

Moses and His Rod

No, this isn't about a person called 'Rod'. And no it isn't about a fishing rod...

Instead, this talk is taken from Exodus 4. We'll be looking at Moses and his rod (his 'staff' of wood that he carried), and what lessons we can learn from this.

Read Exodus 4.1-5.

Moses answered, 'What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, "The Lord did not appear to you"?''

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

'A staff,' he replied.

The Lord said, 'Throw it 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.'

The context (the 'background') of this is that God has called Moses (at the burning bush) to go and be used by God to deliver the Israelites out of Egypt and the harsh conditions there. Moses is not entirely convinced about the whole thing and would rather not go. He wants to obey God, but is fearful.

Moses asks God

Like any of us, Moses had fears. And, it is good to come to God with your fears. It means that you recognise them and that you need God's help with them. God knows us intimately. Psalm 139 (eg verses 1-18) tells us that God has searched us and knows us, he knows our thoughts, when we sit down, he knew us from before time and laid out the days of our life. So God knows your and my fears and worries.

Moses said to God, "What if the Egyptians do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you'?" Often we have similar questions about sharing our faith. We worry about what people will say or think. In our world, there are many beliefs and people may not believe there is a God, or may say that they have their own god. It is OK to go to God with these issues. But we must not stay there. We must listen for God's answer, or commit our way to God (Proverbs 3) and then go ahead anyway.

Psalm 142 and 143 are examples of David crying to God for help. In Psalm 144, we find that God is the answer to our problems – our defender, shield, a mighty warrior and the one who helps us, delivers us and brings good things.

God asks Moses

God is speaking / manifesting himself to Moses through a burning bush. You and I would probably communicate by a phone. But aside from the fact that these weren't yet invented, God does things differently. And I think, a little more creatively.. Anyway, God responds to Moses and his question, by using another question. And again, this was not an exact reply to Moses. God does this. Jesus did this in the New Testament. He would often respond to a question with a question, and often with a question that went a bit deeper and wider than man's thinking. Think about the ways God has answered prayer for you. Chat about it and encourage each other.

In this instance in Exodus 4, God replies to Moses by asking, "What is that in your hand?"

You know, God is always working on our character. What God asks is very simple. He says to you and me, *"OK. I know you're not perfect, but my strength will help you every time you feel imperfect and weak. I love you massively, more than words can express. I would love it if you would love me by spending time with me, walking with me, talking with me, obeying and serving me out of your heart of love for me. I don't expect you to do miracles. Miracles are my business and I will perform them. All you need to do is to offer up to me all that you are, and all that you have. I will take what you are and have and will multiply it beyond anything you can ask or imagine, so that my name will be glorified."*

Moses replied back to God

In answer to God's question, Moses replied, "A staff". God reveals to us what we have and what he is going to use through us and our lives, just as he did to Moses.

When God said to Moses "what's that in your hand" he was reminding Moses of what he did have. He does the same for you and me today. Talking in a Godly way – what is it that you enjoy, that comes easily, that you love doing? What gives you kicks and a buzz, that excites you, gets you talking and fizzing like a shaken up can of soda? God is asking you to submit that to him. You may not think it's much, but it is something and God will take your seed and make it something awesome. Luke 17:6 – Jesus replied, *"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."*

I wonder what the rod that Moses had was for? Probably for walking, resting on, for guidance through rocky or boggy ground, to ward off animals? Well, God had something different in mind. Something way bigger, more powerful and miraculous. This rod would see some serious God action – holding back waves, bringing water out of rock, turning into a snake and back to a rod. I mean, who would have thought of that happening to a little old rod?!! How much more true is that of both our lives and what we have / offer to God. How like God: to take something quite ordinary and make it extraordinary. What God will use you to do is going to be amazing. As you obey and sacrifice, he will take that and do the most amazing things – if we let him.

God tells us what to do

God told Moses to throw his rod onto the floor. As it hit the floor it became a snake and we read (very amusingly) that Moses, "ran from it". I'm not surprised Moses ran from the rod as it became a snake – the shock must have been quite a large one! Imagine God saying "throw your iPod on the floor" and it became a tarantula!

But sometimes our worry is not about offering what we have to God – but what he is going to do with it. But we don't need to worry. God is in charge. He knows the beginning from the end. He knows you and provides for you. He asks us to put him first, to seek him and his good, Godly ways. Then everything else will come as God provides. (Matthew 16.33). The rod to snake miracle is encouraging because we know that God will help us know how to live our lives, how to use the gifts and passions he has given us. God is the ultimate director, brilliantly and perfectly managing his actors and stage crew – to produce an outstanding piece of Godly theatre. And you are one of his key people.

We Obey

In Exodus 4, we find Moses obeying God, despite this being a slightly risky thing to do. God told him to pick the 'snake' back up and he did. And it became a rod again. God was very specific, "...take it by the tail." Be really sensitive to God's Holy Spirit prompting you in small ways.

I once reached into a packet of tomatoes to eat a couple. I felt God say, "you may want to wash those first." But instead, I just ate them. A little while later that day, my sister came to eat them, she opened up the packet to reveal a massive amount of mould on the tomatoes. Maybe I should have listened to God!

But in more major ways, I have heard and responded to God and it has been the right thing to do. Listen out for what olde Christian folks call, 'God's still small voice.' It's like someone watching over you, prompting you to do things. Ask God to enable you to know his voice, just as Elijah did (see 1 Kings 19.11-13)

What God asked Moses to do was pretty crazy – go pick up that snake over there. But God knew what he was doing. And Moses was beginning to understand that God makes the impossible very possible – his faith was growing, and he obeyed. You know, God will take you through different stuff in life. You will find out that God is faithful and that your faith levels increase, as you come to know that God can be trusted to do exactly what he says. How could Moses have really known that he would lead 1 million or so people out of Egypt?!! But he did. We know. Use these lessons of faith to encourage yourself and others.

No matter how strange the calling from God seems to be, go with it. Be obedient, check it out with his Word and with other Christians. But God is looking for people like Moses. He is looking at you and me. How are we going to respond?