

# Who Made Man's Mouth?

by John Piper

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*The sermon encourages believers to trust God to use their mouths for His glory, despite their weaknesses and fears.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 3:14, Exodus 4:11-12, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 12:9

**Topics:** "Faith And Trust", "Sovereignty Of God"

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## Description

John Piper preaches on the importance of trusting God to use our mouths for His glory and the deliverance of His people. Using Moses' reluctance to speak as an example, Piper emphasizes the need to have faith in God's power to equip us, despite our weaknesses and insecurities. By meditating on God's promises, pondering His sovereignty, and being sensitive to His guidance, we can step out in faith and boldly share the message of Jesus with others, trusting that God will work through us.

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## Transcript

August 1, 1982

Exodus 4:10-12

But Moses said to Yahweh: "Please Lord, I am not a man of words, neither formerly nor since you've been speaking to your servant, because my mouth and my tongue are clumsy." And Yahweh said to him: "Who made man's mouth? Who makes him dumb or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I the Lord? Now, go! And I will be with your mouth and will teach you what you shall speak."

My main goal this morning is that you and I might feel more trust in God for the use of our mouths in this church, in our neighborhoods, in our places of work, and in our recreation. More faith in the God who made the mouth that we might dare to use it in all our weakness for his glory and the deliverance of his people from bondage - both his people in the church and those waiting to be saved through our mouths.

Let me try to show the need I sense for this message from two illustrations. I remember when I used to sit in the pew and what I used to go through when I saw a visitor. See if this problem is still not with us. Here is my sequence of thought. First thought: "O thank you Lord for bringing those new people! Wouldn't it be great to make them feel so at home here that they became a part of our church and found their faith built up here and if they ministered to us as well." Second thought: "I should get to them and welcome them and find out their names and something about them?" Third thought: "But what if they don't appreciate it?"

What if they want to keep a low profile and just sneak in and out. I might turn them off. Or what if I try to start a conversation and find we don't have anything in common and then there's that awkward silence? Or maybe they are just relatives of someone passing through and will only be here today. Or what if they are members and I just haven't seen them before. I'll look like a fool." Fourth thought: "O there's Clarence Ohman and Olive Nelson and Deloris Erickson. They're closer than I am. Lord, help them: put it in their hearts to greet the people warmly so they know we care."

"God, we don't want to be like that. Why are we like that?" I think we can find out from this text. But first here's the second illustration why we need this message. I think I am typical when I find that I am not very good at starting or carrying on conversations with my neighbors in Elliot Park. Yet it seems to me that we Christians ought not to contribute to the fragmentation and isolation of our society by living in the midst of virtual strangers. I think we need very much to work on three things: 1) Initiating creative ways to be together now and then with our neighbors; 2) When there is a spontaneous opportunity to chat, don't avoid them but pursue conversation; 3) Dare to blow their minds with something besides the weather, the dome, the tree disease, or the new rehab project. We must venture to speak of Jesus. But we are not very good at it. We feel very much like Moses many times. Why? I think we can find the answer to why we draw back from speaking to each other and to unbelievers when we look carefully at why Moses drew back from going to the Jewish elders and to Pharaoh.

In Exodus 3:8 God states his purpose to Moses: "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." According to Exodus 2:24, God's resolve to deliver Israel was based on his covenant: "God heard their groaning and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob." And in 3:6 when God identifies himself to Moses at the bush he says, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." Moses is supposed to understand that what is at stake in the deliverance of Israel is not just the people's happiness but God's word, his oath to the fathers. This is what lies behind the assertion in verse 8: "I have come down to deliver them."

"It will be my battle, my victory, and my glory!"

"But I have a gift for you, Moses: I am going to give you a part in my deliverance--the lead role under me. And don't worry: Remember verse 8, 'I have come down to deliver them.'" Moses learned this lesson by the time it was all over. In Exodus 15 on the far side of the Red Sea, he sings with the people: "I will sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation. This is my God and I will praise him, my father's God and I will exalt him. The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is his name."

But it took a while for Moses to learn the lesson. In 3:11 he said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?"

"God, in comparison to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, I am nothing. Can a pansy say to an oak tree: 'Lie down, oak, and let some sun in here on this pansy patch!'"

God pauses perhaps to give Moses a chance to change his mind. But, if we read between the lines we hear God say, "You're right, Moses. I didn't choose you because you were an oak. One of my rules of thumb is not to call many wise or powerful or genteel people. I like to use what is foolish in the world to shame the wise and what's weak in the world to shame the strong. So you are absolutely right; you're a pansy and Pharaoh is an oak. But why should that stop you from going down there to lead out my people?"

Don't you remember, 'I have come down to deliver them'" (v. 8). So God says in verse 12 what he always says to people who are poor in spirit and meek and admit that they are pansies. He says, "I will be with you."

