

January 1st, 2022

Questioning God's Calling

Exodus 4:10-17

The burdens in 2023

God is so kind in how in orchestrates the timing of certain messages. This morning we begin 2023, and many of you have been called by the Lord to carry a heavy burden this year: the burden of losing a husband or a wife; of single parenting; of having a spouse who does not love you; of not having a dad or a mom; of serious mental illness; of debilitating health issues; of unbelieving family members; of finances, schooling, broken relationships, loneliness. And then there are the burdens that God is calling us to face in 2023 that we don't even know about yet. One of the the 'difficulties' of believing in a Sovereign God is we have to affirm that the LORD ordained all of the details our lives *and* He has called us specifically to face these things. **Proverbs 16:9** "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps."

'Please send someone else'

Enter Moses. Yahweh is calling Moses to face the most difficult burden in all of the OT: to go back to Egypt, where he is wanted for murder, where he was rejected by his own people, and to tell Pharaoh, the king the most powerful nation in the world, to let Israel go. Moses has already asked several questions about his mission, and now he brings his objections. He doesn't want to go, he doesn't feel up to the task, he wants God to send someone else. And some of you are precisely at that point this morning. 'God why are you calling me to this burden? I'm not up to it, I'm not equipped, I'm not strong enough, wise enough, brave enough, loving enough to face this. Please send someone else.' Like Moses, perhaps, you are questioning God's call. And here's the punchline: like Moses, you aren't strong enough, wise enough, brave enough, loving enough to answer God's call this year. You don't have what it takes. But Christ does. 2023 is not the year of your triumphant. It's the year of His triumphant in you.

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”¹

The Big Idea...

When God calls you to a specific burden your success doesn't depend on your ability but on His power *alone*

★ Our Doctrine

★ Our Duty

★ Our Delight

I. Our Doctrine

Moses' first objection

This is the last bit of dialog Moses has with Yahweh at the Burning Bush before he heads back to Egypt. In all we'll have spent 7 messages on his encounter with the LORD at the Burning Bush. God has laid out the mission for Moses, given Him certain and sure promises of what will happen and has answered all his questions. Last time we saw Moses raise his first objection. Please look at v.1 “Then Moses answered, “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you.’”” God answered by providing three miraculous signs that told both the story of the Exodus and the gospel. But that wasn't enough for Moses.

¹ Ephesians 3:20-21

Moses' second objection

Now we arrive at Moses second objection. Please look at **v.10** "But Moses said to the LORD, "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."" This is not false humility. Moses is stating a fact. He's not a good speaker. The Septuagint—the Greek translation of the OT—translates this as a stutter.² Apparently Moses had a stutter of sorts.

The designed incongruity

Do you see the designed incongruity here? God commissioned Moses who had a stuttering problem to a speaking ministry—to the greatest speaking ministry of the OT. To speak commands to the king of Egypt and to speak courage to captive Israel. And he stuttered. This is a designed incongruity! Imagine God promising me that in 2023 I would not only play for the NBA but I would be the MVP of the league.³ The Scripture is full of these designed incongruities. Sarah giving birth to Isaac at 90 years old (**Genesis 17:18**). Joseph the slave becoming the second-in-command in Egypt (**Genesis 41:41**). David the teenager defeating the 9 1/2 foot tall giant Goliath in battle (**1 Samuel 17:50**). A poor Jewish virgin giving birth to King of Kings (**Luke 1:31-35**). God purposely designs incongruities in the very things he calls us to do.

The blue pill

Moses clearly sees the incongruity: *God has called him to a speaking ministry and he has a speaking problem*. But Moses swallowed the blue pill. He made a disastrous assumption—one that so many of us make. He assumed that his success in Egypt *depended upon himself*, upon his own gifting, specifically his

² Philip Graham Ryken, *Preaching the Word: Exodus, Saved for God's Glory*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2015), pg. 102

³ "It seems a mockery, then, to give a commission of speaking to a stammerer; but in this way, (as I have said,) He causes His glory to shine forth more brightly, proving that He can do all things without extrinsic aid." John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. II*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 92

ability to speak eloquently.⁴ Moses thought, if I can't speak well, how can I succeed?

'Who is El-Shaddai?'

How does God answer? Please look at v.11 "Then the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" God is appealing to two things here: 1) His creation and 2) His providence. Let's take them one at a time.

