

Exodus 011
Three-Way Communication
Exodus 4:13-20
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Let us take our Bibles this morning and open them to Exodus 4:13. The title of our message this morning is "Three-Way Communication." We are continuing our verse-by-verse teaching through the Book of Exodus. The first major section and subsection of the book is the redemption of a nation—how God will perform in this book, the greatest act of redemptive history other than the cross of Christ.

He is going to take His people, His firstborn son, His nation, as He calls them in this chapter, out of 400 years of enslavement. He is going to bring them into freedom, and as He brings them into freedom, He is going to teach them at Mount Sinai His principles for living. That sounds like us, does it not? The Lord has purchased us from the slave market of sin. He sets us free, and as He sets us free, He does not leave us to our own devices but He teaches us the principles of life.

In Exodus, you should see in a different format how God operates with individuals, although here He is dealing with the nation concerning salvation. This is a tremendous thing that is happening here in the Book of Exodus.

When God works, He picks a human instrument. One of the problems God has—and God does have problems—is people. Someone said once: The ministry would be a great place if it was not for the people. The instrument has a tendency to do things their own way instead of God's way. The instrument has a tendency to get in the way of the glory of God. So God has to mold and shape the instrument in a particular way before it can be used. That is what He is doing here with Moses (Exodus 2-4).

Moses had grown up with naturalistic training in Egypt. He had the best of the best of that time period, having been set adrift on the Nile providentially by God, and taken in by Pharaoh's daughter into Egypt. The first 40 years of his life he received a tremendous naturalistic training, but he needed more than that. When he hit the age of 40, he saw an Egyptian abusing a Hebrew, and he murdered the Egyptian in cold blood.

Obviously, you are dealing with a person that is used to doing his own thing his own way. There is nothing more difficult in life to do than to try to do the work of God through human power. The arm of the flesh can only go so far.

That ushered Moses into the second phase of his life. This is the middle tier between age 40 and age 80, where God, as I have said before, gave Moses his B.D. degree—backside of the desert degree. He is no longer an opulent prince; he is an obscure shepherd. There he is, tending sheep for 40 years.

Finally, when Moses, with no more praise, no more accolades, no more privileges in Midian is reduced to about nothing, he takes his father-in-law's sheep near the mountain of God, which is going to be a big deal later on in the Book of Exodus. Mount Sinai, sometimes called Horeb, is where God is going to disclose His Law to His redeemed people. That is where Moses ends up in Exodus 3.

God appears to Moses in the burning bush incident and gives him his calling. "Here is what your life is about: you are going to be used as My instrument to redeem My people from 400 years of Egyptian bondage." Can you imagine if God said that to you at age 80? What would you say? You would probably come up with a lot of excuses as to why you are not the right person for the job. That is what Moses does.

Moses' Calling (Exodus 4:1-31)

- I. Third objection (1-9)
 - A. Objection: Israel will not believe (1)
 - B. Response: proofs (2-9)
- II. Fourth objection (10-12)
 - A. Objection: poor speaker (10)
 - B. Response: God's sovereignty (11-12)
- III. Fifth objection (13-17)
 - A. Objection: send another (13)
 - B. Response: Aaron as spokesman (14-17)
- IV. Moses returns to Egypt (18-20)
 - A. Jethro's permission (18)
 - B. God's comfort (19)
 - C. Moses' return (20)

Thus far, we have studied four excuses. The first excuse is inadequacy (Exodus 3:11-12), and the answer is God's presence. God says, "I will be with you." It is hard to say you are inadequate when God Himself is going to be with you in this task.

Excuse number two is lack of authority. "Who in the world would listen to me? What do I even say to Pharaoh, the leader of the known world, when I say to let God's people go?" God answers that in Exodus 3:13-15 by telling Moses that the I AM sent you. I AM is a great title of God, meaning the Eternal One, the self-existent One, the One who has always been and will always be.

