

Moses the Reluctant Hero Exodus 3:7-14, 4:13-17

Gratefully adopted and adapted from "What Is That In Your Hand?," by David Elvery and "Bushwhacked," by C. Philip Green @ SermonCentral.Com

On Saturday, November 5, 2011, University of Tennessee freshman Derrick Brodus was just lying on the couch in his fraternity house, waiting for the Tennessee Volunteers football game to start at 7 P.M. Less than an hour before kickoff, Derrick answered his ringing cell phone to hear a voice on the other end telling him that a police escort was on its way to take him immediately to the stadium.

Just minutes before that call, Tennessee backup kicker Chip Rhome pulled a muscle during pregame warm-ups. Starting kicker Michael Pardy was already out, injured in Thursday's practice. So one hour before kickoff, the Volunteers were out of kickers.

Derrick, a freshman, had tried out as a placekicker when he enrolled at Tennessee, but didn't make the team. Now, on that particular Saturday, Derrick was the Volunteers' only option.

Minutes after Derrick hung up his phone, the police escort arrived to rush him to the stadium. The team's trainer stretched him in the locker room while he put on pads and a jersey that didn't even have his name on the back.

Even so, Derrick made the most of his opportunity. He made all three of his extra point attempts and kicked a 21-yard field goal at the end of the first half. The Tennessee Volunteers won 24-0.

Back in the locker room after the game, the kicker who began the evening lying on the couch with a bag of chips was the hero of the night. The team cheered as Coach Dooley gave Derrick the game ball. (Graham Watson, "Tennessee grabs last-second kicker off his frat house couch," Yahoo Sports, 11-8-11)

Often that's the way God works in our lives. We're just lying around when God calls us to get off the couch and to use our gifts for His kingdom.

That's what happened to Moses. He spent 40 years living the nobody life of a shepherd when all of a sudden he gets a call from God to leave his comfortable isolation to do something extraordinary. Let's take a moment to update Moses' story to this point.



As the book of Exodus opens, fearing the numerous Israelites, the Egyptians had not only enslaved them to hard backbreaking labor, but they have also begun throwing Israelite baby boys into the Nile to reduce the population. When she could no longer hide her newborn son, Jochebed, one of the Israelite mothers put her baby in a waterproof basket and let him float away on the Nile, charging his older sister Miriam to watch what might happen to him. As "luck" would have it the baby was found by Pharaoh's daughter who named him Moses and raised him as her own. Forty years later living as a prince in Egypt but aware of his roots, Moses thought

no one was watching as he murdered an Egyptian taskmaster for beating an Israelite slave. But when news of his deed got around, Moses fled into the wilderness where he would spend the next 40 years living as a shepherd and thinking that he had safely escaped his past.



Until one day, now 80 years old, while tending his flock of sheep near the mountain of God, Moses turned aside to curiously observe a burning bush; on fire but unconsumed by the flames. Of course it was a visitation from God, Who had never lost track of Moses' whereabouts and Who now had a task for him; a task for which in the past 80 years God had been preparing Moses to accomplish.

*The Lord said, 'I have **observed** the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have **heard** their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and **I have come down to deliver them** from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey... So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.'* (Exodus 3:7-10.).

The first lesson we should take from today's story is that **God never loses track of you. God sees, God hears, God knows, God cares about what is happening to you, and whether or not you recognize it, God also has a plan for rescuing you or using you to rescue others.**

So God said, *come, I will send you to Pharaoh...*

Now, wait a minute, God. I thought You said YOU were going to deliver them. Why are You asking ME to go?

Out of the ordinary events of his life, God called a fallen leader to once again lead. God called Moses to return to the place of his failure where God would now use him in ways he never expected.

And that's the way God works in our lives, as well. He speaks to ordinary people on ordinary days. He speaks to failures in the familiar routines of their tiresome existence, because He wants to demonstrate HIS power in their lives.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote, *Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God; but only he who sees takes off his shoes— the rest sit round it and pluck blackberries."*

Friends, don't just sit around plucking blackberries. Take off your shoes and listen to God speak in the ordinary experiences of your life. God wants to use YOU for HIS glory even in places where you think, "That's impossible!"

