

Accepting God's Challenges

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Introduction.

- A. A series of TV commercials for a hotel chain a couple years back had as its slogan, "When you're comfortable, you can do anything." As a rule, human beings love to be comfortable. We like associating with people we already know, going places we're familiar with, and doing things we already know how to do. Even the things we seek out to challenge ourselves with are generally related to something we're already comfortable doing.
- B. Now, doing things that are comfortable is great in a lot of settings, but it can prove to be a real disadvantage in our spiritual lives. You see, just like in anything else, we have a spiritual comfort zone too. For example, because I was raised by godly, committed parents, I am comfortable with going to services three times a week. I don't really have to think about it; it doesn't stress me out; it's just something I'm trained to do.
- C. Now, being comfortable with some godly action is a wonderful thing, but the problem is that God doesn't just ask us to do what's comfortable. He wants us to become like Christ in every way, not just in the ways that are easy for us. Ever had one of those moments where you realize that God is asking you to do something that's hard? Where you read a passage of Scripture and there's this voice in your head that says, "Ooooh; I don't want to do that"? It's something almost all of us struggle with, especially in the realm of personal work. Our natural reaction is to dig in our heels and come up with excuses about why we aren't doing what God wants.
- D. There's nothing new about this; indeed, we see this same reaction over and over again in the Bible, not just from minor characters, but from some of the most famous heroes of faith. We see this with particular clarity in the story of Moses, the great prophet of the Law. Many of us are familiar with the story of the burning bush in Exodus 3-4, but something we don't realize unless we pay attention is that the conversation between Moses and God there is Moses making excuse after excuse about why he shouldn't go to Egypt and God shooting those excuses down—all because Moses didn't want to leave his comfort zone. This story is valuable to us because all those excuses are the same ones we make today, reasons why we think we shouldn't leave our comfort zones, reasons why we aren't going to be any good at saving souls or engaging in any other part of God's work. Let's look at this dialogue to learn how we can do a better job of accepting God's challenges.

I. "I'm Nobody."

- A. The first excuse, one that Moses used 3500 years ago and that we still use today, is the ever-popular, "I'm nobody." The reluctant servant of God says to himself, "I can't possibly do what God wants me to because I'm just little ole useless me, and God's mission requires someone a whole lot more impressive than I am." We see essentially these words coming out of Moses' mouth in Exodus 3:11. God has just told him that he is to deliver the children of Israel from Egypt, and Moses is absolutely convinced the job is too big for him.
- B. God makes the perfect reply to this excuse in Exodus 3:12. He emphasizes to Moses that the most important thing is not who Moses IS, but who Moses is WITH. That's true for us today too, brethren. Maybe we don't have the abilities of ourselves to do what God wants. Maybe we aren't all going to be astronauts when we grow up. But you know what? We have God, and with His help, we can excel at whatever He wants.
- C. Indeed, brethren, when we look at ourselves and see nobodies, all that tells us is that we're exactly the kind of people God wants. Look at what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29. God hasn't called the world's best and brightest to spread His message with the amazing skills they have themselves. Instead, He's called the ordinary average Joes and Janes of the world, people just like us, so that way, when others start seeing lives being transformed, they recognize that the power is not in the messenger, but in the message. We may be nobodies, brethren, but if we are, that's exactly what God wants us to be.

II. "I Don't Know Anything."

- A. Another excuse that is frequently found on the lips of Christians is "I don't know anything." Here's the way this one goes. The Christian says to himself, "I can't possibly start talking to my friend about God because I don't know what to say. I don't know anything about the Bible, and he'll ask me something, and I won't know what to say to him." Not surprisingly, Moses also tried this one. This is basically what he says in Exodus 3:13.
- B. God's response is quite straightforward, and we see it in Exodus 3:14-15. God begins by describing His nature, and then telling Moses precisely what he needs to tell the elders of Israel to persuade them. God has done the same thing for us today, except to an even greater extent. Consider Paul's description of Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:14-15—able to make us wise for salvation. In God's word, we have everything that we need.
- C. Of course, that doesn't help us a whole lot if we don't know what the Bible says in the first place. However, it is also true that the very best way to learn the Bible is to try to use it for something. If we want to study with someone and we say to ourselves, "I'll go ahead and try this even though I don't know the word that well," that very commitment is what's going to lead us to understanding the Scripture. This is true of personal work,

and it's true of anything else, from teaching a Bible class to, in my case, hymnwriting. I didn't hardly study the Bible by myself at all until I started writing hymns, but once I did, I had to learn. We can learn by individual study, and we can also learn by asking another Christian. For example, I know that both the elders and myself are always happy to answer questions. I don't claim to be a Scriptural expert in my own right, but I do have a lot of time to study, and if I can't figure out the answer myself, I know plenty of people who can.

