

# GETTING IT ON

Exodus 2:11-4:14

David H. Roper

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A few weeks ago I was talking to Ernie Fleegle, one of our young men attending Foothill college this year. I asked him how things were going at Foothill, and his response was, "God is getting it on over there." I am sure you have heard that expression a number of times. It is a contemporary idiom young people use which I thought very appropriate in this case. That is exactly what God is doing. He is "getting it on" all over the place, not only at Foothill but at other campuses around the bay area. The thing that struck me was that if God is getting it on, I need to learn the principles by which I can move in alongside the Lord and be a part of what he is doing. I found some help recently in an episode from the life of Moses and I want to pass it along to you. I want to look at one small portion of his life, his *call* and *commission* to be the deliverer of God's people.

I have been involved in a Bible study on Wednesday nights with some students, studying Old Testament characters, and it has been intriguing to see how contemporary their lives are. This is certainly true in the case of Moses. Let's begin reading with verse 11 of chapter 2.

**One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together; and he said to the man that did the wrong, "why do you strike your fellow?" He answered, "who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid, and thought, "surely the thing is known." When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses.**

I think we can all identify with Moses. He was a typical energetic worker on God's behalf, God's helper. He saw an obvious need--his people were being oppressed. Certainly God is not for oppression; he is for justice. And so Moses wanted to do something on God's behalf. He looked this way and that way and every way except God's way, and acted: he killed the Egyptian.

Now, you can't fault Moses' motives. He had a proper sense of urgency, and yet he set God's program back forty years. He alienated himself from his people, the very people he was supposed to lead out of bondage; he put his own life in jeopardy; and his actions may have resulted in increased hardship for his people. It certainly resulted in an *extended* hardship, for it was at least forty years before God was able to deliver his people.

Now the Lord has two problems. He not only has to deliver his people; he has to prepare the deliverer. There are many things God has to teach Moses, in order to prepare him to be his man. What had gone wrong? Moses certainly had a sense of compassion, urgency, and concern, and yet he was guilty of a tragic blunder because he didn't know the way God works. He didn't know the secret of divine activity.

So what's new? Do we know how he works today? I doubt it. The call today in the church is to get involved. Get it on. Give more. Do more. We are urged to greater consecration, greater dedication. The cry is for activity. As someone has said, "If some activity is good, more is better and too much is just right." And yet the result, across the board, is frustration and disillusionment. God's work is not being accomplished in many quarters. There is little productivity.

What is wrong? Well, we need to learn what Moses needed to learn. The secret of getting things done in God's way is a restful availability to the Lord. We need to be still and know that there is God. We must grant the Lord the right to establish a proper strategy, and then to follow him along the lines which he lays out. The only way we

can discover that plan is through a quiet, restful availability. Now that was what Moses needed to learn and it took him forty years; this is what we need to learn and hopefully it won't take us that long.

The rest of the chapter from 2:15 through verse 25 is an account of Moses' flight across the Sinai peninsula to the land of Midian, located on the east side of what is today the Gulf of Aqaba. The Midianites were ancient relatives of the Israelites, and it was there that Moses found sanctuary. He found a home with a priest of Midian; he secured a wife; and he found a job. All the basic necessities of life were provided for him there. But look at the job that he held. For forty years Moses herded sheep.

Can you imagine what this meant to him? Moses was no ordinary man. He was a statesman, a grandson of the Pharaoh of Egypt. He was wealthy, he had influence and power. Now he is reduced to the rank of a sheep herder, and for forty years this is all he did. What a humiliating, degrading experience. And yet that was the experience that he had to go through in order to understand the lesson God was trying to teach him. We don't know exactly what happened during those forty years. There is really not much exciting that anyone could say about a sheep herder. But in chapter 3, after 40 long, tedious years the Lord appeared to Moses.

**Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God [Mount Sinai, where later he led the people of Israel, and where the Law was received]. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." Then he said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."**

Moses was tending his flock. Suddenly he saw something that arrested his attention. It was a common, ordinary bush, the type of bush that Moses saw every day in the desert, and it was burning. Even that was not unusual, for I am sure that Moses had seen other bushes that had been ignited by lightning. The amazing thing about this bush was that it was not consumed. So he stopped to see the sight, and God spoke to him out of the bush.

