

Servant Of Freedom by Jeff Strite

Exodus 3:16-4:18

There's the story of the college professor who always began his first day of class at the University dramatically telling his students he could prove that God did not exist. Looking up toward the ceiling he would say, "God if you are real, then I want you to knock me off this platform. I'll give you 15 minutes!" For the next few minutes he kept taunting God, saying things like "Here I am God, I'm still waiting" and smugly smiling at the class. Then - all of a sudden - a burly 240 pound halfback for the football team came flying through the door and collided with the professor, knocking him head over heels into the 1st row of students. More shocked than hurt, the professor sputtered: "Why on earth did you do that?" The football player smiled as he walked away... and replied, "God was busy; He sent me!"

In our text this morning, we find God saying to Moses: "I will SEND YOU to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." Exodus 3:10

God was SENDING Moses to confront Pharaoh and free Israel from their slavery. But as I was preparing the sermon today, a question to my mind: Why send Moses? Why not just do it Himself? Did God really need the help? Was He busy or something?

No... God wasn't busy. But there was something about sending Moses on this task that speaks to us about God's plans for our lives.

First, we need to realize God doesn't need us. It's true. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He has an army of angels at His beck and call. And as Amos 4:13 put it "He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man, he who turns down to darkness, and treads the high places of the earth—the LORD God Almighty is his name."

If God HAS all that, and can DO all that, what's He need with me... or you... or Moses???

Psalms 8:4 asks "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"

But, the fact of the matter is: God IS mindful of us.

He DOES care for us.

And when it comes to doing His will, God graciously allows us to take part.

One of the most intriguing promises (for me) that Jesus made was this one:

"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing.

He will do even GREATER THINGS THAN THESE, because I am going to the Father." John 14:12

Jesus promised that we would do greater things than He did on earth?

Really?

But Jesus fed 1000s with just 5 loaves and 2 fish.

He healed the sick.

He raised the dead.

Have you ever done any of those things?

Me neither.

In fact, I have NEVER done anything even remotely like that.

And yet Jesus says I'll do greater things than those?!!!

How's that possible?

Well, consider these two stories out of the book of Acts.

The first story is found in Acts 8:26 where we're told:

"AN ANGEL of the Lord said to Philip, 'Go south to the road— the desert road— that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.'"

As we read the rest of the story we find that Philip does as he's told and goes down to that road and sees a man riding in a chariot. He begins running alongside the chariot and hears a high official from Ethiopia reading from the 53rd chapter of the book of Isaiah (a famous chapter predicting many things about who Jesus would be), and he asks the man if he understand what he's reading. The Ethiopian replies ""How can unless someone explains it to me?" Acts 8:31

So Philip climbs up in the chariot and begins talking about Jesus, and the conversation turns to how the Ethiopian can become a Christian.

As they're riding along, the Ethiopian says: "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" (Acts 8:36) and they went over to the water and Philip baptized this man into Christ.

Now, a couple of questions:

1. WHO sent Philip to meet the Ethiopian Eunuch? (An angel)
2. WHY didn't the angel go himself?

Hold that 2nd question in your mind for a second as we go the next story.

In Acts 9 we read about the conversion of Saul (who we know of as Paul).

Now, at the time, Paul was an enemy of the church. He hated Christianity and did everything in his power to undermine and hurt those who belonged to Christ. He was so committed to this task that, when he heard there was a body of Christians meeting up in

Damascus he led men up there to take those Christians prisoners back to Jerusalem. But on the way to Damascus, Jesus confronts him, blinds him and knocks him to the ground. And he "heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked.

'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'" (Acts 9:4-6)

Then Jesus goes to man named Ananias and commands him to go and teach Saul/Paul what he needs to know. And amongst the things Ananias told Paul was this:

"... what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name." (Acts 22:16)

Now: a couple of questions

1. WHERE was Paul when his sins were washed away? (Damascus)
2. WHY didn't Jesus wash Paul's sins away when He met him on the road to Damascus?

(PAUSE)

Why? Because this is what Jesus meant when He promised that "greater things you will do than I have done." Philip (in baptizing the Ethiopian) and Ananias (in baptizing Paul) were given the honor of freeing others of the chains of their sins. They were given the privilege of being the agents of God's salvation to those around them.

In each occasion, Jesus or an angel COULD have led these men to salvation. But in both cases it was a mortal Christian who was given that honor. It's not that the angel and Jesus COULD NOT have directly saved those men. The fact is - they WOULD NOT do that. That privilege was reserved for men and women who belonged to Christ.

You see, God doesn't NEED us.

But He WANTS us... to be His partners in ministry.

Just like Moses who led his people out of the darkness of slavery into the light God's light, it's a high honor we've been given. And a great privilege.

But there are times when people aren't sure they can do that.

Just like Moses... they don't feel up to the job.

They might even think they'll mess it up and make God mad or something.

But as you notice from our story, the only thing Moses did that made God angry.

You know when that was?

It was when Moses tried to turn God down.

He tries telling God he can't talk very well.

