

+ Exodus 3:1-15 + Victory Is Ours Over Sin's Excuses + 3rd Sunday in Lent + 8 March 2015 +

No one likes to hear excuses. An excuse is an attempt to remove blame from yourself, and well, there's been a lot of that lately. You hear politicians making excuses for questionable activity or athletes making excuses for poor performance. If you've paid attention to local news at all in the last 48 hours, then you've probably heard excuses from University administrators, coaches, and others. "I upheld a high standard of academic integrity. So it must be the fault of this person or that." "We just couldn't understand our drug policy..." "The NCAA is..." and the excuses go on as our beloved Syracuse Orange face heavy penalties for years of infractions.

Of course, this second Sunday in March is typically one of the biggest "Excuse" Sundays of the year. Why? Three words—Daylight Saving Time. Hopefully, you remembered to set your clock ahead one hour. It's still easy to blame the time change for feeling a little groggy or coming late to church this morning, even though DST comes the same time every year.

Excuses come naturally to all of us. Whether it's a little child trying to explain why he didn't listen to mom when she told him to clean his room or a teen trying to tell dad why she came home so late last night or an adult trying to cover unfinished work in the workplace, we've all made excuses. From little on, we become quite adept at making excuses. We're much quicker to make excuses than to give reasons why we don't do what we're supposed to do or why we've done poorly what was supposed to be done well. We're always trying to remove blame from ourselves and pass it on to someone or something else. We've been doing it since Adam and Eve.

Where does this natural inclination to make excuses about everything come from? It comes from a sinful heart. It comes from a sinful nature that thinks that God's will is foolish, that thinks that doing what is right isn't as important as doing what is self-serving. It comes from a sinful nature that **"is hostile to God,"** that **"does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."** (Romans 8:7)

That's why we make excuses. We make excuses for ignorance. We make excuses for foolishness. We make excuses for immoral or ungodly behavior or for selfish ambition. We make excuses about everything because blame and excuses are part of the native language of our sinful hearts, but what comes from those excuses? Almost always the results are sad, disappointing, even bad consequences for us and often for others.

So what do we do about all those excuses? It's not about what we do, but what God does. Take Moses for example. Moses had once been the adopted son of the daughter of Pharaoh—one of the most powerful rulers in the ancient world. Yet he was also the biological son of Hebrew slaves. As a young man brought up in the house of Pharaoh, Moses thought that he could deliver his people with his own forceful hands, but God had other plans. Soon Moses was fleeing into the wilderness where he took refuge with the family of a nomad named Jethro. Forty years later, the Lord had humbled Moses, who was living a simple and comfortable life

One day as Moses watched his flocks near the **"mountain of the LORD,"** he noticed something strange. A thorn bush was on fire. Now thunder and lightning were common on this range, so a lightning strike could easily have started a fire, but this fire was unusual. **"Though the bush was on fire it did not burn up."** Moses wondered, **"Why does the bush not burn up?"** He left his flocks to get a better look, but he couldn't believe what he saw. The thorn bush was ablaze, but the fire did not consume it!

Moses cautiously made his way up towards the burning bush. Suddenly he heard a voice! **"Moses! Moses!"** There was no one out there. The voice was coming from the bush! Moses stopped dead in his tracks. All he could say was **"Here I am."** **"Take off your sandals,"** the voice commanded, **"for the place where you are standing is holy ground."** Moses didn't hesitate to comply. The voice continued, **"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."**

Suddenly Moses realized that he was a sinful human being standing in the presence of the holy God—the God of his forefathers, the God who had brought Abraham to Canaan and promised that land to his descendants; the God who had rescued Jacob and his family by bringing them to Egypt; the God who had promised to deliver his people from slavery. No mortal human being could gaze on the holy God and live. So Moses quickly hid his face.

The Lord continued, **"I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers and I am concerned about their suffering."** For nearly 400 years the Israelites had lived in Egypt. For much of that time, they had endured great suffering and oppression at the hands of the Egyptians. The time had come for deliverance. **"So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land**

flowing with milk and honey...” The Lord of grace would finally free his people from their slavery...through Moses!

