
Prayers

To God

Weekly theme: Giving thanks to God for His Word

Eternal God, Author and Creator of all things, speak to us today through Your Word to remind us of all You have done through Jesus Christ. Remind us of His teaching, His ministry, His love and compassion, and His unrivalled dedication which took Him to the Cross. Let us always be inspired by the Word of Truth: **AMEN**

For myself

Ask the Lord to give you confidence in your work and in your dealing with those around you. Not the kind of overconfidence that people find oppressive and difficult, but the true confidence of one who is content with truth and secure in judgement.

For others

Pray today for those who have only a small connection with the church, but who nevertheless regard it as their place of worship. Pray that the Holy Spirit will work through the faithful to bless those who remain on the edge of faith, and draw them closer to their Lord.

Meditation

Be merciful, Lord Jesus, be merciful.

When I come into your awesome presence,
Hear the cry of my broken heart and heal my soul.

When I am at fault, and know not what to do,
May I not fall before the enemy, but receive Your mercy.

When I stand accused before others, unjustly,
Grant me faith and courage so I may be strong.

When I have walked through trouble and strife,
Assure me of Your mercy, forever upholding me.

When I worship You, and give You all the glory,
Place a testimony of Your love and mercy on my lips.

For with all Your people, I depend on You alone;
Be merciful, Lord Jesus, in Your steadfast love.

Be merciful, Lord Jesus, be merciful .

Bible Passage

Exodus 4:10-17

¹⁰ However, Moses said to the Lord,

'Please my LORD, I have never spoken well, not in the past, or recently, or since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and tongue.'

¹¹ The LORD said to him,

'Who gives people their speech? Who makes them deaf or mute, sighted or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?' ¹² Now then go! I will be with your mouth and teach you what to say.'

¹³ But Moses said,

'O my Lord, please send whoever you want to send!'

¹⁴ Then the LORD became angry with Moses and he said,

'What about Aaron the Levite, you brother? I know that he can speak well. Look, he is coming to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you. ¹⁵ You will speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and his mouth, and teach you both what you must do. ¹⁶ He will speak to the people for you, and he will be your spokesman, and you be like God to him. ¹⁷ Take this staff in your hand; with it you will perform the signs.'

Review

We have all seen it happen; someone is attempting to help another, but the one in need finds it hard to receive help and ends up infuriating the helper. But while this may be one thing between people, it is quite another between people and God! For here, God is seeking to help Moses but he lacks the confidence to receive what God is offering. He is let down by his inability to have complete trust in God's promises and empowering, and His supernatural power. Moses finds it hard to take his eyes off his own limitations, and in particular, his lack of ability to communicate well with others.

Here in this passage, Moses lost sight of the importance of his task, the providence of God, and the great signs and wonders God promised would accompany his work. Was this the same Moses who was intrigued by the burning bush and obedient to the voice of God he had heard within it, the Moses who had earlier responded to the Almighty with such conviction that he was shown God's own character and intentions more fully than any other person in history (3:1-15)? Unfortunately, it was indeed the same man, and this story is a salutary reminder that Moses, the man who would become the greatest leader of Old Testament times, was far from perfect.

Our passage today is an awkward part of the story of Exodus, but the Bible is never short on revealing the faults of great men and women as well as their qualities. Only one man is described by the bible as perfect, and this is Jesus. We do well to remember that just as God led Abraham on a journey of self discovery and faith before he became the founder of Israel, he also led Moses on a simpler journey of personal development so that he would become the great leader Israel so desperately needed.

Moses' questioning of God at the beginning of this text (4:10) is really an extension of his response after God appeared to him in a burning bush. Remember that when Moses first saw the burning bush, He heard God's call from the bush (3:4), but was afraid of Him and hid his face (3:5). Then, after he was told that God intended to liberate the people of Israel and would send him back to Egypt for this purpose (3:7-10), Moses immediately queried his own suitability for the task, saying, '*who am I that I should go ...*' (3:11). It was this questioning that led to God's subsequent revelation of His own name and authority, and Moses was told that he would have to share this revelation in order to convince the people of Israel of the Lord's intention to save them (3:13-22). Then in yesterday's passage, we read about Moses' concern that his mission would not work unless the people of Israel believed him (4:1-9). We get the picture. Moses was being more than cautious, he was beginning to sound like someone who was trying to find a way out of doing what God required! But the Lord answered all of Moses' first three questions because they were relevant, and required His answer. They were part of a genuine conversation between God and Moses which enabled the Lord to say more, and also built up His relationship with Moses.

The time came, however, when Moses went too far. In this passage, his questions began to sound like a complaint rather than a legitimate question (4:10f.). Moses may have correctly felt that his mouth was the weakest part of his soul, for it had not served him well when he challenged some people who were fighting (2:13), an incident that had led to his self-enforced exile. He was not right however to question God about what he could or could not do. In his defence, we may well imagine that Moses had little self esteem and confidence, and was perhaps asking the Lord for some further assistance, something that would enable him to speak well perhaps.