And God says "I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." Ex 4:12

Then Moses simply says: "Send someone else"

"Then the LORD's ANGER BURNED against Moses..." Exodus 4:14

I tell you - if you're going make God mad, you don't want to do it by turning Him down.

It just doesn't seem like a good career move. Besides think of all the adventure and excitement and honor Moses would have missed if he'd just walked away from God's commission.

To this day, Moses is highly revered in both Judaism and Christianity, and Moses' name is mentioned nearly as many times in Scripture as Jesus.

But God didn't just send Moses to do this task.

He gave Moses 3 tools to help him get the job done.

And what we're going to do this morning is look at them in the reverse order in which they occur in Scripture.

So, the 1st tool God gave Moses (and the last in the story) has to do with the issue of Moses' fear that he didn't think he could speak well enough to get the job done.

"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." Exodus 4:10

I know a lot of Christians who say that. They don't believe they know enough or can present the Gospel well enough to speak to others. AND you may be one of those people here today.

Now, I guess it should be enough for us to accept God's statement to Moses:

"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." Exodus 4:11-12

But sometimes that just not enough for some folks.

I believe there are a lot of people who struggle with that fear.

And that fear just shows me that many are NOT all that different than Moses.

Moses was one of the greatest men that ever walked, but even he was afraid to share what God wanted him to say.

But God did give something to Moses to help him overcome his fear.

You know what God gave him?

That's right - God gave him a helper.

"What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you. 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." Exodus 4:14-15

God gave Moses a helper.

He sent Moses' brother (Aaron) to speak for him.

Do you have a "brother" who might help you share your faith?

Yeah? Who might those "brothers be"?

That's right – you have a whole bunch of Christian brothers and sisters right here in this church. And I bet that if you had someone you'd like to talk to about Christ they'd be more than happy to step up and go with you. You've got Elders and Deacons and Sunday School teachers, and all kinds of Godly women and men here who would your Aaron and help you share you faith.

They're your backup team.

They can help you share your faith for the "first time" or they might be able to step up and help you try a different angle on friends or relatives who you HAVE witnessed to, but who won't listen to you anymore.

ILLUS: Have you ever been to a car lot to buy a car? Did you ever notice that you first meet with a floor salesman. Then if you show interest they'll pass you along to another "higher up" in the company... and maybe even a 3rd person to talk to about your potential sale.

Do you know why they do that?

Because they know that if you're interested, the chances of their making a sale go up dramatically depending on how many people they get you to talk to at the car sales.

In the same way, the more of your "back up team" here at church you get talking to your friends and neighbors, the higher your chances of selling your faith in Christ to people you care about.

The 2nd tool God gave Moses was the opportunity to have some "skin in the game."

The LORD said, "Put your hand inside your cloak." So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was leprous, like snow. Now put it back into your cloak," he said. So Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh. Exodus 4:6-7

When I first read that, I wondered, what does this say to me.

And then a phrase came into my mind: "Skin in the game."

In focusing on Moses' hand God was getting Moses to put his skin in the game.

Then I went on the internet to look up exactly what that phrase meant.

According to one on-line dictionary, this was the definition:

Skin in the game means "To have a personal stake or investment."

In other words to have "skin in the game" means that you are committed to the success of a project or cause and you've shown that by investing something valuable and personal in its success.

So, when it comes to the church, how do you know if you have "Skin in the game?"

Well, someone once boiled it down to 3 issues:

How much TIME, TALENT and TREASURE do you have committed to Christ?

How much TIME have you invested in God each week?

Some folks would say... "well, I show up for church 1 or 2 hours a week.

And that's nice... but that's hardly what you'd call "investing".

That's more like dabbling.

No, to really have "skin in the game" when it comes to the amount of time you spend for God each week, you've got to do better than that.

We're talking about – how much time do you spend talking to others about your faith during the week? How much time do you spend reading your Bible on your own? How much time do you spend throughout the week praying and talking with God?

Then there's the topic of how much of your TALENT do you give to the church?

ILLUS: Last Wednesday, just as youth group was about to begin Justin (one of the dads there) was feeling his oats. Justin saw Jason (a member of the praise team who'd come in for practice in the sanctuary) carrying his Bass guitar into church... and Justin began to applaud Jason like he was a rock star. And several of the rest of us got into the act and we all applauded Jason.

Then, after youth group had ended, Jason was on his way out of the building – again carrying his base guitar, and we all smiled broadly and began applauding again.

It was all done in fun and we all had a good laugh... but you know, I think when a person uses their talent for God, there's a little bit of applause going on in heaven.

ILLUS: What talent do you have that you can use for God?

I passed by the church sign of the congregation down the street and I was a little jealous about something they put on their marquee... mostly because they thought of something before we did! Their sign read that if you were a single mother, they were offering to change the oil in your car to get it ready for summer.

That was a GREAT idea! I'm just sorry they thought of it first.

Somebody was using their talents for God.

And then there's the matter of your TREASURE.