Moses wasn't as confident as he had once been. He was pretty doubtful about leading God's people out of Egypt. Certainly his sinful nature didn't want to take on such a tremendous undertaking. So he made excuses. **“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”** God responded with patient assurance. **“I will be with you.”**

God's assurance wasn't enough for Moses. So he made another excuse. “What if they ask me who you are?” With patient assurance, God responded with his holy, saving name. **“I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ God also said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites, ‘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, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.”** God gave him even more assurances, but even then, Moses kept making excuses about serving the Lord.

“What if they don't believe me...?” (Exodus 4:1) Again God responded with patient mercy. He gave Moses a couple miraculous signs that he could use to prove his authority from God, but Moses kept making excuses. **“O Lord, I have never been eloquent...I am slow of speech and tongue.”** (Exodus 4:10) “I'm not a good speaker.” Amazingly, the Lord didn't give up on Moses, but mercifully provided his brother Aaron to serve as speaker. **“Now go!”**, the Lord told him, but Moses had one more excuse. **“O Lord, please send someone else to do it.”** “Why bother, Lord? I'd rather not do this.” At that moment, **“the LORD's anger burned against Moses...”**, but even then we see that God's patient mercy didn't give out. (Exodus 4:12-14) God ultimately overcame Moses' excuses and used him to deliver his enslaved people.

Excuses are part of the native language of sinful human beings. That means they're part of your language and mine too. They flow from a sinful nature that wants nothing to do with God's will and everything to do with my own. You and I should be ashamed of the excuses that we make for not serving our Lord. How quickly I act like Moses and make excuses for not faithfully carrying out my own God-given callings as a pastor, as a husband, as a father, as a neighbor, as a citizen. How quickly I use them to remove blame for my own laziness, my own lack of integrity, my own self-serving ways.

Think of the excuses that you make. They come just as easily, don't they? You might say, “Sorry, Lord, I can't spend more time with you in your Word because of my kids or my job or my lack of sleep or (you fill in the blank).” In reality, that's your sinful nature that doesn't want to spend time with Jesus. You might say, “Sorry, Lord, for not faithfully carrying out my callings. I would've if not for this person or that event.” In reality, that's your sinful nature trying to remove blame for laziness or lack of integrity or selfishness.

You might say, “Sorry, Lord, I know you've given me so much and done so much for me, but my time and my money are precious and I can't devote any to you.” In reality, that's your sinful nature that doesn't want you to devote real time to faithfully serving your Lord or to intentionally devote a portion of your God-given money to support the mission and ministry work that he has entrusted to you and your congregation. You might say, “Sorry, Lord, I know you have a lot of work for us to do, but can't somebody else do it? I just don't have the gifts.” In reality, that's your sinful nature that doesn't want you to serve God with the unique talents and experiences he has given you.

When you and I make excuses, that's our sinful natures talking and it never results in good. It can result in consequences like failure, hardship, or damaged relationships. Those excuses question God's patient mercy and lead us to give up on him. For such shameful excuses, we need to repent before the Lord and to take those sins and leave them at the foot of the cross, because that's where God has a solution for us and our excuses.

God overcame Moses' excuses and entrusted him with the overwhelming task of leading God's people out of slavery in Egypt. The Lord of grace was with him every step of the way, but as impressive as that rescue was, a greater deliverance was coming from a Descendant of that rescued people. Jesus was coming not to rescue a nation of people from physical slavery, but all of humanity from the slavery and oppression of sin. Jesus came to break our chains of sin's oppression and to relieve us of the burden of sin's excuses.

Jesus came making no excuses so he could forgive you and me of all our excuses. Of all people, Jesus had the right to object when he endured poverty and opposition, rejection and ridicule, injustice and torture, and finally a public and shameful death. He was innocent. He didn't need to make excuses, and he didn't have to

endure any of those awful effects of sin. Yet he chose to do so because he wanted to silence your sinful nature and forgive you of the guilt of all those excuses. So that's what he did by his innocent death on the cross and then guaranteed it with an empty tomb.

Now Jesus empowers you and me to stop making excuses and to start serving him faithfully in all our callings. He empowers you and me to stop making excuses and to start spending real time with him in his Word and in service to him. He empowers you and me to stop making excuses and to start sacrificially using our talents and our offerings to say "thank you" with our lives for all he has so patiently and mercifully given us.

Jesus has overcome our sinful excuses with patience, mercy, forgiveness and love. We have no excuse not to serve our gracious Lord. My friends, it's time to go and serve, because victory is ours through Jesus Christ! Amen.