Now, the obvious question is why God spoke to Moses in this graphic way. Why did he speak out of a burning bush? What was he trying to convey to Moses? I believe it was, as Ian Thomas says, that any old bush will do, as long as God is in it. That was the point God was trying to establish. God was totally unimpressed with Moses' ability, and with his brilliance as a statesman. Moses' credentials did not qualify him for his task. Any man would have done. The secret of his power was that God was in him.

That is the principle that God has to teach us. We must learn that the source of our power lies not in our dedication, nor our activity, training, experience, nor ability. God is totally unimpressed with these credentials. The source of our power is Jesus Christ in us. It is his power that will get the job done. That is the first phase of this training program that God institutes on Moses' behalf.

Then the Lord reveals something of his own character:

**And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.**

It had been four hundred and thirty years since the Lord had spoken to any Israelite, but He reminds Moses that He is the one who was faithful to the fathers, to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob--even Jacob, the outcast, the usurper. He is a faithful Lord.

**Then the Lord said, "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings..."**

Remember that in chapter two it was Moses who saw the suffering of his (Moses') people, and now God says, "Moses, they're not your people; they're my people, in the first place. And in the second place, not only have you seen it; but I have seen it. I'm not unaware of what is going on. I'm not unaware of the suffering of the oppressed. I'm not against justice. But, Moses, we're going to do it my way. We're going to establish righteousness in this nation in a proper way and in the proper time and through the proper methods." And he goes on to say:

**"...and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt."**

Ah, you see, God has a plan. And his plan involves Moses. His program initially was that Moses would go to Pharaoh. In fact, eighty years before this encounter with the Lord at the burning bush, the Lord had placed Moses in the household of Pharaoh. You know the incident when he was placed in an ark and hidden in the bulrushes, and Pharaoh's daughter found him and took him home to raise. God was preparing this man, putting him right in the heart of the Egyptian kingdom in order to deliver his people. Moses, out of his zeal, was going to kill off the Egyptians one at a time. God says, "That's not my plan at all, Moses. I had prepared you to go to pharaoh, and in your zeal and enthusiasm to get my work done, you missed my program and set it back forty years. But we're going to do it again, Moses, with a new Pharaoh. You're going to go to Pharaoh, and he will set you free." That was God's plan.

We've all made some tragic blunders moving out ahead of the Lord. It is good to know that people always come before programs in God's eyes. His concern is to build his man, and even though he blundered tragically, God is going to pick him up right where he left off, and put him right back in the original place that he had for him.

Now, Moses has a number of problems with God's plan, five problems, as a matter of fact. He begins to tell God about them:

**But Moses said to God, "who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?"**

His first problem was one of *identity*. He asks the question, "Who am I?" Forty years earlier if the Lord had come to Moses and said, "Moses, I want you to deliver my people," Moses would have known who he was. He would have said, "Right on, Lord! Just step aside and I'll get it done. I am a statesman, a military specialist--just name your assignment and I'll do it." But now, after herding sheep for forty years, he doesn't have a ghost of an idea who he is. He has absolutely no confidence in himself.

I was talking to a friend last week who told me that at this time last year he thought he knew who he was. But now, through a series of reverses in his life, he's terribly shaken. "I don't know who I am," he said. He was really troubled. But this isn't a disaster. The world thinks it is. But God doesn't care who you are. You don't need to know who you are. Because you see, if you know who you are, then you'll be inclined to count on what you are. And God is not interested in that.

You see we itemize our assets and put them over in one column and say, "I can do these things well. I'm qualified here." Then we list all our liabilities in another column and we say, "I can't do these things; therefore I'm not going to venture into these areas." We feel confident in our assets, and not confident in our liabilities; and so we avoid anything in the liabilities column, and we're ready to plunge into anything in the assets column. And you know what God does? He runs us through something where we feel confident, and we flounder and fail; and then he puts us into an area where we feel inadequate, and we're forced to lay hold of him for strength and wisdom in weakness, and we discover that he uses us. And soon we don't know who we are. But it doesn't matter. This opens us up to anything. We can say, then, "Lord, I'm willing to go anywhere. I'll do anything. I'm willing to be what you want me to be." So Moses' problem of identity was no problem to God. He didn't need to know who he

was. All he needed to know is what the Lord told him in verse 12--"I'll be with you."