Last Sunday, you heard Paul Van Dyke announce that the Bedford Presbyterian Nominating Committee was once again looking for people to lead this Church: we need three Elders, two Trustees, and a Deacon. He also said, if we approach you, please don't immediately say "no," because the team has carefully prayed about both you and the task we are asking you to accomplish.

Let's get back to Moses. You would think that Moses would be excited that God is now going to do what he in his own small way had failed to do 40 years ago – which is to liberate his people from slavery. You would think that Moses would also be excited that God was now asking him to leave this hardscrabble backwater life for the glories of Egypt once again, to help God in accomplishing this task.

But, no sooner had God asked him, then Moses came up with a list of not one but four reasons why he was not the man for God's job.

1. *Who am I to do this?* Moses asked. I am a failed nobody.
2. What if the people don't recognize this God Who wants to rescue them?
3. What if they don't believe that God really sent me?
4. And on top of that, I don't speak so good (*we don't know what caused Moses to be "slow of speech," perhaps he was born tongue-tied or stuttered*)

God's first answer should have been sufficient for all of Moses' excuses had he actually stopped making them to listen. God said, ***'I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you'***

Did you hear that? God told Moses that God Himself would be with Moses, protecting empowering him and very sufficiently proving Himself to any who might be questioning as to whose liberating idea this was.

Moses asks, "Who am I?" and God basically says, **"It doesn't matter who you are, because I am going to be the one doing the work.** Because I am going to be with you, you will succeed in bringing my people out of Egypt back to this very mountain."

You see, Moses had to learn that who he was, was not important. Forty years earlier, he thought he was a **somebody**. He thought he was Israel's deliverer and failed. Now, 40 years later, he thinks he's a **nobody**, but God says, "None of that matters. **What matters is My presence, not your ability or lack of it; you need to trust that I will be there for you.**" That is what God asks us to do as well. He does not ask us to trust in ourselves, but to trust in His presence and His power to accomplish what He asks to you to do.

So the Nominating Committee has been talking to each other and talking to God and they have developed a prospect list and have begun searching the wilderness for those people who will answer God's call to lead this church, if not to the promised land, at least for another three years of our journey. Hopefully, unlike Moses you will not have a list of excuses, but rather will prayerfully consider this call to serve.

So Moses lists out his excuses and God counters.

- Who Am I? God's replies, *it doesn't matter who you are - what is important is who I am and that I will be with you.*
- I won't know what to say (vs 13-14). *"I will tell you what to say."*
- They won't listen to me (vs 3:11). *I will work through you with powerful signs. They will see and believe.*
- I can't speak well (vs 4:10). God replied, *who made your mouth? I will teach you how to speak.*

Do you have similar excuses like Moses? Well God has similar answers for you. We are not going to focus on all of these answers this morning, but I want to point out the single question God asks in the midst of Moses' excuse making. After the third excuse, God simply asks: "***What is that in your hand?***"

"What Lord, I don't have anything in my hand."

"No Moses ... what is that you have in your hand?"

"Oh this ... this Lord ... well it's my staff, just a stick Lord, it's a bit battered - almost time for a new one - but it has served me well."



To Moses his staff was nothing special. It was a walking stick, a weapon, a guide for his sheep. It was a common tool carried by every shepherd, which neither made Moses special or unique. But to God this staff represented Moses' untapped potential if only he would release himself along with his walking stick for God's service.

What happened next? God said, "*Throw that stick on the ground.*"

*Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. Then the LORD said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. **"This," said the LORD, "is so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you."**(4:3-5 NIV)*

A couple of observations here that may be helpful for you as you worry about the nominating committee now making its rounds.

What is nothing to us, is something to God. In Moses' hand this was just a staff. But In God's hand this was anything He decided it to be. And it was. And it was used ...

- To prove to the Israelites that God was with Moses (4:30)
- To confront to magicians in Pharaohs court (7:12)
- To turn the waters of Egypt into blood (7:17-20)
- To bring frogs upon the land (8:5)
- To cause lice to infest the land of Egypt. (8:16)
- To rain thunder, hail and fire throughout the land (9:23)
- To raise an east wind that brought the locusts across the land. (10:13)
- To cause the waters of the Red Sea to stand up like a wall and the bottom of that sea to dry up so the Israelites could pass(14:16)
- To cause the waters of the Red sea to come back, drowning Pharaoh's armies
- Later, to bring forth water from the rock at Horeb to supply the Israelites' thirst (17:5)
- And when attacked in the wilderness by the Amelekites, to bring victory to the Israelite army (17:9)

To think that Moses called it "JUST A STAFF."

