

INTRODUCTION

United States is a land of opportunities. Many families in our church are first generation immigrants. Some of them started their own businesses from virtually nothing. Every now and then we also read stories about other people achieving success in their careers – sports, performing arts, science and technologies, etc. Then there are people who devote their time to serve others. In 2008, John Tyler Hammons became one of the youngest mayors in the U.S. history. Hammons was a 19 years' old college freshman when he was elected as the mayor of Muskogee, Oklahoma. He beat the three-time mayor by receiving 70% of the votes. Two years later, Hammons was re-elected. He completed his college education while working as the mayor. After serving two terms he decided to step down. Hammons subsequently graduated from Law school and passed his bar exam. Though young and inexperienced nothing would diminish Hammons' heart to serve his people. Compared to Hammons, Moses was already 80. Moses might think that his golden years were far behind him. He had a desire to help his Jewish peers. But that was 40 years ago! God had a different plan. He wanted to use Moses. Whether you are 19 or 80 God has a place for you to serve. God may not be interested in what credentials you have in your resumes. We shall see in this passage that God is looking for a willing heart in the servants He calls.

EXPLANATION

1. Excuse #1: Others' Rejection 藉口之一：別人的否定

God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. But Moses made two excuses why he was not the suitable person to do it. The first excuse was the fear of people's rejection. In chapter 3 God gave Moses the instructions on what to say to his own people and to Pharaoh. On hearing that Moses responded in **verse 1** of chapter 4: ...“What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you?’” God clearly told Moses that the Israelites would listen to him and eventually Pharaoh would let them go. But Moses still had doubt. It is fair to say that Moses was given a gigantic task. Growing up in the palace, Moses surely knew the authority Pharaoh had. Who was him to command the king to let the Israelites go freely? Also, God had been silent for the past 400 years. How could Moses prove that God had spoken to him? God was being merciful to Moses. He gave Moses power to perform three miracles in front of the Israelites. The first miracle was to turn Moses' staff into a snake. In **verse 5** God told Moses that people should be able to draw a right conclusion from it: “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.” God told Moses to perform a second miracle just in case people were not convinced. Moses put his hand in his cloak and it became leprous. The two miracles were so spectacular that people should believe that God's power was with Moses. God said to Moses that there was a third miracle if people were still not persuaded. Skip down to **verse 9**: “But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground.” The difference between the third miracle and the previous two is that this last miracle

was not reversed. In fact, later on God turned the water of River Nile into blood as a judgement to the Egyptians. The river was a major source of water in Egypt. To the Egyptians, Nile was seen as a divine source of life. Therefore, this miracle was a direct confrontation to the religious system of Egypt. But for now, the three miracles were to prove that Moses was God's messenger. We read from the end of the chapter that the elders of Israel did believe in Moses when they saw those miracles. Let us go back to the first miracle and study more about the staff of Moses. In ancient Israel a person's rod symbolizes one's identity. In our modern world, it is similar to the kind of purse a lady carries or the type of car a guy drives. In the subsequent chapters we see that Moses manifested God's mighty power through the staff. I listed some examples on the screen. Two of the ten plagues – the plagues of hail and locusts – were initiated when Moses raised his staff. Also, Moses stretched out his staff to divide the water in the Red Sea to allow his people to walk across it. When the Israelites did not have water to drink in the wilderness, God asked Moses to strike a rock to let water come out. Of course, there was no magical power in Moses' rod. It was an instrument God chose to reveal His power. Moses was now ready to go back to Egypt. There is a transition in **verse 20**: 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. Moses' rod now became the staff of God. Seemingly God was speaking to Moses: "Now I'm taking over. I will always be with you just like you take your staff wherever you go." We can make some quick applications here. God can use whatever is in our hands for His purpose. You may have a bunch of keys that open your house, your car or your office. God gladly uses all that He gives you for His purposes. You can invite people for a home gathering. You can transform your work place into a venue to witness for God. The same principle also applies to your money, your time, your special skills, etc. God calmed Moses' fear of the possible rejection from his people by reassuring His presence. In the Bible, we see many examples that God was with the servants whom He called to serve. Some Old Testament prophets performed miracles like Moses did, and they prophesied about future events. There are also evangelists in the New Testament whose messages testified that they were sent by God. When the apostles in the early church proclaimed the gospel, they were arrested by the Jewish religious authority. Those officials were amazed that the Christian leaders were fearless. **Acts 4:13** reads: When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. They concluded that the power in the apostles was a result of their association with Jesus. Even when Jesus was on earth people noticed that His teaching carried God's power. There is a remark in **Matthew 7:28-29** after Jesus completed His preaching of the sermon on the mount: 28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. Jesus' audiences could feel a difference that He was not giving religious talks like the Pharisees. Jesus spoke with God's authority because He is God. Today we are also tapping into God's power when we serve the Lord. Can people in and outside of the church notice that there is God's power in you? No, I am not saying that you can perform miracles. But do people receive benefits because of your effective ministries? Can they see the gifts and talents God has given you? It can be the ability to teach, the patience to take care of little children, or the skills to fix things. Do you receive compliments because of your kindness to deal with difficult people, your caring heart to listen to people's needs or your faithfulness even when no one is watching? No matter what it is, when God calls you, He will be with you. People can see a difference in you. That will overcome any fear of people's rejection.

