

Sermon File # 1178

Scripture Text: Exodus 4:10-17; Scripture Reading: Exodus 4:1-17

Sermon Title: *The Adequacy of God*

Manuscript written by Roger Roberts and sermon preached

At International Baptist Church of Brussels, Belgium

On Sunday morning 20 March 2011.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end.

For additional information regarding this manuscript, contact Roger.Roberts@ibcbrussels.org.

All Rights Reserved.

The Adequacy of God

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me to our text in Exodus 4, where I will begin the reading with the first verse. Thus far in our sermons from Exodus, we have seen God's compassionate response to the suffering of his enslaved people in Egypt and his sparing and calling Moses to be the human deliverer of his people. During his 40-year exile in the land of Midian, Moses received the call of God, the great I Am, at the miraculously burning bush. In the 3rd and 4th Chapters, we see Moses, "working down his shopping list" (Motyer, 79) of excuses and reasons why he's not the one to accept such a task. In today's text we'll read Moses' 3rd, 4th and 5th objections to his being the chosen leader. In response to his objections, Moses is confronted with the adequacy of God, who overrides his objections with an inexorable call.

Follow as I read verses 1-17, as we focus on the text, **Exodus 4:10-17**.

As we noted last Sunday, in response to Moses' request, God gave his name Yahweh, the I Am, as an expression of his identity as the eternally active God and as the means of inviting him to save and care for the Israelites and to invite his children to make his name known (3:13-22). But despite this dramatic revelation of the great *I Am*, whom we know to be the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, Moses still could not comprehend the adequacy of God. Moses' God remained too small in his eyes.

Many years ago I was challenged by Anglican clergyman J B Phillips (1906-1982) in his little book, *Your God Is Too Small*, to consider the "size" of the God I believe in and seek to know, love, trust and obey as the real and adequate God. Some of the lesser gods Phillips described are "the Resident Policeman," who is an "inner nagging voice," always maintaining in his worshipers a guilty conscience (15-18). Another is the "Parental Hangover," the lingering image of either an absent, indulgent or harsh father (19-22). "The Grand Old Man" is the god we conceive as too old fashioned and out of touch to be

relevant to us today (23-26). What about the “Meek and Mild” god, who is “placid, uninspired and uninspiring” and whose love is mere sentimentality (26-30)? “God-in-a-box” is the deity we have tamed and labeled to our own liking, one we have packaged and labeled with our own preconceived notions of what and who we would like God to be. This god is the one created by individualism and denominationalism and whose name we use to certify our theology and even our politics (37-40). A popular god these days is the one Phillips calls “Perennial Grievance,” the one we like to blame for “letting us down” and not running the world and ordering our circumstances like we think he should (48-50).

Even after his encounter with the living God at the burning bush, when the God of Abraham gave Moses his name, Yahweh, “I Am that I Am, the eternal Creator and the faithful God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses’ image of God remained too small. Well OK, maybe Moses would have given the right answers about God on a systematic theology exam, especially in the wake of the great theophany of God, and of his Eternal Son, the great I Am, the Alpha and the Omega and Almighty (Revelation 1:8). But Moses, despite this encounter and even in the midst of it, failed to translate who God is to the implications for his life and for the calling he had just received. Clearly Moses needed to come to grips with the adequacy of God.

I find this text to be very relevant and convicting to me. At this stage of my life, after many experiences with the living God and much study and preaching and teaching about his greatness and absolute faithfulness, I still find myself questioning his adequacy in my life and calling in ministry. O yes, I can preach with conviction and zeal to remind and assure you of God’s adequacy in your life, but I’m afraid that when the sermon is over and I return home to quiet living, serving and daily ministry, my God is often too small. I need a new and clearer vision of the great God, the eternal and actively involved I Am, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And just maybe you too need a better view and understanding of the adequacy of God, who, as we can see in our text, first of all...

Confronts our inadequacy

Maybe because we’re so familiar with the biblical story of Moses and the exodus of God’s people from Egypt we fail to comprehend something of the enormity of the daunting task before him. As we see Moses confronted with his inadequacy, let’s try to put ourselves in his sandals and realize that God also confronts our inadequacy...

