

## HOW CAN I SERVE THE LORD?

### Exodus 4:1-17

“I can’t do that!” How often have we not said that! Maybe when we are starting a new job, or learning a new subject at school, or when we have to change our habits. There are difficult tasks we are called to do. Someone has said that accomplishing anything worthwhile is difficult. How do we do it? More importantly, how do we serve the Lord? We have our excuses. We have our objections. We have our reasons why we can’t serve the Lord. Nevertheless, He calls us to serve Him in love and faith. But you wonder: **How Can I Serve the Lord?** We will look at the questions Moses asks and the answers God gives.

The people of Israel are in bondage and slavery in Egypt. But God is coming to deliver them from their bondage and set them free. For that deliverance He will make use of Moses. To that end the Lord has met with Moses at the burning bush near Mount Horeb. God spoke to Moses from the bush, explained that He had seen the misery of the people of Israel, had heard their cry and was coming down to deliver them. And He calls Moses to return to Egypt in order to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt. You might have thought that Moses would have expressed his willingness to go, his readiness to do God’s will. But he has several questions. He has 5 questions in total, or maybe better said 5 objections. **First**, he asked in chapter 3:11: **“Who am I?”** He is not so sure that he is the right candidate for the job. He is not so sure that he has what it takes to get the job done to speak with Pharaoh and to lead Israel. Therefore,

he asks: who am I? And that is not such a strange question is it? When the Lord calls us to salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ, and He calls us in the gospel, then we can feel our sins and our guilt and say: “who am I? How can I be a Christian?” And we feel ourselves disqualified, and we think it must not be for me. Does the Lord want to save me? Does He want to use me? How can I do this? But the Lord answers Moses by promising to be with him: “Certainly, I will be with thee” (Ex. 3:12). That is how you can be a Christian; that is how you can serve the Lord; that is how you can carry out a difficult task, and a difficult calling, because He promises His presence.

But then Moses has **a second question** (Ex. 3:13): **who art thou?** When I speak to the children of Israel, and I tell them the God of our fathers has sent me, and say to me: who is this God that has sent you? What is His name? I don’t know. I can’t tell them anything about who God is and what He is like. And maybe you understand that question and objection. “How can I be a Christian? I don’t know the Lord. I can’t begin to describe the God of the Bible. I don’t know any theology.” But the Lord answers that objection by saying: this is my name: “I am that I am” (Ex. 3:14). He is the great I am. And we don’t grasp that all and we can’t fathom it all, but that is all you need to know. And He comes down in the Lord Jesus. In Him the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily (Col. 2:9), and He says: “I am the great I am.” The Christian might not know much theology, but by grace he knows the Lord Jesus and that is the answer to our ignorance. That is the answer to who He is? He is Jehovah-Jesus. True, we feel like we know so little (and it is true), but if we know Jehovah-Jesus, that is all you need to know. These two questions came in Exodus 3.

Now we come to the **3<sup>rd</sup> objection of Moses: but they won't believe me.**

Exodus 4:1: "And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, the LORD hath not appeared unto thee." I mean, Moses is the only one seeing what he is seeing and hearing what he is hearing, and he has to tell the people of Israel that God has spoken to him, and he is worried that they won't believe him (they did not believe him 40 years ago), and he does not see how they will listen to him now either, and believes they will say: "the Lord did not appear to you." Surely there will be doubters among them. There will be those who will evaluate his experiences, and they will say: no, I don't think that was genuine experience, I don't think the Lord appeared to you. Is that not one of our fears too: other people can speak about experiences, but I can't. I don't even know what kind of experiences I am supposed to have, but I am sure that others will not believe me. Why would anyone believe what I say? That is maybe why we are silent to our family members maybe, and don't say what we need to say to our neighbours: they won't believe me. Moses is struggling with that very thing. In answer to this 3<sup>rd</sup> objection, the Lord gave Moses 3 signs, 3 miracles to perform before all the people testifying to the people that the Lord had appeared to Moses. The three signs are: a stick, a hand, and water. The first sign involved a stick (Ex. 4:3-5). It is what Moses carried with him, a shepherd's rod or staff. The Lord told him to throw it on the ground, and he did, and it became a snake. This dead piece of wood became a living, hissing, slithering snake, perhaps even a snake with fangs that could wound and kill someone. It was frightening to Moses that he ran away from it. Then the Lord said: reach out your hand and take it by the tail (Vs. 4). Ordinarily that would be a bad idea, for if you grab a snake by the