"I will fell that oak and throw it in the Red Sea. And my little pansy patch will walk right through the ocean on dry land."

Moses was red-faced. He had tried something that millions have tried since: in the guise of humility he used his own insignificance to excuse himself from a task that God was urging him to do. God's answer to that maneuver is always the same: "RIGHT, you are small and weak. But WRONG, that is no excuse to cop out." Why? "Because I will be with you, I will help you, I will strengthen you and will uphold you with my victorious right hand. I love to do big things through small people! How else will my name be glorified in all the earth!"

In verse 13 Moses shows he is on the right track, at least temporarily: "Okay, when I go down there to the people what name for you shall I use?" That's right, Moses. Everything hangs on who God is. Who is this God that says he will deliver the people? That's right, Moses: not "Who am I?" but "Who is God? Now you are on the right track."

And God said to Moses (verse 14), "'I am who I am.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, I am has sent me to you.'" The words "I am who I am" at the very least mean, "Nobody determines my character; there is nobody shaping me or making me what I am. I am not in the process of becoming, I simply am--without beginning, without end and never fickle, never manipulated. That's what it means to be God. Tell the Israelites to be confident: when the God who simply is from all eternity resolves to do a thing, he will do it! 'I am' has sent you."

Then with that ringing in his ears, Moses hears again what God resolves to do. Verse 17: "I promise I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt." Then in verse 18: "The people of Israel will harken to your voice." Then in verse 21: "I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians and when you go you shall not go empty."

But while God is rehearsing for Moses how it's going to go, Moses begins to shake in his sandals: "O my stars, he really means it. He's going to send me down there; he's got the whole thing planned. There is no telling what those crazy elders will do. They don't know me from Adam."

So, chapter 4, verse 1: "Moses answered, 'But look, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, The Lord did not appear to you.'"

What a lesson there is here! I don't mean Moses' stubbornness. Everyone of us knows about that firsthand if we're honest. I mean God's patience: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." His ways are not our ways nor his thoughts our thoughts. You know what I would probably have said if I were God? I would have said: "Weren't you listening? I said in verse 18: 'They will harken to your voice.' And now you say, 'They will not believe me or listen to my voice.' Are you calling me a liar?" He was, you know, whether he intended to or not. He was acting as if God would not keep his word. All unbelief says God is a liar or a bumbler. And disobedience, which comes from unbelief, is a vote of no confidence in the Almighty.

But what does God do? He does not even scold him. Instead, he gives him a firsthand demonstration of how he is going to work miracles through Moses to verify his word (Exodus 4:3-9). "In other words Moses, again your excuse is oriented on your inability to persuade. And again, my answer is the same: So you don't have much credibility in Egypt. I am the one who is going to decide who believes you and who doesn't. And I have said, 'They will hearken to your voice.'"

Then Moses gives one last excuse why he should not go speak to Israel and Pharaoh (or in our case, why we should not speak to the visitors at church and the unbeliever at work). Moses says in Exodus 4:10, "Please, Lord, I am not a man of words, neither formerly nor since thou hast spoken to thy servant, but my mouth and my tongue are heavy." Sound familiar? Aren't we all described here - at least some of the time? "God, some people's tongues are light and free. Mine feels like lead in my mouth and if I move it, it gets all tangled. God, do you remember when I proposed to Zipporah? I practiced that proposal for three weeks to the sheep, and got all chokey and wobbly-kneed every time. That's the way it's always been with me. I never scored as high as Miriam did on the verbal skills tests."

So Moses' assumption was, God should only pick people with special natural abilities to deliver his word. But there are several flaws in that assumption and Moses is aware of at least one of them. We can see it in verse 10. Moses knows that God can take a person with no eloquence and then give it to him, changing him into an eloquent, persuasive speaker. So look what he says in verse 10: "I am not a man of words either heretofore or since thou hast spoken to me. Not only is my whole past a history of timidity and verbal incompetence, but the whole time we have been talking, nothing has changed. I don't feel any more like a man of words now than when you met me at the burning bush. If you want me to be your spokesman, you must make me eloquent. You must prove to me ahead of time that my mouth will not freeze on me. We've rehearsed the rod-into-snake trick and the leprous hand trick. Now let's rehearse my lines. Prove to me that my mouth will really say what you want it to."

And then in his great patience, and to make perfectly clear that he does not demand blind faith, God answers Moses with a reason that ends all Moses' objections (v. 11): "Then the Lord said to him, 'Who made man's mouth? Who makes him dumb or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I the Lord?'"

The first thing this verse means is this: Moses, the God you have been talking to, who has made you all these promises of success, who wills to grant you a share in his glorious deliverance--this God is the creator of the world, the inventor of the human body, mind, and emotions. He thought it all up out of nothing and designed it. But that's not all. The most amazing, the most devastating, the most reassuring thing comes next: not only did God create the first man, but he also goes on creating every single person just as he sees fit--whether dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind.