From God's perspective, however, Moses was questioning His judgement and falling into the trap of allowing small problems to obscure the greater task. Moreover, what Moses said indicated that he was reluctant to do God's will, even after God's amazing promises. Most of us use delaying tactics and questioning like this when we do not want to do something, and we know what we are doing. It is likely that this was what aroused the Lord's anger (4:14f.); what is indeed remarkable is the fact that God nevertheless answered Moses' point, even though it was probably pure avoidance on his part.

We should not forget that the Lord was in a hurry to proceed with His plan to set His people free. He may have been frustrated by Moses but he had no second plan or alternative. There was no one else to work with but Moses, and God was intent on making everything work out. As Moses continued to press his point (4:13), despite His anger, the Lord dealt with the situation by telling Moses that he could have Aaron as his spokesperson. Aaron was Moses' brother, and although we do not know how he came to be anywhere near the Moses at this time, the Lord told Moses that he was 'coming' (4:14). Aaron would speak for Moses and be his aide (4:14-17). Finally, God promises to be '*be with your mouth and his mouth*' (4:15), a promise that prefigures prophetic speech found within the later generations in Israel.

This passage joins many others in Scripture that highlight the problem of speech for those whom God calls (see also James 3:5f. Jeremiah 9:8, Zephaniah 3:13 etc). However, problems with speech have never stopped Almighty God from doing His work of Salvation and using those whom He has chosen. This story of Moses and God tells us that God will not accept our caution when He is determined to empower us for some task. He is always ready to work with us to overcome our problems even if He is exasperated by them! Moses was the one person He had chosen for a special work, and God still calls people to do special work for Him today.

Going Deeper

Further Comments

This passage is all about communication. If the mission to free the people of Israel was to be successful, then good communication would be essential, so this less than happy part of Moses' conversation with God is very important. We will now study the details of this passage which bring this out in a number of surprising ways; not least, in the revelation that Moses will be 'like God' to Aaron! It was an astonishing and unique statement in Scripture.

Moses and problems with speech.

The trouble with communication skills is that you do not know whether you have them or that they work, until you are in the position to exercise them, and Moses had little reason to have confidence that he could convey the great speeches he had just heard from God, to the Israelites. There are few who would not understand Moses' concerns. Moses claimed that he was useless at speaking; as the Hebrew text says: 'heavy lipped and thick-tongued' (translated 'slow of speech and tongue' – 4:10). He laboured the point, claiming this was true of 'the past', 'recently', and 'since you have spoken' (4:10); but in saying this, the rhetorical device he used of a threefold reference to time, was evidence enough that he was not as useless at speech as he felt himself to be. The issue was not just Moses' self perception about his ability to speak, but his acceptance of the role of a prophet, taking God's words to the people of Israel. Speaking well and being God's messenger are two different things, and although he was undoubtedly wrong about his abilities, Moses used his uncertainty about the one (speaking) to question his suitability to do the other (be a prophet), eventually driving God to anger. We find out later on in the Bible that Moses is quite an orator; Deuteronomy, for example, is written as a speech by Moses'.

However, the answer that God gave to Moses' concern was twofold; He was Creator and He was present with Moses, and there was no way that God was going to take 'no' for an answer!

Firstly, in a classic Hebrew affirmation of His majesty and authority (4:11) God said that He was the one who made the human body and its faculties, and He therefore had control over them as He wished. He then went on to say that He would help Moses speak and teach him what he needed to say (4:12); He would indeed be with him in the situations to which he was being led. This reminds us of the great saying of Jesus in which he told his disciples whilst on mission for Him that they should not '*worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that time ...*' (Matt 10:19). It goes to the heart of human concerns not merely about speaking, but being a messenger of God at critical times, when the lives of others and the salvation of many are at stake.

It is certainly true that the Lord frequently worked through the weak, the poor or the least able from a human point of view (e.g. see Judges 6:11-24, 1 Sam 16:1-13, 17:19-54; Isaiah 6:1-13, Jer 1:4-19), but this is hardly the point here. We have come across Moses as a baby, as a prince and as a poor shepherd. Now called by God to do a task, Moses needed to show faith in his Lord and in the promise of His presence. When Moses said '*O my Lord, please send whoever you want to send!*' his motives were laid bare before the Almighty. He was not willing to show the faith required, and attempted to direct the whole matter back to God with a thinly veiled prevarication; surely God could send 'someone else'. The answer was clearly, 'No'!

God's solution to a human problem

God would not allow such a matter to disrupt his salvation plan for His people the Israelites. He was clearly angry, and from almost every point of view, we can understand why He was! In a surprise move, we are suddenly introduced to a completely new figure in the whole story, Moses' brother Aaron. If Moses protested human inadequacy (whether true or not) then God would provide a human 'prop' for his prophetic ministry. By the time this incident came to a

conclusion (4:17) and God had finished speaking, there was no room for Moses to say more or complain further!