In light of our overwhelming task

Moses did face a huge challenge. At age 80 (life expectancy was considerably longer then, however!), and having spent 40 years away from Egypt as a fugitive from the law, Moses was called to go back to his people and try to persuade the cruel Pharaoh, dictator of Egypt, to allow God’s enslaved people to leave the country. It was an overwhelming and dangerous assignment. Moses would need not only the authority of God’s name, but would need the assurance of God’s supernatural power and also some good powers of persuasion with Pharaoh, which he certainly didn’t think he had (Enns, 110ff).

I believe God calls every one of his children, and not just Moses and other biblical figures, to a God-sized task, one that would overwhelm us if we fully considered it. Your calling may not be to vocational ministry or even to an official and elected position as a lay person in the church's ministry, but each one of us is called to participate in a God-sized assignment, one that would overwhelm us if we fully considered its magnitude.

To faithfully fulfill my ministry assignment as the pastor/elder of IBC Brussels is an overwhelming task, especially if I fulfill the Kingdom-of-God dimension of this ministry. I might be able to tackle this assignment if I tried to be an organizational CEO, leading to follow church growth principles and good management techniques we could garner from the many conferences and seminars offered by the experts in such things. But to be what Eugene Peterson calls "the unnecessary pastor," giving godly spiritual direction and faithful prayer and ministry of the word, I need the help of the living God for such an overwhelming task (even though, as Dawn and Peterson note, the neglect of these "unnecessary" spiritual tasks might go unnoticed by the church).

To stand before you Sunday after Sunday and faithfully preach God's word to you, "speaking the very words of God" (1 Peter 4:11) is a daunting, overwhelming task. But also, to serve as a faithful under-shepherding overseer and to live a godly life worthy of imitation is overwhelming to me (1 Peter 5:1-3). And to live at home as a faithful, loving partner to my wife and to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22f) and the graces of true godliness (2 Peter 1:5-9) is as overwhelming as it has been elusive to me in my many decades of living as a follower of Jesus.

Maybe you've mastered the art of consistently godly living and fruitful witness and service that brings the unconverted to faith in Christ and glory to God and good to his kingdom; but I still am overwhelmed. As with Moses, the adequacy of God confronts our inadequacy...

With our feelings of weakness

True humility is the awareness of our inadequacy and unworthiness, evoking our worship of and our dependence on God. Maybe one Old Testament scholar is right (Ramm, 34), that "the entire 4th Chapter of Exodus in a commentary on Numbers 12:3," which says parenthetically, "(Now Moses as a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth)."

Moses, aware of his daunting assignment to persuade Pharaoh to let the Israelites free, thinks about his personal inadequacy. No one knows exactly Moses' specific problem expressed by his never having been eloquent and being slow of speech and tongue (10). It's possible that Moses might have had some kind of speech impediment or inclined to get his tongue tied when speaking in public. Another possibility is that after 40 years in Midian he had lost his fluency in the language of the Egyptians. Facing the task of persuading Pharaoh, he simply felt his speech would not be effective or well received (Youngblood & Kaiser, 92; Oswalt, 305).

Maybe there was something deeper, such as the lasting memory of his bitter experience in Egypt 40 years ago that made him flee for his life. After rescuing his fellow Israelite by killing the Egyptian assailant, he was accused by a fellow Israelite of being a murderer and a self-proclaimed ruler and judge

of the Israelites (2:14). We too can be paralyzed by painful and bitter memories of experiences of failure and the fear of rejection from those we try to serve (Ramm, 35).

There's nothing wrong with a healthy sense of our personal inadequacy, which can lead to God-dependency and the magnifying of God's strength through our weakness. Paul was ridiculed by the "Super Apostles" for his comparably "unimpressive" speech that they said amounted to nothing (2 Corinthians 10:10). Although Paul made this "rueful admission" which was similar to Moses' objection (Cole, 75), Paul also realized that God delights to choose the weak of this world in order to display his power through the message of the cross more dramatically (1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5).

In response to Moses' objections about his inadequate speech God reminded Moses of his adequacy as the Creator of his mouth, and the one who made him exactly as he is for his purposes and for his glory (11). This statement of God shows his sovereignty and purpose over even human defects and handicaps, which can be overcome and used for God's purposes and glory. I think of the way people with handicapping conditions, such as blind hymn writer Fanny Crosby (1820-1915), served God so powerfully.