The Bible always holds two things together that some theologians have tried to separate: God's act of creation and his activity of sovereign providence, his initiation of the world and his superintendence of its on-going events. You may have heard the word "Deism." That was a view popular in the 17th & 18th centuries in which God created the universe, endowed it with changeless laws and then withdrew, like an absentee landlord, to let the world run its own course. So if you trip over the box hockey game in the laundry room like I did Friday, you don't concern yourself looking for God's sovereign purposes in it. You just get mad at whoever left it there.

But you can't read the Bible long with an open mind and keep that view. God is the creator. He made man's mouth and God's providence rules over all things. Ultimately, it is he who makes a man dumb, or

deaf, or seeing, or blind. One day Jesus' disciples asked him in John 9, "Rabbi, who sinned... that this man was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be manifest in him." God always has a purpose for every event, whether we can see it or not. "Who makes him dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I the Lord?"

Here was God's last argument to Moses' last excuse: "If it is not enough to hear me say, 'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,' and to see a bush burn and not be consumed; if it is not enough to hear me say 'I will be with you'; if it is not enough to know me as 'I am who I am' and to hear me say, 'I will bring you up out of affliction'; if it is not enough to see me turn a rod into a snake and make a hand leprous and clean; then listen to this, Moses. I made and I control everything. Now, go! and I will be with your mouth and teach you in the moment what you shall speak. No rehearsals, Moses; just the promise. And remember who it is who gives the promise!"

"But Moses said, 'Please Lord, send I pray some other person'" (4:13). "God, put it into the heart of Clarence, or Olive, or Deloris to talk to them!" Moses doesn't offer any more excuses now. He simply refuses to accept the call. Why? That's the question we started with, and now I think we can answer it. Remember, every objection Moses raised God answered by revealing his intention to bless Moses tremendously in the deliverance of Israel and by revealing a sovereign power so great that absolutely no obstacle could hinder the accomplishment of what he called Moses to do. So the answer to why Moses refuses to go under God's terms is simple: he didn't trust him. He didn't trust him! So finally (in verse 14) God got angry because there is hardly a greater insult you can pay to someone than to say, "I don't trust you. You can't be counted on."

And isn't Moses' problem our problem too? - learning to believe that God will work for us in everyday life. How different, how wonderful the use of our mouths would be if we lived by faith in the God who made the mouth and not by sight - by looking at our own clumsy tongue. And where does faith come from? According to the apostle Paul, faith comes from hearing the Word of God. It comes from seeing who he is and what he promises in his Word. And is not the God of Exodus 3 and 4 worthy of our trust? Moses eventually learned to trust him. By the end of his life, God spoke to Moses every day as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:11). Praise God for his patient discipline!

Let me conclude by making five practical suggestions how to apply this message. If you long with me to trust God more to bless others with your mouth, resolve with me in dependence on him to do these things:

1) Simply admit that in ourselves we are pansies. We do have weaknesses, our tongues and mouths are not as eloquent as we would like, and probably we never will be as strong as we might like. Let's admit it.

2) Meditate often on the promises of God in the Bible. One of those promises is: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). That's why we don't have to worry about being pansies before an oak tree. It's why Paul could go on to say: "For the sake of Christ therefore, I am content with weaknesses." [One of which was Paul's lack of eloquence (2 Cor. 11:6).] Remember this: God loves to glorify his power more by felling an oak with a pansy than by turning a pansy into an oak. So meditate on his promises every day.

3) Ponder who God is in relation to this world and in relation to your neighborhood and work. God always answered Moses' objections by revealing more and more of who he is. The doctrine of God's sovereignty over the world creates problems for us. None of us has all the problems solved. But can't we say for sure on the basis of Exodus 4:11 that God intends this to be a very encouraging and practical doctrine to

inspire faith and embolden obedience. And doesn't it? If you are put in a situation where you sense God's urging you to speak a word for him, but there is every reason in the natural circumstances to believe it would be a catastrophe, what other doctrine can sustain faith and obedience except the doctrine that the God who brought the world out of nothing has enough control over things to do something wholly unforeseen and bring good out of the situation. In other words, how else can we trust God with our mouths unless it's true that he works all things together for our good when we trust him (Rom. 8:28). Therefore, ponder daily who God is.

4) Pray always that you be sensitive to his guidance and know those times when an opportunity to speak is at hand. And of course, pray that he keep your heart humble and trusting so that when step number five comes, you will be ready.

5) Namely, in the moment of opportunity, whether in this church, in your neighborhood, or at work,

Give to the winds your fear

Hope and be unafraid

And use your mouth to kindle cheer

The mouth your God has made.

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