Later on in Exodus, we learn that Aaron is Moses' elder brother, and therefore came from the same tribe as Moses, the tribe of Levi. This text has been scrutinised over the years because of the strange way that Aaron is introduced, firstly as a 'Levite' (when as a brother of Moses, he clearly was a Levite without the emphasis here in this text). Secondly, the description of the relationship between Moses and Aaron was one that was close to the relationship between prophet and priest in later Israel. The role of the prophet was to discern and speak God's Word, but the work of a priest was to speak the same word brought by the prophet and minister that to the people. Strangely, many prophets had little dealings with ordinary people, and the work of priests was responsible for recording and passing on the words of the prophets. Isaiah's words are generally reckoned to have been recorded by priests, for example (see Isaiah 30:6), so that they could be read to other people and passed down.

Aaron

Some think that Aaron has been added to this story to justify his later important priestly role in Exodus (see Exodus 28:29f.), and they suggest that verse 17 was originally tacked on to the end of verse 13. However, what God says about Moses and Aaron is so consistent with the theology and the story-line of Exodus 4 that this is doubtful. Many of the details of what actually happened at that time are lost in history, and we cannot successfully unpick events which are so interlinked in the text we actually have, as if to find deeper truths or more accurate descriptions. We live with what God has given us in His Word.

In our passage, the Lord entwines Moses' commission to speak with a commission to Aaron. They are to speak God's words as one (4:15), but the Lord does not offer Aaron anything more than what He has offered Moses. He will be with them both. However, Aaron will be the spokesman for the pair of them (4:16), and Moses will be to Aaron 'like God'. Many people have been puzzled by this because it comes from the mouth of God! Surely, no human being can be 'like God' over another, for surely that would be domination!

In truth, however, we have already seen how God intended this is to work. For Aaron to recognise that his brother spoke the words of God was essential if the revelation already given to Moses was to be conveyed. Domination could only happen if God's gift of authority was abused, and here, Moses was given complete authority over Aaron so that the prophetic revelation of the salvation of all Israel was properly transmitted. There could be no room for error. Moses would have to retain a close prophetic relationship with God, despite his awkwardness and argumentativeness, and what God revealed to him would have to be received and reported by his elder brother as the Words of God Himself. Without this understanding, no older brother of those days would have been so subservient!

Finally, God turned back to Moses and told him to take the staff 'in your hand' (4:17). Moses was not being given an option. His time to bargain with God had come to an end, and it was time for God's plan of salvation to be put into effect.

Discipleship

Application

Excuses, excuses!

Perhaps we offer God too many excuses! This text certainly challenges the Christian to consider whether they sometimes go too far in arguing with God about things rather than getting on with what they should be doing! In truth, we most certainly need to have a relationship with the Lord whereby we can talk with Him about our needs; but the answer to them will always be that if we have Jesus, we surely have enough. And if Jesus is not

enough for us, what are we looking for? God supplies our every need through the Saviour, and those who are content with this are most blessed. Moses had yet to find that peace, and Jesus was many centuries ahead of his time. His story still speaks to us, nevertheless!

Prophetic call

The other important aspect of this passage is the nature of the prophetic call. When God calls someone to be a prophet, He calls them to speak out what He has to say, and they need to learn the discipline of conveying that Word accurately. Further, ministers, leaders and the all God's people have the duty to take hold of that prophecy and work at it, firstly to test it and then to follow its lead. This model of receiving God's Word is clear in the Old Testament and the New (Luke 1:67, Romans 12:6, 2 Peter 1:21, 1 John 4:1). What has happened to it today? Churches around the world are led on models which reflect either traditional paternalistic church structures or sometimes the cultures (of every kind) of the day. Few look to the dynamic of the prophetic Word of God, and this alone is sufficient to meet the needs of God's people.

Ideas for what to do

- What do you think about your own ability to speak in front of others? Don't worry if you feel that your skills are limited, most people feel the same. Most preachers have come to realise that they are only able to speak out and preach when God inspires them and they place their trust in Him completely. Ask yourself, are you willing to do the same? If not, why not?
- Pray for people who do indeed have speech impediments, for we cannot afford to ignore their difficulties. Are any of the services in your church signed, for example?

Questions (for use in groups)

1. In what ways do you depend upon God for what you will say? Does this mean being more disciplined about speaking, or less?
2. How do we try to keep God at bay and avoid His call today?
3. Discuss in your group, the ways that God has used godly people in partnership to bring strength of leadership to His people.

Final Prayer

Within our families, keep us close to Christ, Lord God, so that we may be close to each other. Save us from the dangers of this world which seek to draw people apart, and grant us the grace to be loving in all our actions and our words to each other. We pray this through Jesus Christ our Saviour: AMEN