Then Moses' third excuse is unbelief. "No one's going to believe You appeared to me. They are not going to take me seriously. These are the people that rejected me and caused me to be a fugitive of justice for the last 40 years. Why would they believe me now?" God answers that objection of unbelief by giving to Moses three signs, showing that God is the God of the laws of nature. He can transcend the laws of nature at will. He can take a staff and turn it into a serpent and vice versa. He can give someone leprosy and then instantaneously cure them. He can take the Nile and turn it to blood red. All of that happens in Exodus 4:1-9.

Then Moses moves to his fourth excuse: "God, I do not have the gift of gab. I am not a good speaker. I do not talk well. I am going to go in front of the royal court? I do not have the right oratorical flair, the oratorical pizzazz for that." God answers the fourth objection by explaining His sovereignty. "Moses I am sovereign even over your own mouth. I have the ability to dictate, to control, to influence what comes out of your mouth."

Last time we did not quite hit Exodus 4:12. Let me reemphasize that God is describing His sovereignty over one's mouth.

"Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say" (Exodus 4:12).

That certainly takes away the excuse of not being a great speaker. You cannot use that excuse if God is sovereign over one's mouth. As I tried to explain last time, this is a real hangup for a lot of us. One of the greatest fears that people have next to death is public speaking. I shared a little bit last time about how God took me out of a massive fear that I had during my teenage years and early 20s, and into public speaking.

It seems to me that this issue is a big problem with God's people. A lot of people say no to assignments, because they do not want to be up in front of a group or something like that in a ministry situation. About 800 years later, Jeremiah the prophet had the same problem. It shows me that this is a perpetual hangup on the part of God's people.

*"Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,
'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
And before you were born I consecrated you;
I have appointed you a prophet to the nations'" (Jeremiah 1:4-5).*

Jeremiah said, "Sign me up for that. That sounds great!" No, he did not say that. He was afraid.

*"Then I said, 'Alas, Lord God!
Behold, I do not know how to speak,
Because I am a youth.'
But the Lord said to me,
'Do you not say, 'I am a youth,'
Because everywhere I send you, you shall go,
And all that I command you, you shall speak.
'Do not be afraid of them,
For I am with you to deliver you,' declares the Lord.
Then Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me,
'Behold, I have put My words in your mouth'" (Jeremiah 1:6-9).*

That is something we all need a case of. We need the Lord to be directing our speech, even in moments of fear. It very much reminds me of the apostles. Remember, Jesus sent them out, and Jesus made this statement: "Do not prepare in advance what you are going to say as you are brought before the authorities, as you are brought before the magistrates. I am going to be controlling what is coming out of your mouth. I am going to be influencing that. I am going to be directing that." (Matthew 10:19-20; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:11-12)

As I get up to minister in the spheres of influence God has given me, there probably is not a day that goes by where I do not pray these kinds of words that you see in these passages. One of the prayers I pray is: Lord, bring to mind the things that you would have me to say. I have my script. I have my plans. I have my seminary degree. I have this, I have got that. Maybe I have some natural abilities, but what are those things? At the end of the day, there are only a few loaves and a few fish. Those things have to be placed in the hands of God for them to be multiplied.

That is how to pray about any conversation, any speaking opportunity that you might have: Lord, just bring to mind supernaturally the things that You would have me say. What is interesting about that prayer request is that a lot of times you will find yourself going totally off script. I have done that many times where I have gone back and looked at my sermon notes and laughed at it after the fact, because the sermon had almost nothing to do with what was in my notes, and I just take that as the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Maybe I am going to say the right thing; maybe I am going to say the wrong thing. Give that to the Lord. He has a way of taking care of us. That is what He is telling Jeremiah.

*"Then the Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me,
'Behold, I have put My words into your mouth.
See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms,
To pluck up and to break down,
To destroy, to overthrow,
To build and to plant'" (Jeremiah 1:9-10).*

How could Jeremiah build and plant? How could he destroy and overthrow? How could he pluck up and break down? Because God was going to use His words and give Him the things to say. This is what Moses is receiving here from God. "You cannot use a lack of abilities, that you think you do not have, as some kind of excuse, because I am the One that is sovereign over one's mouth."

Moses now has worked through his last excuse, and now here comes excuse number five. It is almost as if Moses has run out of creativity because he only has one thing left to say. That excuse is given there in Exodus 4:13, and God responds to it Exodus 5:14-17. Moses' excuse number five:

"But he said, 'Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will'" (Exodus 4:13).