When the great 17th Century English writer John Milton (1608-1674) lost his sight he expressed a great truth in his poem, "On His Blindness":

.....
*"Doth God exact day-labour, light deny'd,
 I fondly ask; But patience to prevent
 That murmur, soon replies, God doth not need
 Either man's work or his own gifts, who best 10
 Bear his milde yoaik, they serve him best, his State
 Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
 And post o're Land and Ocean without rest:
 They also serve who only stand and waite".*

(I'm grateful to Philip Ryken, Page 118, for quoting and reminding me of this poem).

Moses' questions and objections may show something other than commendable humility. He may have been exhibiting a cross between true humility and "simple stubbornness" (Enns, 114). One commentator suggests that Moses' excuses and his plea that God find someone else for this assignment (13) bordered on the disrespectful. Moses was saying, "You may be the great I Am, but I'm still the same old Moses, heavy lipped and thick tongued" (Durham, 49).

God confronts our weakness with an overwhelming task...

Bringing us to a crisis of faith

Moses found himself at a crisis point, with God calling him to either submit and obey or drop out altogether. Moses' problem wasn't a speech problem but rather an obedience problem. After all, Moses was able to speak well enough to argue with God! (Ryken, 115). With Moses' 5th objection, asking God to find someone else, God's patience with Moses reached the breaking point (14). But even

in his anger, God persisted with Moses and led him through his crisis of faith. As one has said, we speak a lot about the perseverance of the saints, but here we see the perseverance of God, and his forbearance with our delay, reluctance and disobedience (Motyer, 82).

In this moment of crisis, Moses needed to realize again the greatness of God who was calling and leading him. It seems Moses had taken his eyes off God's greatness as the I Am, the Creator and active Redeemer who is the Almighty One who causes the impossible to happen. Maybe there is something to the fact that Moses doesn't call God "Yahweh," the great I Am, but reverts to calling him "Lord," Adonai (13), a term of respect but not necessarily one of reverent worship (Ryken, 120).

In the crisis of faith, Moses and we must take our eyes off of our inability, even off of ourselves and focus once again on the great I Am, the living God of our Almighty risen Lord Jesus Christ (Enns, 111). In his anger, the Lord God said essentially, "This isn't about *you*, Moses. This assignment is about *me* and *my* power working through you" (Oswalt, 312).

Although Moses was reluctant, God patiently led him through this crisis. Now Moses was ready to see that the adequacy of God...

Works through our dependency

As we noted earlier, Moses' reluctance and the objections he raised indicated a humble spirit, but the time came when Moses had to go through the crisis of faith and "come out on the other side" of a willing surrender to God's will for his assignment. God was pleased with Moses' sense of his personal inadequacy, but was leading Moses to the place where he was willing for God to use him nevertheless. The adequacy of God works through our dependency upon him...

Teaching us to trust and obey

Moses acknowledged what God already knew—that he was incapable in himself, but that God was more than able to do his deliverance work through his servant Moses. In the first 9 verses of this 4th Chapter, we see that God promised Moses he would work his supernatural power through him. Yahweh God would transform his shepherd's staff to a snake, turn his hand leprous and restored again, and would turn the waters of the Nile into blood (1-9). God wasn't conferring independent miraculous power upon Moses to do what he wished, but was promising to work his power through Moses to do his work of deliverance.

When Moses tried to back out of the assignment, incurring God's anger, the Lord in his anger remembered mercy (Habakkuk 3:2), and accommodated Moses' objection by providing his more eloquent and fluent brother Aaron to be his spokesman (14f). God brought Aaron all the way from Egypt to meet his brother Moses on Mt Horeb and the burning bush. As Moses would speak what God revealed to him, so Aaron was to speak before the people what Moses passed on to him.

God was graciously teaching Moses that he was, even though angered by Moses' stubbornness, willing to use Moses and would provide all he needed if he would only trust and obey. The fact that Aaron showed up on cue, just as the Lord God promised him as Moses' assistant, shows the foreknowledge and accommodation of God to our initial doubts and resistance to his will. God always anticipates our needs when we surrender to his will (Motyer, 85).