tail, it will swing around and bite you. A snake must be pinned and held right behind its head, so that its fangs can't reach you. But God told Moses to take this snake by the tail. Moses reached out and grabbed it cautiously (at least that is how it is described in the Hebrew); nevertheless, he took hold of the snake by its tail and it turned back into an ordinary shepherd's staff in his hand. What did it mean? What was the message? The snake was a symbol of Satan in the garden and Pharaoh in Egypt. If you study pictures in Egypt, the cobra was the symbol of power and dominance that appeared on the crown of the Pharaoh, and on his scepter, like a vicious enemy. But the power of the devil, and the evil empire of Egypt would not prevail. The fangs of Satan could not touch the hand of Moses or hurt the people of God. God has power over Satan in the garden and Pharaoh in Egypt. If God is on your side, you don't need to fear, God will overcome. In the words of Romans 16:20: "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." God will prevail. The second sign involved a hand (Ex. 4:6-7). Moses is told to put his hand inside his cloak or into his bosom. So Moses put his hand into his cloak and he took it out it was white like snow, like the hand of a leper. The hand of Moses was covered with a deadly disease, one of the most dreaded diseases: leprosy. Moses' own hand was changed into something horrible. But when he put it back into his cloak, as the Lord told him to do, his hand was restored. Was this sign maybe to show the leprosy of Moses? After all, he pleaded his own unworthiness, but the Lord could restore him, cleanse him and use him. Or was it maybe to show that terrible diseases would come upon the land of Egypt but that the Lord could also remove those terrible diseases? Or was it to show that Israel was leprous, polluted by sin, yet the Lord could cleanse them and heal them. This much we can say is that the

Lord is able to harm or heal a hand. The Lord is able to harm one nation and heal another. The Lord is able to destroy Egypt and restore Israel. The third sign involved water (Ex. 4:8-9). The Lord said: if they do not believe these first two signs, or listen to you, take some water from the Nile river and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground. You see, The Nile River was the life of Egypt, but it had been death to Israel. In these waters the Hebrew baby boys had been drowned to death. But their blood was crying out to God from the Nile, and God would avenge the blood of the Hebrew boys that had been spilled into the Nile River. Their crimes had not gone unnoticed. The waters of the river had not washed that blood away. Look! There it was on the ground for all to see. Those are the three signs that Moses receives in answer to His objection: but they won't believe me. Three signs of death and destruction. Three signs that show the power of the Lord, that the people of Israel and Egypt could know that the Lord is God. God is King forever, let the nations tremble. Do we? Have we seen the evil of the serpent, the leprosy of our own heart, how our sins cry out for judgment? He is the God who harms and heals. He is the God who kills and makes alive. We have the greatest sign of the Lord Jesus Christ who came to crush the head of the serpent, who came to make leprous sinners clean, who came to wash away our sin with His own blood. There is the miracle of His incarnation, the miracle of His crucifixion, the miracle of His substitution, and the miracle of His resurrection. That is what the Lord sets before us in the gospel. Yes, I object sometimes that others won't believe me. Others won't listen to me. It is a very real complaint and objection. I am sometimes afraid and filled with doubt. Others will not believe my experiences or they will point to my lack of experiences, but true faith does

not look at our experiences. The Lord does not want us to look at our experiences and rest in our experiences and whether others will believe us or not. The Lord simply wants us to look by His Holy Spirit to Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ and the more faith looks to Him the more experiences it has, and the more my faith is strengthened and the more I go forward trusting Him. But Moses has another objection.

**Fourth objection: I can't speak.** Verse 10: "And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue." He did not think he had public speaking abilities. In fact he says something like this: I am not a man of words... I am heavy of mouth. Maybe he had a speech impediment. Maybe he stuttered or stammered. Even as he was speaking to God, he was having difficulty. The speech impediment continued even now in the presence of the Lord. How can I serve God? I can't speak. And he was not the only one to have felt this way. Isaiah said himself: I am a man of unclean lips (Is. 6:5). Jeremiah said: I cannot speak, for am a child (Jer. 1:6). Paul knew that others were not that impressed with his ability to speak. "His speech is contemptible" (2 Cor. 10:10). Moses was the first man to protest a lack of eloquence, but he was not the last one. We can all feel that. What can I say? How can I speak? Don't ask me to be a Christian because I can't speak. Don't ask me serve the Lord when I can't say anything. I can't speak for Him; I can't pray to Him. Others seem to have no problem speaking and praying. Others seem to be eloquent. Others seem to have capable tongues of men and of angels, but I don't (1 Cor. 13:1). I can't put words together. I don't know how to articulate myself. I stumble. I try to put words together but the wrong thing comes out of my mouth. Don't ask me to serve the Lord

because I can't speak for Him and pray to Him. I can't evangelize. And that is how sometimes while we say we can't speak, and we could never speak for God, we don't seem to have a problem arguing with people and even arguing with God as Moses is doing. But the Lord answers Moses by reminding him of the Creator of the mouth and the Guide of the mouth. Verse 11: "Who hath made man's mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord?" Who gave you that mouth anyway? God did. He gave us our eyes, our ears our mouth. Every ability that we have as well as every disability that we have has been ordained by God. I read this story of a minister who some years ago (maybe in the 1950s) with his wife were expecting their first child. I don't know how it all went, but the baby was born, maybe he was whisked away by the nurses, but the father was the first to find out that their baby had Down's Syndrome. He was devastated, and he reached out to a friend and told him the news that they had a baby born with Down's Syndrome because he did not know what to say to his wife. And his friend said: "my friend, this is of the Lord." And he turned to these verses from Exodus 4 and read: "who maketh the dumb or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord?" And the minister went to his wife and said: "my precious darling, the Lord has blessed us with a down's syndrome child." And his wife began to cry. And she said: "where did you get that?" And he showed her this verse and later she called her mother and said: "mother, the Lord has blessed us with a down's syndrome child. We don't know the nature of the blessing, but we do know it is a blessing." On the next Sunday 70 nurses from the hospital came to that minister's church and 30 were brought to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, the Lord has made us with our abilities and our disabilities, with our gifts and handicaps, with our