2. Excuse #2: My Limitations 藉口之二：自我的缺點

God asked Moses to go to his people and go to Pharaoh. Moses did not want to take the assignment. His first excuse was the fear of people's rejection. After God reassured His presence Moses came up with a second excuse about his own limitations. Look at **verse 10**: Moses said to the Lord, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." Did Moses finally talk to his people? And did he eventually ask Pharaoh to release the Israelites? Moses did so with boldness and good articulation. Therefore, was he lying to God when he said that he was not good in speech? Bible scholars called Moses' reaction an "exaggerated humility." When people were asked to take charge of an important task they might show similar attitude. There are some examples in the Bible. When Solomon succeeded the throne from his father, he said to God in **1 Kings 3:7** – "Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties." Solomon was an adult, not a kid! He was showing exaggerated humility before God. In Moses' case, how did God respond? The Lord replied in **verses 11-12**: ... "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." Rather than taking this as a rebuke, we can look at it as an encouragement from God. The Lord helped Moses put his humility in the right perspective. It is a godly virtue to be humble. But one should not overlook that it is God who empowers us. A tool is useful only when it is in the hands of a craftsman. Moses and anyone of us can do great things only because God ministers His grace in us and through us. Did God's reminder remove Moses' concern? Not quite. See Moses' respond in the **next verse**: ... "O Lord, please send someone else to do it." The Chinese Union Version gives us a literal translation of that statement: "Lord, please send whoever you want to send." It essentially meant: "I don't want to do it!" Therefore, the true reason behind Moses' humility was his reluctance. It was quite a daring response to the Almighty God. The passage tells us that God was angry at Moses. Why wouldn't He? God could have wiped Moses out and called someone else. But in His anger, God continued to show Moses His grace. God told Moses that He had prepared Aaron, Moses' older brother, to be his assistant. In fact, on his way back to Egypt, Moses would meet Aaron. Skip down to **verses 15-16**: **15** "You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. **16** He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him." Moses was a true prophet. God would give His messages to Moses, who in turn passed the words to Aaron. Then Aaron would become Moses' spokesman. The same is true in today's churches. The Bible is God's authoritative Word, and a pastor is only a middleman who conveys God's message. Aaron was not only a messenger. He could provide emotional support to Moses when they went to see Pharaoh. Team work is actually a Biblical principle. To Moses, God added Aaron. King David was assisted by Jonathan. Jesus' disciples helped each other. The apostle Paul had his dedicated partners Silas and Luke, and later his apprentice, Timothy. God puts a lot of faithful coworkers in our church too. None of us has all the time and talents to do everything. We share our burden and pursue the same goals of building up this church and furthering God's Kingdom. We should never feel alone in the ministries. God gives us coworkers to make up for our deficiencies. It often takes some humility to say to others: "I need your help." At 80 Moses looked more like a retiree than a leader. This world craves for charisma. People are attracted to super-star figures who have good look and are smart and eloquent. Still remember how the Bible describes Saul, the first king of Israel? Saul was a fine

young man without equal among the Israelites, and he was a head taller than other people. In **1 Samuel 10:24**, Samuel introduced the new king to his people this way: ...“Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people.” What was Samuel referring to? It was possibly about Saul’s appearance. At that time the Israelites asked for a king. They wanted a candidate who stood out like a king! But subsequently Saul failed miserably because of his pride, and particularly, his disobedience to God. Then God told Samuel to go to Jesse’s home to find a replacement for Saul. Samuel saw Jesse’s oldest son and he thought he had found the man. God reminded Samuel in **1 Samuel 16:7** not to make the same mistake again: ...“Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” God chose David, the youngest son in the family. He was younger and shorter. God said that David was “a man after (God’s) own heart.” Was David perfect? Far from it! David later became an adulterer and a murderer. But David repented of his sins to God. A king is just a servant in God’s eyes. God has the same requirement for all of us. He looks at us on the inside to see if we are ready for His use. Feeling of inadequacy drives us to the Lord for help. However, realizing our own limitations should not be an excuse to refuse God’s calling. Once I invited a brother at my former church to teach Sunday school. He humbly told me that he might not be a suitable candidate because he had never taught a class before. I encouraged him by saying that skills can be acquired, experience can be accumulated but godly characters can only come from God. That brother is a humble and teachable man. Finally, he accepted the challenge. He leaned on the Lord for help and God gave him the skills he needed to succeed.

CONCLUSION

God is looking for a willing heart in the servants He calls. We may have our “Moses’ moment” at certain points in our lives. We are concerned about people’s rejection and we feel timid about our own limitations. The Lord will give us signs of His presence, and He will also provide the abilities and the help we need. When my wife and I were still in our high school years God put a burden of serving Him in our hearts. We did not even know each other then. We were married much later. By the time I was finally ready to enter the seminary I had no struggle at all. But my wife had much hesitation. She was unwilling. She grew up in a small rural church. She knew how a pastor’s wife was like. She had to play piano, teach children Sunday school and cook for others. None of those three areas is my wife’s specialty. She also saw that a pastor’s wife often received little appreciation for her contribution. God used the story of Moses to change my wife. God spoke to her heart when she read that it was God who gave Moses the abilities to speak, to hear and to see. Problem solved and no more hesitation. As we look back it is all God’s blessings. From Moses’ experience we learn that God does not want us to put the focus solely on others or even on ourselves. God is faithful to the ones He calls.