Note that he doesn't say to Moses, "you're nobody," because Moses is not a nobody. We are not nobodies. The Lord knew Moses by name; he called him "Moses" out of the bush. Moses was a unique individual in the eyes of the Lord, just as you are a unique individual. There is nobody in the world exactly like you. But it is not his uniqueness that qualifies him in God's eyes. The point is, the Lord is going to be with him. And whatever he needs to do, whatever demand he has to face, whatever problem lies ahead, the Lord is adequate for that. So lack of knowledge of our identity is no problem to God.

Moses has a second problem, found in verse 13:

**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?"**

Now his problem is one of *ignorance*. Before, his problem was one of identity: "Who am I?" The Lord says, "It doesn't matter, Moses. I'll be with you." And his obvious question is, "Well, that's great; but who are you?" As Bill Cosby says, "Who is this, really?" The solution to ignorance is revelation. He gives us his Word. Ignorance is no problem to the Lord. Because as long as Moses remains teachable, the Lord will reveal his character to him. And that is what he begins to do. The Lord reveals his name. It's only fair; he knew Moses' name. And the basis of any friendship is an exchange of names, so he tells Moses who he is:

**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.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you,' this is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations."**

Did you know that is what our Lord's name is? His name is literally "I Am." The word "Jehovah" or Yahweh" (we don't know how it is pronounced because the Jews never pronounced it) is based on the first person singular form of the Hebrew verb "to be": I AM. That's His name. You see, he's saying to Moses, "Moses, what do you need? Then I am that. Are you afraid? I am your courage. Are you weak? I am your strength. Are you perplexed? I am your wisdom. Are you lonely? I am your friend. Do you feel guilty? Then I am the source of your continuing forgiveness." The Lord is anything we need. Then he goes on in this section to talk about what he will do:

**"Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt; and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey. And they will hearken to your voice; and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, we pray you, let us go a three days journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.' I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand and smite Egypt with all the wonders which I will do in it; after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and of her who sojourns in her house, Jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing, and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters; thus you shall despoil the Egyptians.'"**

Do you understand what he is saying to Moses? "All eventualities, all contingencies, everything that could possibly happen to you--I am aware of. I have already worked out a solution, the victory is yours. Moses, you are walking in a victory I have already secured. There is no possibility of failure. As a matter of fact, you are not only going to be delivered from the Egyptians, you are going to plunder them, you are going to come out of Egypt a wealthy nation. You're going to come out with more money than you had when you went in." You see, when I AM is in charge, victory is certain. That is why Paul can say we are more than conquerors through him that loved

us. God is able to do far beyond anything we could ever ask or think.

What are you facing this week? What demand, what pressure, what difficulty? The thing that God wants you to know is that he is adequate for that, and he has already secured the victory. You are walking in a victory that is yours. But, Moses didn't believe that. That was his third problem. His problem of identity was no problem to God; his ignorance was no problem. Now unbelief becomes a problem to Moses:

**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.'"**

Do you realize that just prior to this, in chapter three, verse 18, God had told Moses, "And they *will* hearken to your voice," and Moses turns right around and says, "God, they won't hearken to my voice." In other words, God, you're a liar. Have you ever told God that? I have, so many times. But you see, even unbelief is not a problem to the Lord. Because if we are open, if we are willing to believe, he'll begin to strengthen our faith and encourage it, and move us along to full belief.

We had a rally last Thursday at Stanford, and a couple of students got into a discussion with a representative from the Universal Life church. He grew quite angry at what these men were saying, because they were bringing the issue home to him. He was saying, "What about those who never heard the Gospel?" and they were saying, "what about you and your response to the Lord?" He got angrier and angrier and began to shout at them. It struck me that he had already indicted the Lord on all counts. There was nothing anyone could say that would prove the truth of the Gospel to him. He was beyond proof. He had made up his mind that God was unjust, and therefore it was folly for us to try to help him to believe.