1. God's creation of our mouth

First God asks Moses "Who had *made* man's mouth?" Augustine once said "Men go abroad to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars; and they pass by themselves without wondering." We must pause and wonder at our mouths for a moment. Oh the wonder of our mouths! What are all the wonderful things your mouth does? It speaks. It eats. It tastes. It kisses. It sings. It laughs. It drinks. It blesses. It curses. It reveals the heart. It has the power of life and death. It can proclaim the Word of God. It

⁴ Where else does this come up in Scripture?

1) Jeremiah made this same objection when God called him as a prophet to Judah. The LORD called him in Jeremiah 1:5, then Jeremiah responded in 1:6 "Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.'" How does God respond? v. 7-10 "But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord." Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, "*Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.* See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.'" The Lord is saying His words are ultimate not Jeremiah's.

2) The Corinthians were heavily influenced by the philosophy and rhetoric of the Greeks thought that the gospel's success depended on eloquence, i.e. the power of man's words. Paul specifically tells them in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with *lofty speech* or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and *my speech* and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, *so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*" Paul is saying it is not human words that matter but God's words that matter. "The fact that Moses had problems with his speech is a sardonic comment on Egyptian culture. Egyptian magicians, some of whom Moses was shortly to face, were thought to be eloquent speakers and they revelled in their splendid powers of speech. Moses, however, was wholly dependent upon the God who was speaking through him." John D. Currid, *Exodus Vol. 1: Chapters 1-18*, (Auburn, MA.: Evangelical Press, 2000), pg. 105

can confess that Jesus is Lord unto salvation. There is more glory and wonder and excellency in your mouth than in the highest mountain and the deepest ocean. Who made that? God did! At the bottom of this rhetorical question God is appealing to His almighty power. ‘Moses you are right, you are not powerful, but look at Me! I AM El-Shaddai, the Almighty God! I am the One who made human mouths. I didn’t use pre-existing material, I made them out of nothing. I didn’t use tools, a chisel or scissors, I simply spoke.’ **Psalm 33:6** “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.” ‘Moses why are you worried about your power of over words? I AM on your side. Nothing can stop My words. I commanded the sea “Thus far shall you come and no father, and here shall your proud waves be stayed?” (**Job 38:11**). Has the sea ever overpowered my Word? Will your stuttering prevent Me from working?’⁵ That’s God’s first appeal, to His all-powerful creation of the human mouth

2. God’s providence over our mouth

Secondly, God appeals to His providence over the human mouth and our other faculties. Continuing in v.11 “Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind?” It’s not just that God made our mouths, ears and eyes, He *determined* whether we would be able to use them with great skill or be disabled.⁶ ‘Moses your stutter came from Me. I determined that. I planned it. I purposed it. I formed you that way for such a time as this.’⁷ *Why?* Why would God appoint Moses’ tongue to be defective and then call him to the most important speaking ministry in the entire OT?

⁵ “Creatures only can do what is possible to be done in their own kind. A man is one kind of creature, an angel is another; both have their essence limited. Man can do things belonging to a man, an angel can do all things belonging to an angel; but God made all things and therefore he can do all things.” Thomas Manton, *The Works of Thomas Manton Vol. XVII*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2020), pg. 83

⁶ “Moses objects his stammering as a cause for holding back; God replies, that it is He alone who governs the tongue which He has created; therefore, that if some be tongueless or dumb, and some quick and eloquent of speech, the difference is all of His good pleasure.” Calvin, pg. 92

⁷ “If it is true that God made us exactly the way he wanted, then we cannot complain about our lack of ability without grumbling against God.” Ryken, pg. 104

Our doctrine: Soli Deo Potentia

That brings us to **our doctrine**: *When God calls you to a specific burden your success doesn't depend on your ability but on His power alone.* Consider 3 proofs of this doctrine found elsewhere in Scripture.