warts and all for His glory; yes, He has a purpose with our abilities and our disabilities, with our gifts and our handicaps. He is the Creator of us, also of our mouth, and He also wants to be the Guide of our mouth. Verse 12: “Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.” The Lord promises to be with his mouth. It is true, we don’t always know what to say and we stumble. We may be slow of speech. But Spurgeon says a slow tongue is better than a fast tongue, and few words are better than many words. Pharaoh had more reason to be afraid of a stammering Moses than of the most eloquent speaker in Egypt, for what Moses said had power in it. What we need is a mouth that is guided by the Lord; we need to be taught what to speak, when to speak, and how to speak? So, if you say: “but I don’t have enough head knowledge and I don’t have enough heart knowledge, and I don’t have the ability to speak and to pray.” He promises to help even if our gifts to speak are few, but let us seek to speak as we ought to speak for Jesus, longing for the day when (as William Cowper put it) “then in a nobler, sweeter song, I’ll sing thy power to save, when this poor lisping, stammering tongue, lies silent in the grave.” Friends, when you sense your inabilities, that is when the Lord is pleased to help you and guide you.

And then there is **a 5<sup>th</sup> objection: Send someone else**. Verse 13: “O my Lord, send, I pray thee...” someone else. The Lord has called Moses 4 times to go (chapt. 3:10, 16, 18; 4:12). Moses has asked the questions he could think of; he has raised his objections. The Lord has answered his objections, and Moses has run out of excuses. He could not claim that he was ignorant of God’s name; he could not excuse his inadequacy in himself, and his inability in himself; he could not say anymore that the Israelites would not believe him, or that he was a poor mouthpiece. The real issue was



he was not willing. He did not want to do this task. And that is why he says: Lord, you can send anyone you want, but not me. How different he is from Isaiah who in Isaiah 6 is overwhelmed with the majesty and glory of God, and hears the voice from heaven saying: whom shall I send? And Isaiah who knows his own unworthiness and smallness and insufficiency and inability nonetheless says: “here am I, send me” (Is. 6:8). But that is not how Moses responds. He says: “someone else can go.” And those are common words: don’t ask me; ask someone else. Who will help with this? Who will visit the sick? Who will reach out to him? Who will speak for me? Who will witness to their co-worker, who will invite their neighbour to church? Who will be a Christian? Who will serve me in this small corner or in that small corner? And we say: “don’t ask me, ask someone else. Someone else will do it. Someone else will be a Christian; not me. Someone else will serve Him in my home, or in my work, or in the church. Someone else will speak for the Lord; not me.” I keep looking for someone else, but I keep missing him every time I try to find him. You are the one whom the Lord is calling to be a Christian and to follow Him and to serve Him, not on the condition that you will know more, or have greater experiences or when you will be able talk to better or easier, but simply bowing before His word.

True, it is nice when we can have someone with us. Two are better than one (Eccl. 4:9). And the Lord will send Aaron, and he will serve as the spokesman for Moses; he will handle public relations. But by our unwillingness, we do displease the Lord, and His anger is kindled (as verse 14 says, and that is the first time in the Bible we read these words, when Moses makes all these excuses and at last says: send someone else, “and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses”). The Lord is

slow to anger; He is not easily angered, but His patience does have a limit. And His righteous indignation is kindled in the face of our objections and our excuses, when we refuse to obey Him, and we won't listen to Him. Are you doing that when He is calling to you? And you have objections and you have excuses and you may even sound pious with your excuses, but it is your guilt and the Lord needs to demolish all your objections and excuses and show you the sufficiency of His grace, and the sufficiency of His Son, whoever you are.

Moses said: send someone else. No, the Lord did not remove the call from Moses. He pressed him into service. But He did send someone else in the fullness of time. From all eternity He said: Lo, I come, in the volume of thy book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will (Ps. 40:7-8). He did not object. True, He agonized over the prospect of the cross, but He did not refuse to endure them. He said: not my will, but thine be done, and then He went and freely offered His life for the salvation of many. He did not say: "send someone else." He knew there was no one else. He alone could make perfect atonement for the sins of His people. And my hope is in His willing obedience and His willing service, and I learn to serve and to follow in relationship with Him, even though I don't think I tick all the right boxes, and even though I don't feel so gifted, and I think there are others who can do it better than me, but it is a privilege to serve Him who loved me and gave Himself for me. Amen.