So what do you have in your hand that God could use? We can find many other instances of those who thought they didn't have much to offer, but God used what they had mightily.

- All Jochebed had in her hands was some straw, but she wove it into a basket to shelter Moses.
- All Miriam had in her hand was a tambourine, but she used it to lead the people to celebrate God's faithfulness.
- Hannah held a small child in her hand, but when she gave him to God, he became a great prophet.
- All the widow had was enough food for one more meal for her and her son, but God used it to feed her family and the prophet Elijah for the entire famine.
- All the little boy had was a sack lunch, but Jesus used it to feed 5000.
- All Peter held was an empty net, but Jesus filled both the net and his life with newfound purpose.
- In 1984, all that ten Bedford churches had a just little bit of groceries to share, now 36 years later, Bedford Christian ministries serves the entire county helping with power, rent and medical needs along with clothing and households goods. Oh yes, and a lot more groceries to share.

Just some straw—no problem, God can use it!

Just a child—you've got to be kidding, God can change the world with a child!

Just a sack lunch, a fishing net, or some groceries – put them in God’s hand and He will use them!

For those of you who doubt - don’t doubt. God can use whatever you have, no matter how small for He is truly the God of the impossible. You don’t need to be educated, rich, smooth talking, or good looking. God isn’t interested in these things, but He is interested in what we have in our hands. We all have something to give. We have life, we have a testimony, we have the word of God, we have prayer, we have material possessions and we have some ability - so stop making excuses and give yourself to God who can do something marvelous with your life.



Would this staff have been able to be used in all these various ways, if it only remained a stick in the hand of Moses? No. To be used, it had to be made available to God for His use. Once Moses released it, it became God’s to use as He needed. And WOW! God certainly used that stick a lot.

What would have been the consequences had Moses refused to let go of his staff?

Who knows. Maybe a nation would have remained in slavery, maybe thousands more would have lost their lives, maybe we would not have even heard of Moses at all. What are we missing out on because you are holding onto your staff, instead of giving it up to God. What will we never accomplish as a church, as a body of believers worldwide if you keep what is in your hand for yourself.

So what’s in your hand? What are your talents? Have you released such to God? Notice once they are released, God gives them right back - we don’t lose anything, it just becomes more valuable.

After all his excuse making, Moses finally owned up to God, **“I just don’t wanna go!”** But God said **“O yes you are going”** – it’s never wise to tell God “no” – “but since you have made a fuss about this, I will allow your older brother Aaron to be your mouthpiece and assistant.” Aaron did assist Moses quite ably in the Exodus, but little did Moses know that his big brother would later cause all kinds of trouble for him in the wilderness – in the form of a certain golden calf – but that’s a story for another day.

There is an amazing postscript to this account which I believe is important to note. If we had continued on we would eventually read *“So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt. **And he took the staff of God in his hand.**”* (4:20).

What did Moses take in his hand?

It was no longer his staff, but God's. He went to Egypt to do God's work, with a promise of God's power and with God's tools. When we do God's work, we do it not only in His strength, but with His provisions. If we make ourselves, our gifts and talents available to Him, He takes them and stamps His name on them. It is not our voice that we sing with, it is God's. It is not our skill that we teach with, but God's. It is not our hands that we work with, but God's. It is not our compassion that we help with, but God's.

What do you use to minister in this church? Is it your gifts and abilities, or is it God's? Have you handed them across to God to use as He sees fit or are you still holding on to them, not yet willing to share?

So what should we take home with us today?
How about two questions that we need to ask ourselves.

What ministry or task has God spoken to me about and what am I going to do about it?

No matter how small, what do I have in my hand that I can use for God's work?

God can use your service for Him and make an incredible impact. God needs you, the world needs you, the church body needs you - will you take your place in the body and help us change this community?

So what do you have in your hand? And what are you going to do with it? Remember the choice is up to you, but I pray that we, like Moses, would be surprised and even terrified at times by the power of God's staff in our hands.