

“Yeah, but . . . What if . . .”—Exodus 3:10-14

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Yeah, but . . . What If . . .”, is Exodus 3:10-14 → Yahweh said to Moses: *“Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” He said, “But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.” Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Have you ever noticed that God does not practice good “manners?” Scripture gives no record of God thanking people, encouraging them with, “You can do it!” or asking people to do something for Him, let alone using the word “please.” Instead, we hear the LORD commanding or telling people what **they are going to do!**

This type of approach can “rub against” the sinful nature because sinners don’t like to be told what to do. Upon being confronted with the law the sinful heart can produce rebellion so quickly that a person doesn’t even realize it. Maybe it was a recognition of this dynamic of life which prompted our parents to teach us to ask “nicely” and respectfully by using words such as “please” and “thank you.”

Instead of a reaction of rebellion when being told what to do sin can also produce reluctance because of insecurities, perceived inabilities and feeling inadequate. Such reluctance is evident in “Yeah, but . . .” statements which are followed up with “what if . . .” scenarios, intended to stifle or paralyze action.

When the LORD revealed Himself to Moses through a burning bush He **told** him to do a very basic task: Go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt. (cf. Verse 10) What makes this task “basic” is that it was backed up with the promise that Yahweh would make it all happen. Moses would simply serve as His instrument through whom Yahweh would display His presence, power, providence and protection!

Moses’ question in verse 11 of our text seems to reveal a reluctance on his part to do such a task: *Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?* God’s response in verse 12 put the focus on

His presence, not Moses' identity—*But I will be with you*. However, Moses continued a chain of “Yeah, but . . . what if . . .” reactions as God explained to him that he was going to do what God said despite his efforts to talk his way out of it. Look at Moses' continued efforts to discredit himself for the task:

- His inquiry in verse 13 of our text could reveal skepticism on his part: *If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, “The God of your fathers has sent me to you,” and they ask me, “What is His name?” what shall I say to them?* Once again Yahweh points him to His presence in the midst of it all: *God also said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”*
- In Exodus 4:1 Moses placed the possibility of rejection before Yahweh: *What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, “The LORD did not appear to you?”* (NIV) Yahweh responded by giving evidence of the power connected with His presence through miraculous signs which Moses could use. (cf. Exodus 4:2-9)
- In another effort to discredit himself for the task Moses said in Exodus 4:10
→ *Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since You have spoken to Your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.* Maybe you can relate and feel that Moses has a legitimate argument. Many

experience fear at the thought of speaking in front of others and knowing what to say. Yahweh responded with His providence in the midst of His presence: *Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.* Then He provided his brother Aaron as his spokesman. (cf. Exodus 4:11-17)

- Finally, in Exodus 4:13 Moses made his “last ditch effort:” *Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.* At this point *the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses* and he went.

It doesn't take much of a leap to relate to Moses in this situation. Even when asked to engage another person with God's Law and Gospel, let alone being **told** to do so, immediately the emotional risks far outweigh action. As long as we focus on ourselves and our own inabilities, the task looks impossible. This is the common faith struggle recorded in the Scriptures as God interacted with His people.

It wasn't that Moses didn't care about the plight of God's people. He found himself tending sheep in the wilderness because of trying to initiate the liberating of God's people when he lived back in Egypt. It culminated in murder so he fled from Pharaoh to Midian. (cf. Exodus 2:11-15) However, God's hour had not yet come. Then, when the time did come and God called him to act, Moses objected.

God is not a convenient source of power which you can tap to promote your own ambitions. To be useful to God, you have to abandon all self-determination and put yourself at the disposal of God's will. Then God transforms all your inadequacies into channels of His power. Just as God was very persistent in overcoming Moses' hesitation to surrender his self-will so He is very persistent with us sinners. **He will not give up on you even when you give up on yourself!**

Many times we make tasks that God calls us to do harder than they really are because we can't get past ourselves, our own inability and the delusions of impossibility which the devil places in front of us. Such thoughts can paralyze us into inactivity, thinking we can't do it.

Actually, you can't! This is why Jesus has given you the Holy Spirit in baptism and His Word. According to Jesus' words in Matthew 10:19-20, you need not *be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. **For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*** The Spirit helps you in your weaknesses (cf. Romans 8:26); He will produce the necessary good works needed at the moment of service (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; Galatians 5:22-23); the Spirit will do the work in and through you!

Not once did God give Moses any inclination that he could talk the LORD

out of sending him to Egypt. God was instructing Moses, not asking him to do something. For God, its not “What part of ‘no’ don’t you understand?” but rather, “What part of ‘you will’ don’t you understand?” It was all about God’s presence with His power, providence and protection! With every “Yeah, but . . . what if . . .” the LORD gave Moses proof of His powerful presence, reinforced by His name—Yahweh—*I AM WHO I AM*. (cf. Verse 14) God’s Name itself embodies His presence and power! The miracle of God is constantly seen as He uses us frail, excuse-driven, sinful human beings to get His work done **because of His powerful presence!**

Recognizing your sinful idolatry in making God’s work about yourself, you need His presence all the more, **especially His presence in Jesus**. He has live, died and rose again so that you can be completely forgiven of all sins of rebellion, reluctance and reaction. You need not carry the burden of your sins or the sins of others any longer. Jesus has carried it for you on the cross. It is this work as Yahweh in the flesh (cf. John 8:58) which authorizes Jesus to tell you, *go therefore and make disciples of all nations* by baptizing and teaching. (cf. Matthew 28:19-20) Notice, this too is a work backed up by the promise of His presence to you: *Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*. Amen.

*But we have this treasure (of the Gospel) in jars of clay,
to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.*

(2 Corinthians 4:7)

Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.