"I have given you a lot of excuses, Lord, but the truth is, I do not want to go. I am not the guy. I am not your man. My resume (if he submitted a resume) is withdrawn. My application, withdrawn. I am a shepherd. I have been happy at Midian. I have been doing this for 40 years, and I have gotten used to the routine here. I am happy pasturing my father-in-law Jethro's flock in and around Midian. I just want to live and spend the rest of my years doing that."

That is really what the issue with Moses was. He could throw up all kinds of other excuses, but he just did not want to go. Do you know what? If God had left Moses in that condition, he would have spent his final days as a shepherd. He would have died and no one would have even known his name. But what God had for Moses was so awesome—the deliverer, the law giver, and the author of Hebrew Bible. None of that would have even been a reality in Moses' life if he had succeeded in turning God down.

Keep that in mind. The next time you have a temptation to turn God down for some reason. It could be something that you are supposed to do that is so far and above and beyond you that it has to be of God, and you just forfeit the opportunity to be used in that way, because you do not want to be inconvenienced. No one likes their file drawers rearranged; no one likes their life changed. I believe that a lot of Christians fade away into obscurity for reasons like this. Their comfort zone is too comfortable, and that is why we call it a "comfort zone." "Do not do not infringe on my life," when in reality, what God wants to do in and through your life is so huge that when all is said and done, you will look foolish staying in this little Midian shepherding comfort zone.

At some point, you have to step out of the comfort zone. Everybody likes to dogpile on Peter. Jesus said to Peter, "Get out of the boat and walk," and we dogpile on him because he only walked for a little while and then he sank. You hear all these sermons about how if he just had enough faith and all of these kinds of things. I guess my way of looking at it is at least Peter got out of the boat and tried. Where were the rest of them? I only see Peter even making an effort, and he was actually successful for a season.

The problem, of course, is that he got his eyes off the Lord and he got it onto the winds and the waves. That is where the problems started, but at least the guy gave it a shot. Many times in our lives we do not even want to give it a shot. We do not even want to try. We have all of our excuses, but it is more of a heart problem.

Look at God's reaction to this fifth and final objection (Exodus 4:13). Dr. Ed Hindson, in his Exodus commentary, says,

"...Ultimately, it came down to the fact that Moses simply did not care for the position being divinely offered and turned it down flat. He entreated the Lord to choose a replacement and send someone else."

I guess God could have done that if He sovereignly wanted to, but it is interesting to me how Moses does not get let off the hook. If you look at Exodus 4:14, to me these are some of the scariest words in the Bible:

"Then the anger of the Lord burned against Moses..." (Exodus 4:14).

The Lord did not sin. We just finished talking about how in Christ the wrath of God against sinners is satisfied. Those words "the anger of the Lord" should cause some fear. The anger of the Lord did not burn against Moses because he was involved in some sexual sin or was involved with foreign substances or gambling or getting his life knee-deep in financial problems. It was not anything like that. The anger of the Lord burned against Moses because Moses did not believe that God could pull this off through him.

Dr. Ed Hindson writes this about the response:

"The anger of the Lord was kindled. At this response from Moses, the Lord's patience finally ran out with His servant, and He lost his temper. No more gentle, reassuring answers were forthcoming."¹

I do not want to be around when that happens. It is like the Incredible Hulk. "Do not make me angry. You would not like me when I am angry." If the Hulk can get mad, think about what happens when God gets mad. If Dr. David Banner, the guy that became the Hulk, could get angry, think about God's anger.

In other words, you make excuses, you make excuses, and you make excuses, and God says, "OKay, I am done. No more excuses. The only thing left for you is anger, divine discipline." It is scary, the predicament we put ourselves in even as Christians when we keep saying "No" over and over and over to the Lord.

Yet, in the midst of it, the Lord is so loving and patient. As you continue to read Exodus 4:14, it says,

"...and He said, 'Is this not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently'" (Exodus 4:14).

