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It's Your Call: No Excuses!

Verses in Exodus 3 & 4

A few weeks ago, a council in south London published some of the genuine excuses they've received from drivers trying to escape motoring offences. Here are my highlights. These are all real. No. 1: "I can't help it. Someone has hypnotized me to park illegally." No. 2: "I won't lie, I should know better than to speed on that stretch of road because I ran a woman over there last week." This without doubt is my favorite: "There was a bee around my head (!), so I sped up to 80mph in the hope that it couldn't fly that fast and would have to stay in the back seat area and not distract me."

These last weeks we have been hearing Pastors Mark and Jeremy do a fantastic job of teaching us that every one of us has a call from God. By this point, hopefully you have a better idea of what God's call to you is. We all have the same primary call—the call to be in relationship with God, and we all have unique secondary calls—the call to do something for God, to put to work our particular personhood, giftedness, and responsibilities, in some way for God. I want you to think about the call God has been placing upon your heart over these last few weeks... whether that is a primary or a secondary call, or both. Some of us are pursuing God's call on our lives. But others of us, honestly, are full of excuses as to why we can't obey God's call. If you are an excuse-maker, you are in good company...

Remember a guy named Moses? His people, the Israelites, were being held as slaves by the king of Egypt, Pharaoh. But Moses wasn't with them—he was in the desert, tending sheep. And it was in this place that God approached him with the most famous "call" in the Bible—the call to lead his people to freedom. And Moses was full of excuses as to why he wasn't the man for the job. But before we get there, let's read God's call to Moses. Turn with me to Exodus 3...

Read: Exodus 3:1-10

¹ Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did

not burn up. ³ *So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."*

⁴ *When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"*

And Moses said, "Here I am."

⁵ *"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."* ⁶ *Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.*

⁷ *The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering."* ⁸ *So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.* ⁹ *And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.* ¹⁰ *So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."*

Pray

God's call to Moses was there in verse 10:

So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.

So how does Moses respond? He says, "You got it!" Right? No, he starts making excuses... 5 of them in total! As you listen to them today, I want you to think about which of these 5 excuses you are giving to God at the moment. Or if you are already responding to God's call, I want you to think about which excuse keeps trying to rear its ugly head as you are pursuing that call. Okay? So here's the first one in verse 11:

But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

Do you ever lack confidence that you can do something? This is what Moses is experiencing right here—a lack of self-confidence.

One year ago this week, Rachel and I moved to Gig Harbor. Six months before that, I was sitting in class in Oxford, England and Pastor Mark came and sat next to me. We chatted a bit, and I didn't think anything of it. The next day I bumped

into him at a conference, he gave me his business card and said, "When you're done with all this studying, give me a call, and we'll see about you and your wife coming and working for us in Gig Harbor." I got home that night and said to Rachel, "Err... I think... I think I got offered a job today... in the United States."

As time went on in the process of coming to Gig Harbor, I started to question: Why me? Why us? Why would God call us here? What do we have to offer? We're only 22! We can't do what they're asking us to do!

This is exactly what Moses was experiencing: A lack of self-confidence. Self-distrust. And don't get me wrong, this can be a good thing, but only if it leads to trust in God. So often it can lead to spiritual paralysis—the inability and unwillingness to take any course of action. Maybe that is where you are right now... You've heard God's call, but you have no self-confidence at all, and so you are paralyzed, unable to step out. How does God respond? Verse 12:

And God said, "I will be with you."

When we truly know that God will never leave us nor forsake us, that he has placed his Holy Spirit inside of us, we no longer need to put confidence in ourselves—we can put all our confidence in God. We don't need to trust in ourselves, we can trust in Him. God carries on in verse 12:

"And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

Literally, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. God is telling Moses that the success of his mission will prove that it was God who sent him and who was with him. But this type of sign requires faith. Moses must step forward in faith. And when we lack self-confidence we must do the same. Put our faith in God, step out, and answer his call. And then, he promises, he will work his purposes through us.

So, Moses is encouraged, right? Hmm... Let's read v. 13:

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

In OT times, someone's name was much more significant than it is today. In those times, your name spoke of your character, your very essence. Moses asking God, "What is your name?" is the same as asking, "Who are you?" What he's really saying is: How do I know I can trust you?

I spent a lot of my teenage years not really trusting God. I had attended church as a child, I was brought up in a Christian family; I knew about God, but I didn't

really know God. And because I didn't really know God, I didn't trust him. It's difficult to trust someone you don't know, isn't it?

How about you? Perhaps you are here, but you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, or you're not fully trusting God with some area of your life. Well, God is calling you to trust him today... calling you to enter into a relationship with him, to follow him. That's the primary call of God on every single one of our lives. And in our passage, God reveals who he is, so you can know he is trustworthy. Listen to verse 14:

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

This is the first time in the whole of the Bible when God reveals his name: "I am who I am" or "I will be what I will be." God is saying to Moses that if he steps out in faith, he will discover who this God really is.

And we discover who this God really is as we read through the Bible. We discover that he is a God who creates, and who loves his creation so much that he gives the choice to reject him. He is a God who sends his own son to die the death that we deserved to die, so that we could be freed to live that life that we don't deserve to live; a God who creates, who loves, who blesses, who forgives and who redeems. He is who he is! And he will be who he will be!

If you step out and trust him, he will prove himself faithful as he has in the past. But maybe you're worried about what others might think. Moses was... Let's read Chapter 4 verse 1:

Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you'?"

Almost three years ago, Rachel and I were trying to discern when the right time was to get married: in one year, or two, or even three. One of my biggest concerns was what my family and friends would think. We were 20 at the time, and none of our friends were even engaged, let alone married! If now was the right time, how was I going to explain that to everyone? What if they didn't listen to me or didn't believe me?