Proof #1: Gideon and his 300 men

Please turn to **Judges 7**. Here we find that God called Gideon to defeat 135,000 soldiers in the Midianite army.⁸ Children, boys and girls, how many soldiers would you want on your side if you faced 135,000 soldiers? Do you know how many soldiers Gideon started with? 32,000. But the LORD told Gideon he had too many men (v.2), so Gideon sent 22,000 men home, and 10,000 remained (v.3). But the LORD told Gideon that there was *still too many* so He told them to have them drink by the river, and all the men who lapped water like dogs would remain to fight. That left 300 men—the most unfit men, the men who acted more like dogs than men—to fight the Midianites (v.7). If you do the math, every man would have to kill 450 Midianites *each* to win the battle. Do you know who won the battle? Did it depend on Israel's ability? No. God tells Gideon *specifically* why He whittled down Israel's army. Look at v.2 “The LORD said to Gideon, “The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’” God didn't *merely* want Gideon and his men to win. He wanted them to win *in complete weakness* so that the only explanation was the power of the LORD.

Proof #2: The uneducated disciples

Please turn to **Acts 4**. Peter and John are arrested because they had healed a lame beggar by the power of Jesus. Starting in v.5 the council holds a tribunal of sorts to have the apostles answer for their deeds. They ask them in v.7 “By what power or by what name did you do this?” Picking up in v.10, Peter filled with the Holy Spirit says “...let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you

⁸ This is the number I found online but I couldn't find the verse to verify.

crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Now this was Peter the fisherman. Peter the blue collar. Peter the nobody. Peter’s nobody status was part of the message. Look at v.13. “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, *they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.*” Why do you think Jesus called uneducated, ill-equipped men like Peter to be among His disciples that would change the world? So that the *only* explanation was the power of the risen Christ.

Proof #3: Paul and his painful thorn

Please turn to **2 Corinthians 12**. The Lord Jesus called the Apostle Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles, to carry His gospel to the ends of the earth. But Jesus made Paul exceedingly weak in this mighty task. He gave him a “thorn in the flesh”—we’re not sure what it was, but it vexed him terribly. Look at v.8 “Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.” Stop. Imagine what the prayer might have sounded like: ‘Lord you called me to preach the gospel, I can do this task more effectively, more mightily if this thorn, this weakness wasn’t harassing, please, please, please take it away.’ How did God answer? v.9 “But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, *for my power is made perfect in weakness.*” In other words, ‘Paul when you are weak and harassed, no one can take credit but Me for the mighty works that are being done through you.’ Jesus didn’t *merely* want His gospel to be proclaimed throughout the world. He wanted it to be proclaimed by a weak, harassed apostle so that all would see that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the very power of God and not the invention of any man.

Summa Theologica

In sum, beloved as God calls you to your task this year, it may be burdensome, you may be plagued with weakness, with disability, with insurmountable obstacles, with grief, with ignorance, but don't you see that is part of the God's design. He's not's calling you to these things to display your power but His. Your mountain of inadequacies is *precisely* what God wants others to see. So that all would know that your success did not come from your own power but from the very power of God.⁹ That's **our doctrine**: *When God calls you to a specific burden your success doesn't depend on your ability but on His power alone.*

II. Our Duty

'Therefore go'

Please turn back to **Exodus 4** and look at **v.12**. "Now *therefore* go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak." Remember that whenever you see a "therefore" it connects to what came previously. The LORD is telling Moses 'Therefore go knowing that my very power is with you. My almighty power will be with your weak mouth.' Clearly Moses had a very specific task, but the promise of God's power is present with every believer in everything God calls us to.

Ephesians 1:19 "...what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe."

Ephesians 3:20 "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, *according to the power at work within us.*"

⁹ 2 Corinthians 4:7 "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."

Therefore beloved—as you enter 2023, no matter what burdensome task God has called you to—*go* in the power in Yahweh. *Go* knowing that He has promised to accompany all your weaknesses with His almighty power.

Experimental Use

So our **first duty** in light of this charge is to *test* ourselves. Is God’s power enough for you? Does the God who made man’s mouth have enough resources for your burdens this year? Moses was in the wrong here *precisely* because he thought his own ability was ultimate. Please don’t make the same error. The Puritan Thomas Manton claimed that believers doubt and question God’s power more than God’s will.¹⁰ Meaning, we doubt God’s might more than his heart.

Sarah doubted the power of God

Think of God’s promise to give Sarah a baby at 90 years old. Did she doubt God’s heart? No, she doubted God’s power. God says to Abraham in **Genesis 18:13** “*Why* did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ *Is anything too hard for the Lord?*” Dear sisters, is there anything that you are facing this year that will be too hard for the LORD?