What is going to be described here now is a method of three-way communication to accommodate Moses in his insecurities. That is the forbearance of God. The anger of God here, absolutely. The patience of God here, absolutely. when you see any passage of the Bible dealing with the wrath of God whether it is the Sodom and Gomorrah story, events in the Book of Revelation, the Flood, you name it, right there in the same

¹ Hindson, E. E., & Mitchell, D. R., eds. (2010). *King James Version Bible Commentary for Today: The Most Up-to-Date Commentary on the Time-Honored Text of the King James Version* (p. 85). Thomas Nelson.

context, you will see something related to the patience of God, the love of God, and the grace of God.

In fact, some of the greatest statements in the Bible about the long-suffering of God occur in contexts where God is about to or is delivering judgment. Both are equal parts of God's nature. If your theology is such that you only see the wrath of God all of the time, but not His patience, then you have a warped theology. If your theology is such that all you see is His patience, but never His wrath, you have a warped theology. It is both "Holy, holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty" (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8), and "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). It is both.

How does it all come together? How does it work? The cross of Christ is where it all works out, because in the cross of Christ, the anger of God against sin was satisfied. Now we are free to partake of His grace. I do not know of any doctrine in the Bible where both examples of God's character are reconciled better than the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So here we are seeing the anger of God because He has given Moses every opportunity that he is opted out of. You see the patience of God because God says, "I am going to develop through Aaron a three-way communication process," which is going to get more detail in Exodus 4:15-16. In Exodus 4:14, God even gives Moses a sign.

"And moreover, behold, he [Aaron] is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart" (Exodus 4:14).

"He is coming out to meet you, and he is going to be happy to see you because he is part of the communication process. When you see him come out with a big smiley face and thumbs up and let us go—he has the right attitude—that is a sign in and of itself." God is taking Moses along step-by-step, giving him initial signs.

Then you see a description of this three-way communication system in Exodus 4:15-16. Here is how it is going to work:

"You are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you and you will be as God to him" (Exodus 4:15-16).

You will see the same type of arrangement over in Exodus 7:1-2.

"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of this land'" (Exodus 7:1-2).

All this talk about how Moses and Aaron will be as God to Pharaoh is not saying that these mere men are elevated to deity. Whenever you are in any kind of theological system and they teach you that you can be a god, you know it is heretical because that is the very first lie that Satan told right to Eve in Genesis 3:5:

"For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5).

It is so interesting to me to see all of the kingdom of the cults parading the idea that you can be deity. That is what New Age teaches—you can evolve into deity. Shirley MacLaine in the movie "Out On a Limb," with her arms outstretched on Malibu Beach, chanting over and over again, "I am God." I am sure God got a laugh out of that one. "Hey, Michael and Gabiel, come over here. Look at this little speck of sand here calling herself God."

The Mormons say you can evolve into deity and have your own planet. Almost all the false religious systems of the day teach that you can be God. This is not what this passage is saying. It is saying that God is going to work so powerfully through Moses and Aaron that to Pharaoh they will seem like God. Pharaoh is going to look at these guys as if they are God because of God's power, not because God transitioned them into human to deity. These passages are sometimes taken out of context to teach false ideas.

God sets up a three-way communication system here. "Moses, I am going to tell you what to do. You are going to communicate it to Aaron, and in turn Aaron is going to communicate these things to Pharaoh, the leader of the known world. I do not have to work this way, Moses, but I love you so much, and I want to use you so badly that I will go down to your level to set something up that will get you out of your comfort zone and so you will stop making all of these excuses."

Dr. Ed Hindson writes,

"The Lord answered Moses' request by bringing a third party into the equation, Moses' brother, Aaron. God begrudgingly indulged Moses' reluctance to expound the divine message. Although Moses was commissioned to serve as God's mouthpiece, Aaron was likewise commissioned to be Moses' mouthpiece. A three-way system was arranged whereby God would first speak to Moses. Moses would then convey the divine will to Aaron. Finally, Aaron would then publicly broadcast the message."²

Three-way communication. It was God's accommodation and God's willingness to go to the lowest level where people are because God loves people that much. God is an

² Ibid., 85-86.

accommodating, condescending God who will get right down to your level if that is what it is going to take to get your attention.