This is what Moses is experiencing. He's heard the call. He's heard God's response to trust, and step out. But he's just not sure that everyone will believe him when the only proof he has is a promise from an unknown God that one day Israel will worship Him on this mountain. God responds to Moses by giving him the ability to perform three signs. Moses can turn his staff into a snake and back into a staff again. Moses can make his hand leprous and then heal it again. And, lastly, Moses can turn the water of the River Nile into blood.

Now these signs don't prove that God can rescue Israel from Egypt. In fact, the Egyptian magicians repeated all of these signs that Moses performed in front of them. Actually, for those living in Egypt at this time, these signs are pretty superficial—you couldn't base your faith upon them.

Since I got engaged to Rachel, a lot of people have asked me: "How did you know it was the right time?" I say, well... I knew Rachel was the right girl, and the Bible says, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing." (Prov. 18:22)

But I also tell them that God gave me a sign. For the first two months of my senior year at college, I would cycle the same way every day, and every day would wait to cross a road at a set of traffic lights. Every day I would wait at least 30 seconds. Then one day, the day after I had fasted and prayed about marrying Rachel, the lights changed as I arrived and I cycled straight through. Then the next day the same thing happened again, and, again on the third day. It was as if God was saying, "I'm giving you the green light!" It never happened the rest of the year.

Now, this is of course explainable in all sorts of ways. And for many sitting here it may seem superficial. But for me, at that time, it was the sign I needed to just tentatively put that first foot forward and ask Rachel's parents if I could marry her... to step out in faith. Not based upon some traffic lights, but based upon knowing Rachel was the right girl and the Bible telling me that marriage is a good thing. It was the simple, gracious push I needed.

Have you heard the call, but now you're worried that others will reject you when you tell them? Well, perhaps God is giving you a sign right now, through his word. Maybe verses 1-9 are your version of my traffic lights. This is the time to step out! But Moses didn't step out. He came up with another excuse. Look at verse 10:

Moses said to the LORD, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."

I can't do it. I'm not good enough.

There was a time in my life when I was playing a lot of rugby, but I wasn't enjoying it at all—I wanted to quit. But every time I came to pray about it, God told me it was what he had called me to do—he wanted me to be a witness for him to my teammates. But I just kept coming to him and saying: "I can't do it! I don't have the strength! I just hate it!" I doubted that I had it within me to keep up with the grueling training schedule. Moses thought the same thing—he doubted he had the ability to speak.

Listen to God's response in v.11

The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

God says, "Who made your mouth? I did. Now don't you think that if I made you, I can provide you with the ability to speak?" And that's how God responded to me over his call for me to play rugby. When I doubted that I had the physical strength to answer his call, he gave me the ability to do so. He had made my body, and he could equip me with whatever I needed to answer his call on my life—and he did.

Are you in that place today? Do you keep making excuses for the call God has given you? Oh, I could never talk to anyone about Jesus. Well... God made your mouth. Oh, but I'm not intelligent enough. Well... God made your brain. Oh, but I don't have enough money. Well... God owns all the money in the world. Oh, but, but... please send someone else to do it. That is finally where Moses lands. Look at verse 13:

But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it."

Is that what you are saying to God today? Send someone else? Well listen to God's response. Verse 14:

Then the LORD's anger burned against Moses and he said, "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. But take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it."

Did you hear that? If you are saying to God, "Please, can you send someone else?" The answer is always "No!" Moses still had to speak. No one else can answer the call to which you have been called. It is God's call to you, and you alone. God will give you the gifts you need. And God has placed you in a community that will strengthen you for your work...right here! The church! Moses' brother Aaron was already on his way to help Moses...but he could not answer God's call to Moses. And no one can answer God's call on your life!

At the beginning of this message, I asked you to think about which excuse you've been using to try and escape God's call? Which excuse keeps rearing its ugly head for you?

- Are you lacking self-confidence? Put your confidence in God.
- Do you struggle to trust God? Step out in faith, and he will prove himself to you.
- Are you worried about what others will think? Maybe God has given you a sign today through his word that you can share with others.

- Are you worried you don't have the gifts? God can and will provide you with all you need.
- Are you trying to give God's call on your life to someone else? You can't—it's God's call to you, and you alone.

But at the end of the day, whichever excuse it is, deep down they are all the same. Every single one of Moses' excuses focused on himself. Listen to them: Who am I? What shall I tell them? What if they don't believe me? I have never been eloquent! Please don't pick me! No matter which excuse we use, if we are making excuses we are focusing on ourselves. If we look to ourselves, the call will seem impossible, but if we look to God, nothing is impossible.

Did you notice how, finally, God's patience was used up? He was burning with anger. Why? Because Moses had placed himself above the only one who matters—God. And this same God, I Am Who I Am, who called Moses that day—He is here today. And He is calling you. Do you think He makes mistakes? Do you think that if God calls you to something He is not powerful enough to lead you through it? Are your excuses keeping God's call at arm's length?

People of God, lift up your eyes. Don't look to yourselves. Look to God. If God is calling you to do something, you can be sure that he will equip you, enable you, empower you, and most importantly, never leave you. If God is for you, no one can stand against you. If God calls you, nothing can stand in the way. It is His call on your life, not your own. Take your focus off of yourself, and look to God. No more excuses. Anything is possible with God.

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
 1. What is God calling you to?
 2. What excuses have you given to God to try and get out of this? (Or, if you are pursuing that call, what excuses keep trying to rear their ugly head?)
 3. How do you think God would respond to your excuses? (Use God's responses to Moses in the text to help you.)
 4. What practical steps are you going to take in the next few days and weeks?