Moses doubted the power of God

Think of God’s promise to feed Israel in the desert. Did Moses doubt God’s heart? No, he doubted God’s power. **Numbers 11:21-23** “But Moses said, “The people among whom I am number six hundred thousand on foot, and you have said, ‘I will give them meat, that they may eat a whole month!’²² Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, and be enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, and be enough for them?”²³ And the Lord said to Moses, “*Is the Lord’s hand shortened?* Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not.” Dear brothers, is the LORD’s hand shortened for any burden that you will be lifting this year?

¹⁰ Manton, pg. 87

Elenctic Use

That brings us to our **second duty**, to answer that *objection* haunts our heart. You might ask, “But what if God doesn’t come through? What if God doesn’t exercise His power in those things that I need and desire the most?” This is not hypothetical is it? There are multiple families here that are facing such painful circumstances that I don’t even know how you sleep at night. I’m so sorry for you loved ones. Does that mean that God’s power has failed in your lives? No. It means that in the incomprehensible wisdom of God He knows what is best for you. **Psalm 84:11-12** “For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. *No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.* O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!” **Psalm 34:10** “The young lions suffer want and hunger; *but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.*” Loved ones if we lack anything we think we need, it is certain that that Lord has determined that whatever it is, it is not good for you or best for you. His power has not failed you.

Mediatory Use

Our **third duty** is to *mediate* on the power of God. Why should we meditate on the power of God? Because if you are a Christian, your main problem is *not* that you don’t believe on God’s power in your head, but rather you haven’t feasted upon it in your heart. In our passage God asks Moses a question: *who made man’s mouth?* No doubt God is rebuking Moses’ unbelief. But is He just asking Moses to acknowledge or assent to correct orthodox belief? It’s you God, you made man’s mouth? Is that all God wanted? No. The devil’s can do that. He wants Moses to feast on the truth in his heart, to meditate on it. That’s how *faith* in God’s power grows, by meditating on it. That’s how courage and boldness are born. **Daniel 11:32** “The people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.”¹¹ Don’t you remember how God dealt with Job’s soul? God just talked with him for four

¹¹ NKJV

chapters about His almighty power working in creation and providence. And that concentrated mediation on God's power cured Job's soul.

Job 38:4 "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" We have some water leaking in the back foundation of this building, it will take tens of thousands of dollars, probably several weeks, and lots and lots of digging. How much effort did it take for God to set the foundation of this world? How much money did He have to spend? What shovel did He use? This Great Builder needed nothing but His bare Word, and it was accomplished in a moment.

Job 38:12 "Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place?" Loved ones, when was the last time you woke up and said 'sun come forth and shine your light?'

Job 38:34 "Can you lift up your voice to the clouds that a flood of waters may cover you" When was the last time you looked at your watch and said, 'Yeah, it's time to rain' and then looked at the clouds and said 'rain' and they obeyed you?¹²

You see the LORD constantly appeals to creation again and again in Scripture so that we would see monuments of His power and trust Him.

Psalms 121:1-2 "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, *who made heaven and earth.*"¹³

¹² **Job 38:39** "Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions?" Haha. I went hunting this year and didn't even get one shot off. 'Oh, but Pastor Josh' you say, 'that's because you are not a good hunter.' Maybe so, but nobody can hunt like God. He's underselling Himself here. Not only does He feed the kon, but He feeds every creature on earth. **Psalms 145:18** "The eyes of all look to you, *and you give them their food in due season.*" God's grocery budget is infinite. Meditate on that next time you go shopping. The food is there because of God. Yes means are used, the farmer, the rancher, etc. But God is the one that causes the grass to grow for livestock (**Psalms 104:14**). He is the one that causes the springs to gush forth to give drink to every beast of the field (**Psalms 104:10-11**).

¹³ **Psalms 124:8** "Our help is in the name of the LORD, *who made heaven and earth.*"

Psalm 146:5-6 “Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, *who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them.*”

Isaiah 40:28-31 “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, *the Creator of the ends of the earth.* He does not faint or grow weary...Even youths shall faint and be weary... but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength...they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

Summa Theologica

Loved ones this is how you are to “therefore go” as you walk out your calling from the LORD in 2023. Go knowing that the LORD the creator of heaven and earth is with you. The God who made man’s mouth is with you. What do you need that He cannot supply? Don’t doubt His power. Make up your mind on this day, the first day of 2023 that the Lord’s power is enough for you. Make up your mind that if you lack something that you think you need this year that God has not let you down, but has deemed it is not best for you. Make up your mind this year to meditate on the Almighty power of God when you find yourself in a Job-like situation so that courage would be born in your soul. Those are our **duties**.