- D. The point is, if we start trying to teach others, even if we don't know very much, the struggle of teaching will always help us to grow. By contrast, if we let our lack of knowledge discourage us, we'll stay right where we are. Ten years from now, the next time we get an opportunity to reach out to the lost, we'll still say, "I can't do that because I don't know anything." We need to learn, not be scared off by our ignorance.

III. "They Won't Listen."

- A. The next excuse in line is, "They won't listen." This is the one that pops up in our heads when we let Satan paint this horrible ghastly picture of how everything will go wrong if we try to talk to somebody or serve God in some other way. We think that we're going to do a horrible job of approaching him, that he's going to laugh at us, and that we're going to become social lepers because of the huge dorks we proved ourselves to be. We see Moses playing this same what-if game in Exodus 4:1. He's afraid the Israelites won't believe him.
- B. God responds by giving Moses the ability to perform miraculous signs, and we see God describing the impact of these miracles in Exodus 4:8-9. God assures Moses that this will persuade Israel. Now, when we consider the great miracles that Moses worked, this might make us feel like we don't have as much going for us, but the fact of the matter is that we do. Let's ponder Paul's words in Romans 1:15-17. Paul here expresses his eagerness to preach in Rome. He says that he is not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God to salvation. The word gives Paul what he needs to bring others to Christ.
- C. Now, we might think to ourselves, "Well, that's just the Bible. It's not that impressive," but when we do that, we're selling God's words short. When the Bible is called "the power of God to salvation" in Romans 1:15, the word translated "power" in our Bibles is the Greek word *dunamis*. In other places in our Bibles, *dunamis* is actually the same word that is translated "miracle." Think about that! It is fair to say that the Bible is the miracle of God to salvation. It has the same power to convince the hearts of men that we see in the mighty miracles of Moses. Of course, people aren't always going to believe the Bible, any more than they always believed Moses, but if a man can be reached by the power of God at all, the Bible will do the job.

IV. "I Don't Know What To Say."

- A. Yet another favorite Christian excuse is when we say, "I don't know what to say." Some part of us is convinced that we need to be people of great eloquence to spread God's message, and that when we start tripping all over our tongues, we're doomed to fail. Moses, naturally, says the same in Exodus 4:10.
- B. Consider what God says to Moses in reply in Exodus 4:11-12. He reminds Moses that this isn't about what Moses can do; it's about what God can do. God promises to give Moses everything he needs to be persuasive.
- C. This is true for us in a number of different ways. Moses' situation is different from ours, it is true, in that we don't have the miraculous spiritual gift of prophecy. However, God does help us with what we say when we're trying to serve Him. First, if we pray to God for help in doing His work, He will surely help us. Second, though, we need to remember that it's not our eloquence or lack thereof that determines whether someone in the world will hear us. All that matters is the impact of the word on their hearts. This is the point that Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 2:1-3. Even the great apostle didn't preach with the skill of the master of rhetoric or the wisdom of the philosophers. In weakness, in fear, and in trembling, he simply presented the gospel of Christ crucified. That's all he did, that's all he had to do, and it's all we have to do—just preach the word.

V. "Send Somebody Else."

- A. Finally, at the very bottom of the barrel of excuses, after we've exhausted all the others, we say, "Send somebody else." In our hearts, we say to God, "Brother So-and-so is so much better at this than I am. I'm going to let him do the evangelistic stuff, and I'm going to do my part by sitting right here in this pew three times a week." After Moses runs out of excuses too, this is where he ends up in Exodus 4:13.
- B. God's reply to this, in Exodus 4:14-17, is quite interesting. First of all, we see God getting sick of all of the excuses. He actually gets mad at Moses. After God does that, though, He gives Moses what he wants—in a way. Moses' brother Aaron is now going to go along with him and speak for him. At the end of the day, though, Moses still has to go. He still has to serve God as God wants.
- C. This is true for us too. Look at Paul's words in Philippians 2:12-13. God is at work in each one of us, and He requires each one of us to do His work, especially His work of saving souls. Certainly, I know that there are many in the brotherhood who are better at personal work than I, but God still expects me to do my best. That's true for all of us. If we don't, if we invest ourselves in finding ways out instead, then God is going to be getting mad at OUR excuses. We all know lost people, so we all need to be involved in saving them.

Conclusion. If you've been letting God down in this or in any area of your life, now is the time to make things right.