ILLUS: (Pull out my checkbook)

I leave my checkbook at church all the time... because otherwise I'd forget it. And every Sunday, I write out my tithe to the church. Now why do I do that by check? Because I don't usually carry that much cash on me – anywhere. If I have more than 20 or 30 dollars in my wallet at any given time I get REAL nervous. If I were to lose my wallet with more money in it than that I would be seriously upset.

So, I'm a "checkbook" giver.

Now let me illustrate the difference between a "checkbook giver" and a "wallet giver".

ILLUS: Wallet givers do it like this (pull out my wallet)

I have \$18 in my wallet this morning. A five, a ten, and three ones.

The plate is being passed and I look inside my wallet... and I've got a decision to make.

Three dollars seems to chintzy to put in the plate.

But if I gave all 18, I wouldn't have any money left.

So, what am I to do?

Well, I could put \$5 in, but even that seems a little cheap.

And so I finally decide to put the \$10 in.

Do you see the difference?

If I'm a "checkbook giver" that means I've planned ahead as to how much I'm going to give God. But the "wallet giver" often ends up giving God his "leftovers". He really hasn't given God a tithe... he's tipped God.

He hasn't really put any skin in the game.

Now I've always been a checkbook giver.

I've always planned out ahead of time what God is going to receive.

As a preacher, you kind of expect me to put my "time" and "talent" into ministry.

But if I don't have any skin in the game as far as my "treasure" goes (I gave the checkbook a toss) I really am not invested in God's kingdom. I really haven't committed myself totally to the success of God's kingdom.

The last thing I want to point out... is the first thing God asked Moses:

"Then, the LORD said to him, 'What is that in your hand?'

'A staff,' he replied." Exodus 4:2

(I picked up a shepherd's staff and held it as I spoke)

What have you got in your hand Moses? God had asked.

Well, what did Moses have in his hand?

A staff.

(Pause) That's a dumb question.

Of course he has a staff in his hand... he's a shepherd.

But this was more than just a staff.

This staff symbolized everything Moses was and everything Moses owned.

This staff represented the totality of Moses' wealth.

He may not have had much, but this staff represented all he had.

At one time Moses had been a prince of Egypt, with power, prestige and palaces.

Now, he was lowly shepherd living out in the middle of the desert in a tent that's moved whenever they needed to find new pasture for the flocks.

Even the sheep weren't his – they belonged to his father-in-law.

Moses had little that was really his own... except his staff.

"So, (God asks) Moses what is your hand?"

As long as the staff belonged to Moses, it was just a staff. But once Moses gave it to God, God used it shake an empire. With that staff of God,

- Moses struck the Nile River and turned it to blood (7:17)
- He stretched it over the waters of Egypt and brought a plague of frogs upon the land (8:5),
- He struck the dust of the earth and up from the dust rose a plague of gnats (8:16),
- He stretched it toward heaven and down came fire, thunder, and hail (9:23),
- He waved it in the air and a horde of locust invaded the land (10:13),
- He stretched it out over the Red Sea and the waters parted for Israel to pass on dry ground (14:16),

- He struck a rock and water poured forth to quench the thirst of God's people (17:6)
- And when he held it high in the air, the Israelites prevailed in battle over their enemies (17:9).

Once that symbol (of who he was) was given to God, it was no longer a mere shepherd's staff.

Once it was given to God, it was as though God had placed in Moses' hand the very power of the universe.

Had the nature of the wood changed?

No, it was still the same shepherd's staff – but with a difference.

Now, it was no longer a mere piece of wood.

Now, it belonged to God.

What is in YOUR hand?

CLOSE: I want to close with a story about a man named Charles who had a dream.

Charles dreamed of being a missionary.

And He trained for the mission field, and he fell in love with and married a woman who shared his vision. Together, they eventually saved up enough money to be able to go abroad. But then his wife's health began to fail and they realized that she'd never survive on the mission field. If they went to Africa as planned, they realized she would certainly die. Suddenly he was confused and disillusioned.

His dream would never come true.

So, he resigned himself to going to work for his father – a dentist with a small side business.

As his father grew older, the young man took over the side business. And one day, it struck him that perhaps he could still touch the world for Christ. He would work hard, be a good steward of his resources and see that Christ became known to as many people as possible – he would just do it in a different way. He would keep his promise by financially supporting other who could go overseas as missionaries.

He worked hard and eventually built the company into a huge enterprise.

(I walked down in front of the Communion Table)

I didn't tell you what that "side business" was, did I?

Well, we see his product every Sunday when we take of communion.

(I took a full communion cup from the tray and held it up).

This was his side business.

Oh, and I never told Charles's last name did I?

Do you know what it was? That's right, his name was Charles Welch.

Today his grape juice is sold in supermarkets everywhere.

And Mr. Welch gave huge sums of money to the cause of world missions.

Ironically, did far more for world evangelism than he could have by being a missionary himself.

All because he took what God placed in his hand.

What do you have in your hand?

What can you use to further Christ's kingdom?

(Pause)

But you know, there isn't anything you can give God until you've first given Him yourself.