as God's human instrument of His deliverance. His reasoning as a leader is pretty sound, but it leads him to a dangerously faulty conclusion. His logic is certainly correct when he says, "If God's people will not listen to me, how can I ever expect Pharaoh to do so?" The best way to have an effective leader is to be a willing and supportive and

even forgiving follower. Moses lacked that from God's people in this moment of need, and so he concludes from this lack that God's enemy is not going to listen to him either.

But then comes the faulty conclusion. He tells the Lord that he has uncircumcised lips. That self-doubt certainly reminds us of the excuses of the burning bush episode in chapter 4. But there, Moses said that his mouth and tongue were too heavy, and here he speaks of his lips being uncircumcised. I believe that the self-doubt Moses experiences here is a noticeably different kind of doubt than he experienced before. Sending Aaron along could take care of the natural inability to speak well, but Aaron's presence could not take care of the spiritual problem of uncircumcised lips.

We remember also from chapter 4 that circumcision was a spiritually sensitive topic for Moses's relationship with the Lord. His son had not been circumcised due to the influence of his wife, and Moses almost lost his life over that oversight.

I think that Moses is remembering the Lord's chastening of that night, and he is accusing the Lord of chastening him now without reason by not blessing his best initial efforts first before Pharaoh and then the Israelites. Why do they not listen? Why is there no power from God? Why have things gone so wrong? God sees my lips as uncircumcised!

Moses has been having a hard time since 5:22-23 with the unsuccessful way the Lord seems to be using him. A combination of damaging thoughts struggle for his attention in this valley of despair. On the one hand, there are times of frustration when he feels like God is treating him unfairly. Then on the other, there are times when he understands why God would never use someone unworthy like himself in a powerful way. We have been there, haven't we?

Well, God answers both concerns clearly in his precious Word. He is going to do so for Moses in chapter 7 after a genealogical parenthetical that we will look at next. For now, let me remind us of two things about our uncircumcised lips when it comes to the work of the Lord in and through us:

(1) The reality of God's loving discipline answers our frustration when things go wrong: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb. 12:5b-6). A frustrating lack of success is often simply be the result of the Lord's greater love for us as His children.

(2) The reality of God's superabundant grace answers our sense of unworthiness when things go wrong. Paul said of himself: "Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. 1:13-15).

Sin is always ignorance and unbelief at some level. Jesus crucified said of His executioners, "They know not what they do." Whenever I have sinned, I have done so ignorantly in unbelief. But with Paul I can know that God's grace is greater than even my unworthiness to be His minister.

III. Moses and Aaron were just as weak as their fellow Israelites (vv. 14-27).

Application: God had promised Abraham in Gen. 15:16 that after four generations of suffering in Egypt, He would deliver His people. This passage focuses primarily on demonstrating that God has kept faithfully His promise (follow the men whose ages are mentioned): Levi (v. 16), Kohath (v. 18), Amram (v. 20), Moses and Aaron.

But in doing so, this list of names also has running through it a thread of lessons to be learned about how God is willing to use the weak. Reuben is mentioned. He was weak, but he was the firstborn of Israel (v. 14). Simeon and Levi were weak, but God blessed them with a progeny (vv. 15-16). Four mothers are listed in this category of fathers. Women are the weaker vessel, but God used these women in a mighty way (vv. 15, 20, 23, 25). And then the list concludes, that just as the Israelites from whom Moses and Aaron had sprung, they too were weak, but God would use them against Pharaoh and the armies of Egypt (vv. 26-27).

Illustration: C. H. MacIntosh summarizes the spirit of the passage this way: "Nothing is more calculated to assure and establish the doubting, trembling heart than the knowledge that God has taken us up just as we are, and in the full intelligence of what we are; and, moreover, that He can never make any fresh discovery to cause an alteration in the character and measure of His love. 'Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.' (John xiii.) Whom He loves and as He loves, He loves unto the end. This is an unspeakable comfort. God knew all about us — He knew the very worst of us, when He manifested His love to us in the gift of His Son. He knew what was needed, and He provided it; He knew what was due, and He paid it; He knew what was to be wrought, and He wrought it; His own requirements had to be met, and He met them" (2:94).

Conclusion: Are you a weak servant of the Lord like these listed in this passage? Do you find a lack of success in the work of the Lord at times both frustrating and condemning?

If you must answer at times, “Yes, that would be me,” our passage indicates that you are the kind of underdog that our wonderful Lord loves to use in a glorious way. We may have to wait until we walk no longer by faith before we can see fully the true successes that He has accomplished with our apparent lack thereof.

In the meantime, do not despise the Lord’s chastening; but see His love and find His purpose in it. Trust that the grace of His gospel is far greater than your unworthiness to be its minister. Know that He will love you to the end. And so be at peace with your weakness, and so less weary in well-doing.

“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