The ultimate example of this is the incarnation of Christ, where at the point of the virgin conception, humanity was added to eternally existent deity in the second member of the Godhead, and God became one of us and lived amongst us. No one has an excuse anymore saying, "I do not know what God is like." You have a historical record of God in the flesh.

I try this with my cats all the time. I try to get my cats to do this or that, and one day I was thinking if I could just become a cat, I could talk to them. (Do not worry, I am not into the furry thing and I am not going to start crawling around on my hands and knees.) Is that not what the incarnation is? God says, "I am going to become human. I am going to add humanity to eternally existent deity. Now human beings can know how I think, how I talk—they can relate to me."

The whole Bible is about accommodation. It is about condescension; it is about God, coming to the lowest level He can come to because He loves us that much. That is what God is putting up with, with Moses. It is a striking thing because God is God. He can do anything and everything. No one questions His will, and yet His nature is such that, with Moses, He devised this three-way communication system because Moses, at the age of 80, had some insecurities.

The truth of the matter is, God wants to use you more than you want to be used. We all want to be used by God, but God really wants to use you. I mean really, really, really, really badly, to the point where He will put up with a lot of stuff to move us on the right track.

The three-way communication system I was thinking about is from 2 Timothy 2:2, where Paul the Apostle set up a multi-tiered communication system.

"The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2).

Timothy had a lot of hangups and insecurities, but Paul was very clear to Timothy that the whole thing does not hinge on him. "It is not as if you are going to go out and win the world to Christ. What you are going to do is entrust the things coming from me to faithful men. Those faithful men are going to turn around and they are going to teach others."

If I have my count right I am seeing at least four generations from Paul to Timothy, from Timothy to faithful men, from faithful men to others—Paul, Timothy, faithful men, others. Is that not the Scripture and divine truth moving through four generations? That is the way I count it and look at it.

I remember Dr. Dwight Pentecost. There probably is not a person that has had more influence over my thinking in terms of theology, other than the Holy Spirit Himself. I remember him being in his office, and he was one of these guys that was just great. He had this open-door policy where you could come in and talk about anything. No subject was off limits.

I remember him pointing to a map of the world on his wall, and saying, "Look at all of these different continents. Look at all of these different states. Do you realize that my voice is going out all of the time in those different countries? I have spent the last 40 to 50 years teaching all of the men who would fill the pulpits in all of these different nations."

He never had a massive ministry that we would look at. Today, you have to pack the Coliseum to have a massive ministry. Yet he had a bigger effect than all of these massive ministries combined because he did what 2 Timothy 2:2 says. He was in a seminary where all of the future preachers were coming. He was training them, and they were going out and they were training others. I should be clear, his joy in it was not his voice going out. Who cares about a human voice? His joy in it was: "The things that the Lord has shown me in His Word are going out, nonstop, all over the world."

You might be in some kind of ministry or some kind of situation where you are only discipling one or two people. You might wonder, are you going to have any impact? After all, the church down the street has ten million members. Do not underestimate the power of this three-way communication. You pour yourself into a person, and that person pours themselves into others, and they in turn pour themselves into others. Now you have got something going, and you might not see the harvest right away. You might not even see it in your life, but it is there.

I think sometimes we disqualify ourselves from being used like this because it is not the ministry we envisioned. "I want the stadium, I want the Coliseum. I want the TV stations, and I want the radio stations. I want this. I want that," when the reality is, you could be the next Mordecai Ham.

Nobody's ever heard of Mordecai Ham. Mordecai Ham was not well-known. He was a crusade preacher, an evangelist that happened to share the gospel in one of his meetings with a guy named Billy Graham. I am going to get a lot of people writing to me saying, "I do not like Billy Graham for this or that," but just forget all that. I am teaching a very simple point here. If you do not have a Mordecai Ham, who is unknown, you do not have a Billy Graham, who is extremely known.

Maybe you are the next Mordecai Ham. Maybe you are the next Billy Graham. I do not know what God does. He works very differently through different people, but at the end of the day, it is not the person, it is the message. What a shakeup that was, sitting in the office there of Dr. Pentecost and him pointing to that map on his wall.