At first sight, this looks like God gives lets Moses settle for second best, to have Aaron as his spokesman and assistant. And, as we know from the later episode of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32) and his and his sister Miriam's rebellion (Leviticus 12), Aaron wasn't always the most loyal and dependable helper. But the truth is, God always anticipates our needs and will provide all we need to live for him and to follow him in obedience. When God accommodate to our weak faith, he nevertheless accomplishes his will and work. Having Aaron or any other accommodation from God doesn't necessarily mean we now are condemned to living with what is second best. What we must do is trust and obey. If we obey, God will provide everything we need to serve him effectively.

All we need to do is to cast aside our self-doubt and fear, and repent of our disobedience and distrust of God and begin to follow Jesus, realizing he is with us to enable us, just as he promised Moses early on in this discussion (3:12). But if we lose this sense of absolute dependence of the Lord, we run into danger as we start to trust in ourselves. This was the bitter lesson Simon Peter had to learn the hard way. Despite Jesus' warnings about his pending denial, Peter forged ahead, oblivious to the dangers and walking straight into the devil's entrapment. The problem is well stated in the Gospels: He followed the Lord "at a distance" (Luke 22:54; Mark 14:54).

And the adequacy of God means he is not only teaching us to trust and to obey but also that he is...

Inviting us to join him

God invited Moses to undertake this overwhelming assignment, but was teaching him to trust in the adequacy of Yahweh, the great I Am, the Great Deliverer and Redeemer. All ministry and all godly character formation and fruitful living and serving depend on God alone, who invites us to join him. The crisis of faith is to realize where God is leading and then decide to make the adjustments necessary for us to follow and join him in his kingdom work.

We then learn to trust and obey and see him provide everything we need along the way. Just as in Moses' case, when he obediently accepted his assignment and went back to Egypt on mission with his brother Aaron, he discovered God's sufficiency for his needs. As we'll see in the series of plagues, God kept his promise to reveal his miraculous power to Pharaoh and all the Egyptians. Latin Church Father, Augustine (354-430) noted how the role of Aaron as Moses' spokesman seemed to diminish as Moses himself became more confident through God's presence in his life (26-28). Moses himself became "powerful in speech and action" (Acts 7:22). As with Moses, when we obey the Lord Jesus and die to self, we begin to experience more of the anointing of the Holy Spirit, who gifts us and uses our gifts for God's glory.

Our adequate God invited Moses to join him in this great mission...

Resulting in a successful conclusion

God promised Moses that he would be with him and demonstrate his power through him, bringing about a successful conclusion to his life and work. Of course, before the mission would be accomplished, there would be a lot of “blood, sweat and tears” shed. But God would eventually bring about everything he said he would do through Moses. And Moses would need to be able, during those tough times in Egypt and in the wilderness, to look back and remember this encounter with God and his promises to him.

And you and I can be sure that when we know, love, trust and obey the Lord, he will work through our lives and cause everything to work together for our everlasting good and his glory (Romans 8:28f). That means that God knows what he’s doing when he calls us into a love relationship with himself. He takes us just as we are, with all of our history, good and bad, and all of our abilities, disabilities and inability, and gives us his grace and power and works through us his pleasing will (Romans 12:1f).

We can see Moses confronting Pharaoh, leading the Israelites across the Sea of Deliverance, and through the wilderness those 40 long years, and all the way to the Gate of the Promised Land. Also you can by faith see your life, surrendered to God, as an instrument in his hands, leading you and using you for his glory.

Conclusion:

Once Moses was finally convinced of the adequacy of God, he surrendered and there was no turning back for him (Kelley, 27). Through many dangers, toils and snares he was to come, but his work would be successful and glorious in God’s sight.

God calls us all to join him in his kingdom work, work that involves forming godly character, living Christ-like and winsome lives, praying in the Spirit, leading the lost to faith in Christ, making disciples and disciple-makers, praying and working for deliverance for the persecuted church, and making a difference in this world and the next, speaking out for social justice and for protecting the environment. All of these point to God-sized tasks, even those that are done under the roof of your own house and in the hearts of your family and friends. For the doing of these we need a fresh vision of the adequacy of God.

Charles Marsh tells the story of the burning bush-like call of God to the great African American leader of the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr.:

“When Martin Luther King Jr. moved to Montgomery, Alabama, in the spring of 1954, civil rights activism was not on his mind.” He came to the city to serve as the pastor of a prestigious church that offered a successful ministry career, “a great salary, a comfortable parsonage” and a secure life for his wife and young daughter. “The day after Rosa Parks refused to move from her seat in the front of the bus, Ralph Abernathy talked King into accepting the leadership of the Montgomery Improvement Association. But King accepted only after being reassured that the boycott (against the city) would be over in a day,” Marsh continues.