If a man doesn't want to believe, then God won't encourage his faith. But if he wants to believe, if he is open and responsive to the truth, then God will begin to encourage his faith. He does so in the case of Moses by giving him three signs. Now, it appears in the passage that the signs were given in order to encourage the nation of Israel to faith. But they never really had any problem believing Moses. These signs were for Moses:

**The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A rod." [His shepherd's crook.] And he said, "Cast it on the ground." So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. But the Lord said to Moses, "Put out your hand, and take it by the tail," so he put out his hand and caught it [the Hebrew literally says "and seized it" and you can just imagine Moses laying hold of that thing], and it became a rod in his hand--"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." Again, the Lord said to him, "Put your hand into your bosom." And he put his hand into his bosom; and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, as white as snow. Then God said, "Put your hand back into your bosom." So he put his hand back into his bosom; and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. "If they will not believe you," God said, "or heed the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. If they will not believe even these two signs or heed your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it upon the dry ground; and the water which you shall take from the Nile will become blood upon the dry ground."**

Now there is much here in the symbolic message of these signs, and I'll let you dig this out on your own. But the principle that I would like you to see is that the Lord builds faith by giving a man something to believe that he can believe. It is like the prayer of the man who came to Jesus and said, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." That is, I have this much faith; you must help it grow. The Lord never asks us to believe things that we cannot believe; he asks us to believe what we can believe. And when we lay hold of what we can, then he gives us more to believe. You can see it in this incident in Moses' life. The Lord says, "what's in your hand?" That's easy; it's a shepherd's crook. "Throw it down." Okay, that's simple. And he throws it down. Instant obedience. It becomes a serpent. That's a little hard to handle. I'm sure that Moses had seen serpents before in the wilderness, but this must have been startling, and he fled from it. And the Lord said, "Pick it up." Now that was a hard thing to do, but it was not impossible for Moses, and so he obeyed. And when he obeyed, it became a staff again, and his faith was

strengthened. When the time came then for him to walk into Pharaoh's presence and throw that staff down, he could walk in with confidence and authority, without any sense of misgiving, because he had learned that God was faithful. Then the Lord says, "Put your hand into your bosom," and he does, and he takes out his hand, and he's contracted leprosy, this hideous disease. In all of Israel, no one had ever been cured of leprosy. Then the Lord says, "Put your hand back into your bosom." It's hard to believe, but not impossible, so Moses does as he is commanded, and when he takes his hand out it is cured, and his faith is strengthened. The third sign doesn't even need a trial run. The Lord says, "When you get to the Nile, pour some water on the ground and it will become blood." And Moses says, "Right." You see, that is how the Lord builds your faith. Unbelief is no problem to the Lord. If you are open and responsive to the truth, he will build your faith.

The fourth problem is found in verse 10 of chapter 4:

**But Moses said to the Lord, "oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either heretofore or since thou hast spoken to thy servant; but I am slow of speech and of tongue."**

The Hebrew indicates that Moses had a speech impediment. He stuttered. Can you imagine a leader of a million and a half people who stuttered? Moses said, "I'm not eloquent, I'm inadequate," and that was his fourth problem. But note the Lord's response:

**Then the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak."**

In other words, "Moses, that inadequacy is a created inadequacy. That may be a problem to you, but it's no problem to me. I made you that way. I knew about it from the very beginning. I never thought of disqualifying you on that basis."

Now, what are your inadequacies, and mine? They are there because God designed them to be there. They are part of our uniqueness as a person, and are no problem to God. In fact, they become a source of power, because Paul says it is where we are weak that we are strong. So we can never say that inadequacies disqualify us.

Then there is one final problem:

**But he said, "Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person." Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, "Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well; and behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you he will be glad in his heart."**

Moses has a problem with his identity, and God says, "That's no problem; we can handle that." He has a problem with his ignorance, but God says, "That's no problem, either; we can handle that." He has a problem with unbelief, and God says, "We can take care of that." And his inadequacy? That's no problem. But suddenly God is angered. Why? Because Moses had hit upon the one thing that frustrates God, and ties his hands. The only thing that disqualifies us is our saying, "Lord, I'm not available." That is the only thing. Our problem of identity is no problem, He is with us. Our ignorance is no problem; he'll reveal himself in the Word. If we have trouble believing, he'll nurture and increase our faith. Our inadequacies are no problem, he made us that way. But if we say we're not available, everything grinds to a halt, and God has to pick up another instrument. In this case he chooses Aaron.

This was the secret that Moses learned from the encounter with the Lord in the bush: the basis of our spiritual power is availability. The only thing that will disqualify you and disqualify me is if we are not available. What is God calling you to do? What need is lying before you in your school or office or neighborhood or home? What is there to be done? Any old bush will do, if you're available to God.

*Thank you, Lord, that it is not our ability but our availability that counts in your eyes. It is our desire, Lord, to make ourselves available to you and thus to discover your will and be a part of your program. Make these truths practical and real in our lives today. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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David H. Roper  
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