III. Our Delight

Moses’ last objection

In spite of God declaring Himself all-powerful for Moses, Moses dug in his heels with one last objection. Please look at **v.13** “But he said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.”” He’s not only arguing with God and

disbelieving God, but he is straight up disobeying. Think of everything Moses saw. He was the Burning Bush. He heard the voice of God. He saw the miraculous signs—his staff turning into a serpent and his hand becoming leprous and then whole again—*and yet* in spite of all this he still wanted to run away. Does that remind you of anyone you may know? God doesn't hide Moses' sin here so that we could see that he suffered from the same type of unbelief and doubt that we often have. To be sure it is sin on our part as well, but the grace at the end of this passage is how God responds.

God's nostrils

Please look at v.14 “Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses...” Stop. Literally “The nostrils of Yahweh heated up.”¹⁴ It was right for God to be angry here, because Moses was refusing to obey Him. It's not surprising that God was angry, He provided proof after proof and Moses refused to believe and obey. The surprising thing is not God's anger, but what He does next.

A priest will be sent

Look halfway through v.14 “...and he said, “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.”” What? God is angry at Moses' disobedience so He sends someone to help? Specifically Aaron his brother, the Levite. We don't know it yet, but it will be clear before the end of this book that the Levites will carry the priesthood.

He shall be a prophet

Notice the LORD says “I know that *he can speak well.*” But even Aaron the eloquent speaker needed God to be with his mouth. Look at v.15 “You shall speak to him and *put the words in his mouth*, and I will be with your mouth and *with his mouth* and *will teach you both what to do.* [v.16] He shall speak for you to the

¹⁴ Currid, pg. 107

people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him.” Moses was going to be אֱלֹהִים לְמֹשֶׁה ‘*ĕlōhîm* or אֱלֹהִים לְמֹשֶׁה God to him — meaning that just as Moses was God’s prophet, Aaron would be Moses’ prophet as it were. This would prove later to be a powerful witness to Pharaoh. Pharaoh had officials who were mouthpieces for him, who spoke for him. Moses was going to come into his presence with a similar mouthpiece in the person of Aaron.

Take your staff

And finally in v.17 God tells him “And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs.” God gave Moses this last token of assurance — just as Pharaoh would have a serpent’s staff symbolizing his power over Egypt, so Moses would have a shepherd’s staff symbolizing Yahweh’s power over the heavens and the earth.

The deeper magic

So what’s the takeaway here? Well for Moses’ God showed His infinite grace in His fierce anger and sent a prophet, a priest, a mediator who would be glad in his heart to be with Moses and help Him execute His call. Is there a deeper magic for us? Yes. You see God give us more than His infinite power to fulfill our callings. This year you are not charging into your burdensome task *with only the power of the God on your side*. God has sent you a Prophet, a Priest, a Mediator who has gladness in His heart to help you. He is the Lord Jesus Christ. And He has promised that He will be with you even unto the end of the age. **Matthew 28:20** “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Look to Christ

Dear loved one, *perhaps* God has called you to an incredibly burdensome task this year. But take heart. Don’t question God’s call. Don’t look at your own inadequacies. Look to your great Prophet Christ who speaks to you all the Words of God. Look to your great High Priest Christ who has appeased God’s wrath towards you, though like Moses you have often rebelled.

More than Aaron

God has given you so much more in Christ than He gave Moses in Aaron.

Moses had Aaron a man would die.

You have Christ, the God-man, who can never die. **Revelation 1:17-18** “I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”

Moses had Aaron a man who at one point opposes Moses and sinfully speaks against him (**Numbers 12:1-6**).

You have Christ, the God-man, who sticks closer than a brother, and He has promised “I will never leave you nor forsake you. (**Hebrews 13:5**)

Therefore go boldly into 2023. Not because everything will be easy. Not because you will have no sorrow or pain or hardship. But because Christ Jesus the risen and reigning Savior is with you. Therefore go. You cannot fail. You cannot be overpowered. You are more than a conqueror through Him who loves you.