But after a prolonged and seemingly unsuccessful boycott, “King had fallen into despair about his leadership and the direction of the boycott. On a gloomy day in January 1956, fearing he was a complete failure, King offered his resignation as the president of the MIA. It was not accepted,” says Marsh, “but King’s doubts about his own abilities as a pastor and organizer remained real and unabated.

“Later in that month, King returned home to his parsonage around midnight after a long day of organizational meetings. His wife and daughter were already in bed, and King was eager to join them. But a threatening call,” notes Marsh, “the kind of call he was getting as many as thirty to forty times a day—interrupted his attempt to get some much needed rest. When he tried to go back to bed, for some reason he could not shake the menacing voice that kept repeating the hateful words in his head,

“King got up,” says Marsh, “made a pot of coffee and sat down at his kitchen table. With his head buried in his hands, he cried out to God. There in his kitchen in the middle of the night, when he had by his own account come to the end of his strength, King met the living Christ in an experience that would carry him through the remainder of his life. ‘I heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on,’ King later recalled. ‘He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone.’” Marsh relates how King continued to quote the words from this old Gospel song that I remember from my childhood: “No never alone. No never alone. He promised never to leave me, no never alone.”

Marsh continues, “In the stillness of the Alabama night, the voice of Jesus proved more convincing than the threatening voice of the anonymous caller. The voice of Jesus gave him the courage to press through the tumultuous year of 1956 to the victorious end of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. More than that,” concludes Marsh, “it gave him a vision for ministry that would drive him for the rest of his life.”

You and I need an encounter with the adequacy of a great and faithful God, who is calling us to live in his strength and as we carry out the mission he has for us. Only the living Christ, the great I Am, can carry you through life’s trials, enable you to be a godly and fruitful witness, and prepare you to gain a glorious entry into the Promised Land. The greatest promise to Moses and to us is that our adequate God will be with us (3:12) and will never leave us, “no, never alone.”

Thoughts and questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. What about Moses' situation would have made him reluctant to quickly accept the assignment God was giving him?
2. Reflect on your view of God and asks yourself if your "God is too small" for you to completely trust and obey.
3. Do you agree that everyone has been given a "God-sized" assignment that is humanly impossible? If so, what is the task or responsibility God has given you?
4. Do you think Moses' reluctance was based on true humility or do you think he was being somewhat stubborn? Give reasons for your answer(s).
5. Do you recall a crisis of faith in your life when you faced a critical decision to trust and obey or to distrust and disobey God? What was the outcome?
6. In verse 11, God says he creates our abilities and even our disabilities. What unique abilities and even disabilities has God given you that you can use in his service?
7. To accommodate Moses' feelings of inadequacy, God provided the assistance of his brother Aaron, but eventually Moses seemed to grow in self-confidence and in his ability to speak and lead. What are some ways God has worked in your life to develop your spiritual gifts and service to him?

Sources cited in this manuscript:

Augustine, et al, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, Old Testament Volume III, *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, Editor, Joseph T Lienhard, General Editor, Thomas C Oden

R Alan Cole, *Exodus: an Introduction and Commentary*, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, Editor, D J Wiseman

Marva J Dawn and Eugene H Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call*, Edited by Peter Santucci

Peter Enns, *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus*

Page H Kelley, *Exodus: Called for Redemptive Mission*

Charles Marsh and John Perkins, *Welcoming Justice: God's Movement toward Beloved Community*

John Milton, <http://www.bartleby.com/101/318.html>

J A Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, *The Bible Speaks Today Series*, Old Testament Editor, J A Motyer

John N Oswalt, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Genesis & Exodus*, General Editor, Philip W Comfort

J B Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small* (Macmillan Paperbacks, 1966).

Bernard L Ramm, *His Way Out: a Fresh Look at Exodus*

Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, *Preaching the Word Series*, General Editor, R Kent Hughes

Ronald Youngblood and Walter C Kaiser, Jr, *The NIV Study Bible, New International Version*, General Editor, Kenneth Barker

All Rights Reserved.