God is really good at this three-way communication thing. In fact, He is good at four-way communication, and five-way communication—the principles of spiritual multiplication.

Look there at Exodus 4:17:

"You shall take in your hand this staff, with which you perform the signs"
(Exodus 4:17).

Here is the three-way communication all set up. "By the way, Moses, do not forget your staff." It is a strange thing to say, until you understand what happened to the staff in Exodus 4:2-4. That is the same staff that became a serpent and then was turned into a staff again.

Go down to the second half of Exodus 4:20:

"So Moses also took the staff of God in his hand" (Exodus 4:20).

Look at what it is called here: the staff of God. Why? Why the emphasis on taking the staff, make sure you bring the staff, and all of this stuff? Do you know what the staff is? We are not talking about your secretary and youth pastor; we are talking about the shepherd's crook, shepherd's rod.

Why take that? "Because, Moses, it is going to get tough and you are going to doubt Me. But you know what? Here is a tangible reminder of what I can do. Here is a tangible reminder of how I, at will in your life, suspended the laws of nature. You are going to look at that staff and you are going to remember that when it gets tough (and it will get tough), when it gets confrontational (and it will get confrontational), you are going to look at that staff and you are going to persevere in the midst of adversity, because you have a tangible reminder of what I did. If you understand what I did, since I do not change, you can understand what I can do."

Now, as a Christian, I hope you have that staff in your hand. You may not be a formal shepherd, but you need a memento of some kind. You need something that you can look at—a picture, something you wear like a shirt—you need something that you can look at that reminds you of what God did for you, how He delivered you from something that you felt you could never be delivered from. This is the value of the practice of journaling, just keeping a journal. You put in a certain date: God rescued me from unemployment right here. God moved me to a new and better job right here. You have the date down, and you can remember it.

You need to open that journal or whatever memento it is that you have, and you need to be reminded of what God did for you. You are going to come to another crisis in your life at some point where you are going to need the hand of God to move. It is going to be something too big for you and too big for me. You need to be reminded that God is the living Savior.

Do we put so much emphasis on the death of Christ that we forget that He is the living Savior? We are celebrating communion and we are looking backward. Praise the Lord. We would have nothing were it not for that transaction. But the Jesus that ascended back to the Father's right hand is just as much alive today as He was 2,000 years ago, when he walked the face of the earth. We are not serving a dead Savior; we are serving a living Savior.

Over and over again the Bible calls God the living God. This is His anger with His people turning to idols which cannot see, cannot talk, and cannot think. Read what God says to His people through the prophet Isaiah in those latter chapters to pre-Exilic Israel. "Are you guys getting tired of toting these idols around everywhere you go? Because you know the day is going to come where you are going to get old, and you are not going to be able to carry these big pieces of clay, wood, and metal anymore. In fact, you are going to need someone to carry you in your old age. Now, I, as the living God, can pull that off. These things that you are worshiping instead of Me cannot pull that off."

Your cell phone is not going to help you in the day of trouble (unless you need a ride or something like that). We spend so much time walking around looking at these things all the time. I saw a reel about if somebody looked at their Bible the same way they looked at a cell phone. It has this lady reading her Bible, and she is holding up traffic, the line is piling up behind her and all this stuff. I know you are going to play a little game with me: Well, my Bible is on my cell phone. We can do all that, but we just spend so much time with these things. You can talk to people, you can text people, you can see what is going on. It is really neat. But is that a substitute for the living God?

"You are going to need some kind of memento in your life, Moses, so you can remember that I am alive and I helped you with something. You were afraid of a snake, and I turned it back into a staff. Do you remember that?" "Oh, yeah, I remember that, Lord. In fact, I have the staff right here in my hand." I have the journal; I have the email; I have got the signature. Whatever it is, I have it right here in my hand. When it gets tough (and it will get tough), I am going to remember that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. If God could bail me out then, He can certainly bail me out now.

Go down to Exodus 4:18 and you see Moses is now returning to Egypt.

