

Never Say Never

Exodus 4:1-17

When you get married, you make what I would call a blind promise, a promise of things yet unknown, a promise that will obligate you to do things that are still future and undetermined. Marriage is a commitment you make “for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow.” When you make that promise, you don't know what it will require in the future. You don't know what “better or worse” will involve. You just make a commitment, a promise you intend to keep no matter what happens. Indeed, the essence of a marriage is that blind promise.

Typically, blind promises are almost always a very bad idea. You should never make a vow or a promise to someone unless you know exactly what it involves. After all, if you don't know what you are promising, how do you know if you will be able to keep your promise? That is a necessary part of establishing a marriage relationship, but ordinarily you shouldn't make such commitments.

Yet with the Lord, you ought to make such a promise. You can't put any restrictions on your commitment to the Lord. You should never say to God that there are certain things that you would never do for him. You should never say to God that there are certain things you would never give up for him. You should never say “never” to God. You shouldn't say “no” to God.

But Moses did! When God called him to lead his people Israel out of Egypt, Moses said, “Here I am, send Aaron.” Moses was full of excuses, full of reasons which seemed good to him, why he couldn't do what God wanted him to do. He would not make a blind promise to God. He counted the cost and figured he wasn't up to the task.

Moses was human. He was flesh and blood. He was like you and me. And he forgot one thing--the subject of our sermon this afternoon. What did he forget? God's power. If you see nothing else in this passage, there is,

I. A DISPLAY OF DIVINE POWER

This whole story is a story about power.

A. Supernatural power.

Miracles. Signs and wonders. Things that transcend our own natural abilities. That's what supernatural means. Things only God can do. Miracles are a testimony of God's own identity, a testimony of his deity. We read in,

Ex. 7:5 “And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them.”

In the language of the New Testament, we read about Jesus' first miracle at the wedding in Cana,

John 2:11 “This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.”

A Peter preached at Pentecost that Jesus was “a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know.”

So here is the evidence of God. Here is the manifestation of his glory. Three miracles identified for us. A staff turns into a serpent. A hand turns leprous. And water turns into blood.

v.2-9

Let me start with the obvious. These things really happened. I make no attempt to explain it away. This is not figurative

language nor is this just religious mythology. The miracles were real and true.

Interestingly, Aaron actually performed this first miracle before Pharaoh, showing that God's power was far superior to the false power of the Egyptian magicians.

Ex. 7:8 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 9 “When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, ‘Show a miracle for yourselves,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your rod and cast it before Pharaoh, and let it become a serpent.’” 10 So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh, and they did so, just as the LORD commanded. And Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent. 11 But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. 12 For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron’s rod swallowed up their rods.”

The hand turning leprous must have terrified Moses. That was his own hand, his own flesh. And again, it really happened. Leprosy, or any variety of terribly infectious skin diseases, was used often by God as a punishment, thinking of Miriam, Uzziah, Gehazi, Naaman, and healing was often noted as a sign of God's power.

Then water turns into blood, a preliminary expression of the first plague, recorded in,

Ex. 7:17 ‘Thus says the LORD: “By this you shall know that I am the LORD. Behold, I will strike the waters which are in the river with the rod that is in my hand, and they shall be turned to blood. 18 “And the fish that are in the river shall die, the river shall stink, and the Egyptians will loathe to drink the water of the river.””’ 19 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over

their streams, over their rivers, over their ponds, and over all their pools of water, that they may become blood. And there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in buckets of wood and pitchers of stone.” 20 And Moses and Aaron did so, just as the LORD commanded. So he lifted up the rod and struck the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants. And all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood.”

Many imitations were tried, but none with any power! Thus we see the fullness of God’s power. And I would use the adjective awful.

B. Awful power.

Usually today the word “awful” means something extremely bad or even horrible, but the word also means “full of awe.” Inspiring fear and reverence. It’s not very similar to the common use of the word “awesome” today, which just means exciting or grand, for here the emphasis is upon the impact upon the observer. God’s power is awful, terrible as the original King James translates many verses. Consider,

Ps. 47:1 “Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph! 2 For the LORD Most High is awesome [awful]; He is a great King over all the earth.”

“The LORD Most High is awful!” “Terrible.” You don’t often think of God in that way, do you? We’re uncomfortable with those words simply because we want to be so very cozy and comfortable with God. But he is one who inspires reverence and awe. The weight of his glory ought to humble us in dreadful awe. Not that we would be afraid of his presence as if we had no mediator nor any promise of being his beloved children, but that we ought not to consider him lightly nor casually.

God had a reason for displaying his awful, terrible power!

v.5

And to intensify that,

v.8

And to humble them all the more,

v.9

But now the important question, “Why?” “Why did God show forth such power? In our text, it is obvious. He is responding to Moses, particularly the fearfulness of his own insecurity. In verse 1, we see,

II. A DISPLAY OF HUMAN INSECURITY.

And this is not a good thing!

v.1

God had said they would! And it is entirely inappropriate to respond to that promise by saying, “But suppose they will not believe me...”

Yet, we are often like Moses in this way, however.

A. We are prone to be doubtful of God’s promises to us.

We think, we worry, what if it doesn’t work out?” What if God’s promises aren’t fulfilled? So we doubt. In our own insecurities. And,

B. We are prone to be unsatisfied with God’s revelation of himself.

v.1 “...suppose they say, ‘The LORD has not appeared to you.’”

Moses is saying, “God, this isn’t sufficient revelation.” And

don’t forget what Moses saw!

Ex. 3:2 “And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed.”