"Then Moses departed and returned to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, 'Please, let me go, that I may return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see if they are still alive.' And Jethro said to Moses, 'Go in peace'"
(Exodus 4:18).

Moses leaves Sinai, where he was, and he goes back to Midian to get the permission from his father-in-law to leave and go to Egypt to fulfill his assignment. You will notice that Moses did not say to the flock, "You guys are done." He did not just let him go. He did not walk away from the flock because God had a calling on his life. God does not work that way. God wants us to fulfill our human responsibilities.

"He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much" (Luke 16:10).

Why did God pick Moses? He is sovereign, but another reason He picked Moses is that He had built into Moses' character consistency and responsibility. This is a guy that takes his assignment seriously. Because after all, if you are going to let the sheep go at Sinai and not fulfill your responsibilities as the shepherd of your father-in-law's flock, how in the world are you going to lead roughly 2.5 million people out of the bondage of Egypt? We either qualify ourselves for future assignments or disqualify ourselves from future assignments by how we handle the little things in the "nasty now and now."

What little things, that nobody sees, has God put into your lap? You look at it as tiny, and you look at it as little, and you look at it and say, "If I skirt here or cut a corner there, if I take a short shortcut, no one would know." God says, "I see it, and I do know." If you cannot be faithful with this, how can you be trusted with bigger things?

"And [Moses] said to him, 'Please let me go, that I may return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see if they are still alive'" (Exodus 4:18).

Do you see where Moses' priorities were? Moses' priorities were on God's priorities. It reminds me very much of the Book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah, in the reign of Persia, is going to be allowed by Artaxerxes to leave Susa and go back and rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. He requested permission for his employer to let him go, just like Moses is doing here. I love the priorities of Nehemiah. He does not say, "I want a vacation. I want to do some sightseeing. I want to make some money." His heart is such that he is thinking about the things that God is thinking about.

"So the king said to me, 'Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart.' Then I was very much afraid. I said to the king, 'Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my father's tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?'" (Nehemiah 2:2-3).

Jerusalem had no wall. If you do not have a wall in the ancient Near East, you do not have a city. It is interesting how the things that broke the heart of God broke the heart of Nehemiah. Apparently, the things that broke the heart of God also broke the heart of Moses.

That is something we really need to pray about, because so many times it is self-interest, what we are interested in, not God's interests. How is this going to affect me? Because after all, the Holy Trinity is "me, myself, and I"—it is all about me. We do not do exegesis; we do "narcigesis," as I say. We have to see ourselves into everything when we ought to be more concerned about the things of God than the things of self.

The Bible teaches something really interesting. It says, if you seek God's priorities, all the things that you think you are interested in and need—God's got those covered.

"Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your loving Father feeds them" (Matthew 6:26).

"...will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!" (Matthew 6:30).

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

What are those things? What are we going to eat? What are we going to drink? What are we going to wear? Where am I going to live? Am I going to live in a red state or a blue state? What is the weather like where I am going to live? What kind of neighborhood is it? What kind of salary am I going to make? Will I be able to afford retirement? (The answer is probably no, but you can ask.)

God is saying, "All that stuff, I got covered. I got it all covered." What you ought to be preoccupied with is God's way of thinking, and His priorities, *"and all these things will be added to you"* (Matthew 6:33).

Moses asks for his father-in-law's permission to go.

"And Jethro said to Moses, 'Go in peace'" (Exodus 4:18).

It is interesting to me how God respected the family structure and did not circumvent the family structure here. I have run into people that say, "I am called by God to do X, Y, and Z. I do not have any money, and I have these ten kids that I need to feed. I am seeking God's will for my life." To which I usually say, "Let me give you God's will for your life: go get a job and take care of all these kids!"

When God moves on somebody, He does not circumvent the family structure that He has put into place. Moses, I guess, could have just dumped the flock at Sinai and headed right for Egypt. He had a word from the Lord, but you do not see him doing that at all. You see him fulfilling his responsibilities. You see him respecting the wishes of his father-in-law.

I know we can all carve out little exceptions about parents not agreeing with spiritual things or whatever, but I have discovered that if you just walk out the things of God, then all of these other relational issues, to my mind and from personal experience, just have a way to take care of themselves.