But what if that isn’t enough? So often today, such direct revelation is not enough. The great inclination of our day is to seek more of God’s revelation, it is misguided zeal in those who seek more revelation. As if what we have is not enough! We need more inspired prophecies. More inspired words.

And do you know what that says? Ultimately, it says that Jesus is not enough! Because Jesus is the final and complete revelation of God,

Col. 2:9 “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”

So we read that,

Heb. 1:1 “...time past [God spoke] to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.”

Do you want more revelation? More than Jesus! There are still many people wanting something more. And rather than looking to God’s own self-revelation, they look to themselves for help. The great danger of our day is that,

C. We are prone to trust in the instability of self-reliance.

Because, after all, if you are going to doubt God’s promises or be unsatisfied with what he has revealed, you need to find something else to trust.

But right at this point comes the problem! It is a very modern

problem. Moses expresses it so well. We you force yourself to rely upon yourself, you end up dreadfully insecure.

v.10

We read further,

v.13-14

That's not godly humility! Rather, that is ungodly, proud, arrogance. You see, this wasn't about Moses at all! This was about God and his power. But it seems that Moses needed some 21st century counseling for his problem of insecurity. He depended upon himself and found himself lacking!

Beloved, if you doubt God's promises and are unsatisfied with his revelation, then you are forced to depend upon yourself. And your problem with so much of our insecurities is that they become little more than a disguise for the pride of self-reliance. And the solution is not to reinforce your pride! The solution is to redirect your source of power.

Surely it is right and proper to accept with humility Jesus' evaluation of us all,

John 15:5 "...without Me you can do nothing."

Surely it is right and godly to agree with Jesus' description of the church in Laodicea and apply it to yourself,

Rev. 3:17 "[You] do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked."

But also you must believe what Jesus says just before he says, "...without Me you can do nothing."

John 15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit."

"Without [him] you can do nothing." But with him? Well, Phil. 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

So where are your own personal insecurities? What are the areas of your life where you simply do not trust God's promises or are not satisfied with his revelation? Maybe there is something which God requires of you to which you respond, "I can't do that." "I'm not up to that."

In what way are you saying to God, "Here I am, send Aaron!" Let this example be a challenge to you, and a bit of a warning.

v.13

v.14a

Humility is a good thing. But false humility and insecurity are nothing but a thinly veiled disguise for proud self-reliance. So beloved,

Prov. 3:5 "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths."

But there is more! The point of all this is not simply to leave you with an understanding of the scolding that God gave Moses! He was admonished, to be sure, but God isn't done with him! Despite his own failures to trust God, this is the man God has chosen. And this is the man God will equip! So we have,

III. A DISPLAY OF DIVINE EQUIPPING.

And to be sure, this is a gracious work of God! God's response to Moses impertinent objections is to remind Moses that,

A. God is worthy of our trust.

v.11-12

Moses said, “I am not eloquent...I am slow of speech.” And God says, “Have not I made your mouth?”

I went through this experience in the years immediately after I sense the call to the ministry, seeing in myself much the same weaknesses as Moses identified. But that human weakness has simply taught me that the power and the effect of my own words is from God. I am thankful that I am not very eloquent because it keeps me from any temptation to depend upon myself and to forget that,

1 Cor. 1:18 “... the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

God keeps me humble in my own gifts and abilities so that I can, in good conscience, conceive of my preaching as Paul did his,

1 Cor. 2:1 “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

Oh what a danger there is today to flock to the most eloquent preacher, the most charismatic speaker, the most dynamic, engaging and articulate spokesman. That burden is too great for any man to bear. For God is the enabler. He has equipped us, each one actually, for works of ministry and service. And he makes our work fruitful,

v.4-5

God makes them believe! That’s why he gives Moses these great signs. To equip him for service!

Beloved, this is God’s intention for you, as well. Equipping. Indeed, my job and a pastor-teacher, according to Paul’s words to the church in Ephesus, is...

Eph. 4:12 “...for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

That’s a strong church. 50 members or 500. Even 5000. That’s when we reach “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” When the saints are equipped for the work of ministry!

Notice finally, with Moses,

B. The gracious provisions of God.

In actuality, God grants Moses’ request.

v.14-17

God says, “I will let Aaron do the talking.” “He shall be your spokesman.” But notice clearly, God gives Moses the words. “I will be with your mouth.” And Moses will give the words to Aaron. “You shall be to him as God.” “You shall put the words in his mouth.”

So it is that God equips his people for service with his own gracious provisions. Despite our weaknesses. Thus Paul would later write to the church at Corinth,

2 Cor. 4:7 “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.”

Beloved, each one of you is an earthen vessel, a clay pot. You are insufficient in yourself and incapable of fulfilling your duties before the Lord even in the least degree. Indeed, “without [Christ] you can do nothing.”

But don't say, therefore, to God, “I can't do it.” Never read what the Bible says about your own responsibilities and duties before God, and come away thinking, “I can't do that!”

It might be a matter of calling to service. It might be a matter of objective obedience to clearly stated commandments. It might be a matter of personal discipline or a battle with sin. It might be the cultivation of one of the fruits of the spirit--maybe patience, or joy. Or self-control. This is to be your confidence,

Phil. 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

John 15:5 “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit.”

So never say never to God. Instead, surrender yourself to him, body and soul, and trust him to equip you to do all that requires of you to do! Make a blind promise to God, this promise or something like it: “God, I will endeavor to do whatever your word says, and I will rely upon your strength and your power to do it.”

Phil. 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”