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

Lord, break my heart for the things that break Your heart. Have you ever prayed that? Pray that one this week with sincerity. You will see a completely different mind developing within you.

God gives Moses a word of comfort in Exodus 4:19:

"Now the Lord said to Moses in Midian, 'God back to Egypt, for all the men who are seeking your life are dead'" (Exodus 4:19).

What does that mean? Moses had been a fugitive of justice for 40 years, having murdered the Egyptian at age 40. God says, "All the people that were holding that against you do not even remember the crime." Essentially, what He is saying is the reign of Thutmose III is over, and now we are into the reign of Amenhotep II. There has been a transition of power.

Amenhotep reigned from 1449 to 1425 BC. The Exodus happened in 1446 BC. Using basic standard Egyptian chronology, we can conclude that the Pharaoh of the oppression was different from the Pharaoh of the Exodus, although both had the same mentality. The Pharaoh of the oppression was Thutmose III. The pharaoh of the Exodus was Amenhotep II.

"Come on, Pastor, why go into all this stuff?" There is a very simple reason: I want us to understand that this is not just story time here. This is history. This is not "VeggieTales" or whatever; this is not "Jack and the Beanstalk." These are not neat spiritual tips for the day. These are actual historical events that can be validated and verified.

There is a way to put the Book of Exodus together that harmonizes beautifully with Egyptian chronology. In fact, I will mention some of it when we get to the tenth plague. Some of it is so amazingly and eerily similar to what the Bible says. Imagine that! You are reading a book of history. Do not buy the secular line: "We do the history in the public school system. We at the universities with the PhDs, are the historians. You Sunday people are just the spiritual people."

No, no, no. We are the spiritual people and the historical people. In fact, if you gave us half a moment of your time, we could come into the public school system and correct the whole record. But you do not want that because you are more interested in your own personal narrative than biblical interference. We have got the goods here. They own the system; we have the truth. Russ Miller, who is coming to speak at our conference, will say that concerning the evolution issue over and over again: We own the truth; they own the system.

Moses returns to Egypt.

"So Moses took his wife and his sons and mounted them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt" (Exodus 4:20).

Who is his wife? His wife is Zipporah, whom he met in Midian. That is how he got his father-in-law Jethro. Zipporah is mentioned in Exodus 2:21.

"Moses was willing to dwell with the man, and he gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses. Then she gave birth to a son, and he named him Gershom, for he said, 'I have been a sojourner in a foreign land'" (Exodus 2:21-22).

It is not until we get to Exodus 18:4 that there is actually another son from that union named Eliezer:

"The other was named Eliezer, for he said, 'The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh'" (Exodus 18:4).

Once again, the family principle is respected here. If God is calling you to do something, He will call the whole family, in my opinion. I am very leery and wary of people that say, "God has called me this direction, but not my wife." Something is not right there.

We will close with this:

"Moses also took the staff of God in his hand" (Exodus 4:20).

You notice now it is called the "staff of God." That is the reminder and that is the memento that he would be perpetually looking at, I believe, when it got tough. Off Moses goes, along with family and staff from Midian to the land of Egypt. Next time we will see how God continues to speak to Moses about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.

Shall we pray? Lord, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your truth. We thank You for Communion Sunday. We thank You for fellowship, but most of all, Lord, we thank You for salvation. I do pray, Lord, that if there is anybody within the sound of my voice that may not know You personally, I pray that for them today would be the day of salvation; that they would fulfill Your condition, which is to receive what You have done for them in their place. We know, Lord, the only way to receive a gift from You is to believe, which means to trust. We do understand, Lord, that we are dealing with more here than intellectual assent to facts—it is a matter of trust. I pray many, many people within the sound of my voice would be placing their trust in the finished work of the Savior and become Your child even this day, this very first Lord's Day in August. What a great time to be born spiritually.

I do pray, Lord, if anyone is unclear about this that they would seek me out after the service, so that all obstacles can be removed and they can see clearly that there is life in the Son, by faith alone in Him. We will be careful to give You all the praise and the glory. We ask these things in Jesus' name. God's people said, Amen.